



Memorial | Omid, a memorial in defense of *human rights* in *Iran*

One Person's Story

Vahid Heidari

ABOUT

Age: 23

Nationality: Iran

Religion: Islam (Shi'a)

Civil Status: Single



CASE

Date of Killing: January 5, 2018

Location: Arak, Markazi Province, Iran

Mode of Killing: Death in custody

Age at time of offense: 23

About this Case

He was an honest, healthy, and well-built young man who worked hard in cold and hot weather just to make ends meet

Information regarding the death of Mr. Vahid Heidari was published by ISNA News Agency (January 6, 2018), and on Mr. Mohammad Najafi, attorney at law in the city of Arak's facebook page (January 7, 2018). Additional information about this case was obtained from the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center's interviews with two individuals with knowledge of the case (January 9, 2018), from ISNA and Mizan news agencies, BBC Persian website (January 9, and February 2, 2018), Iran Campaign for Human Rights website (January 9, 2018), Euronews (February 2, 2018), Voice of America (January 7, 2018), and Aftab and Young Reporters Club websites (January 10, 2018).

Mr. Vahid Heidari, Child of Hassan, was single, 23 years old, from the village of Takieh near the town of Shazand, and resided in the city of Arak in Markazi Province. He was a street vendor and spread his items at the entrance to the city of Arak's bazaar, in the same place where other street vendors gathered to sell

their things. He came from a poor family and had two brothers and three sisters. His father was an injured Iran-Iraq war veteran, and several of his relatives had also been killed in the war. According to his friends, Mr. Heidari was an honest, healthy, and well-built young man who worked hard in cold and hot weather just to make ends meet.

This case is related to Mr. Heidari's killing in detention; he had been arrested in the first days of nationwide demonstrations.

Background

Nationwide Protests

Popular public protests began on Thursday, December 28, 2018. On the first day, thousands of people in Mashhad, Kashmar, Birjand, and Neishabur in Khorassan Razavi Province participated in the "No To Rising Prices" demonstrations. In videos of these demonstrations disseminated online in social networks and in the media, the protestors chanted slogans of "Death To Rohani" and "Death to the Dictator", "You've destroyed Islam, The people have had enough", and "Nothing is in its right place when Iran doesn't have a Shah". On the second day, protests spread to other cities in Iran including Esfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Rasht, Sari, Ghouchan, Sabzevar, and Khorramabad, and the protestors' slogans turned against the institutions of the Islamic republic and the Leader himself. With the city of Qom joining other protesting cities, slogans were chanted in support of Reza Shah Pahlavi. Videos of the days protests disseminated on social media show that in the cities of Qom, Hamedan, Qazvin, Qaemshahr, and Bojnurd, slogans of "Death to the Dictator", "Reza Shah, joy be upon your soul", "Let go of Syria, think of a solution for us" were chanted. On the third day, simultaneous with government sponsored demonstrations celebrating Dey 9th (December 30) in Tehran's Mosalla ("Prayer Place"), protests continued across Iran in Kermanshah, Dezful, Karaj's Gohardasht Neighborhood, Rasht, Arak, Shiraz, Shar-e Kord, Khorramabad, Zanjan, Bandar Abbas, Semnan, and Hashtgerd, with skirmishes breaking out between protestors and government forces; at least two people were killed in the town of Dorud in Lorestan Province. On December 31, 2018, protests continued in Tehran, Mashhad, Kermanshah, Rasht, Arak, Tabriz, Maragheh, Behshahr, Chahbahar, Hashtgerd, Orumieh, Dorud, and Malayer. Iranian Television reported the death of 10 people in the protests, and [the town of] Izeh's representative announced 2 individuals had been killed in that town. Hamedan Governor's office also reported the death of 3 people. In a cabinet meeting, Iranian President Hassan Rohani addressed the protests for the first time and while reiterating the people's right to peaceful protests, stated that the government would not tolerate chaos and disorder. On the fifth day, January 1, 2018, the protests became more violent, with a police precinct in the town of Qahdarijan in Esfahan Province set ablaze, following which 6 people were killed. The Iranian President, Hassan Rohani said that the protestors were not people who had received orders from abroad, and had come onto the streets because of [the pressure of] their problems and [based on] their feelings. The next day, however, the Iranian Leader of the Revolution [Ayatollah Khamenei] announced that the recent events were "the work of foreign enemies of the Islamic regime", [directly contradicting President Rohani]. At the end of the sixth day of protests, the number of deaths stood at 21, according to Iranian officials. Seven days after the protests had begun, the regime's supporters started demonstrations in various cities at the government's invitation, and condemned the popular protests. On that same day, even though smaller protests occurred in Malayer, Noshahr, Gohardasht, and Amol, the protests generally began to subside. The head of the Revolutionary Guards Corps held "a former official" responsible for the protests and announced the end of "the new sedition". On the eighth day the country's Prosecutor General announced that the unrest was the result of "a

three-way project by America, Israel, and Saudi Arabia”, and said that the principal planner of the protests was an American named Michael Andrea who was the former person in charge of CIA counter terrorism. Iran's Information Minister also stated in an announcement that three of the Ministry's personnel had been killed in skirmishes with armed persons in the town of Piranshahr. Social networking apps, Instagram and Telegram were filtered during the protests and the filtering of Telegram continued after they had ended. (Euronews, January 3, 2018, Voice of America, January 7, 2018). One Majless (“Parliament”) representative, quoting the head of the Iran Prisons Organization, stated that 4,972 people had been arrested in the course of the protests. At least two of the individuals arrested by the names of Sina Qanbari and Vahid Heidari died under suspicious circumstances while in detention (BBC Persian, February 2, 2018) but Iranian officials did not accept responsibility for their deaths. Nationwide protests that had started with slogans demanding better economic conditions, and subsequently evolved into criticism of government corruption as well as domestic and foreign policy, thereby questioning [the legitimacy of] the religious regime, continued in the following months without any particular leadership.

Arrest and Detention

There is conflicting information regarding the time and manner of Mr. Heidari's arrest. According to his family and a person with knowledge of the case, he was arrested by the Police Force during the protests on December 31, 2017, at the entrance to Arak's bazaar where he had spread his things for sale, and was taken Arak's 12th Razavi Police Precinct. (Boroumand Center interview). According to the Province Police's announcement published one day after his death, however, Mr. Heidari had been arrested on January 1, 2018.

According to persons with knowledge of the case, a large number of people were arrested on December 31, 2017, and because of their large number, they were distributed among different detention centers in Arak, including the 12th Precinct. A number of the individuals arrested at the same time as Mr. Heidari had testified that they too had been subjected to beatings at the detention center. (Boroumand Center interview).

Mr. Heidari died at Arak's 12th Precinct on Friday, January 5, 2018, only a few days after his arrest; and according to persons with knowledge of the case, there were marks of fracture and a deep depression on his skull, which seemed to indicate that he had been hit with a blunt object. (Boroumand Center interview).

Officials' Reaction

Officials informed Mr. Heidari's family on January 5, 2018 that he had died. They announced the cause of death as “suicide”. They forced Mr. Heidari's family to bury his body in a pre-determined grave in Arak's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery's Section 34 on the morning of January 6, 2018. According to persons with knowledge of the case, quoting eyewitnesses, there were a large number of police and security agents at Mr. Heidari's burial. (Boroumand Center interview).

After Mr. Heidari's death, officials denied that his arrest had anything to do with the nationwide protests and stated that he had been arrested on drug charges. Official authorities provided conflicting accounts of Mr. Heidari's background and the manner of his death. Regarding his background, Markazi Province Police announced that he had “three prior criminal cases on charges of harassment and assault”. (ISNA, January 6, 2018). Markazi Province General and Revolutionary Prosecutor said that Mr. Heidari had “multiple criminal priors, and priors of drug trafficking and of inflicting harm on himself” in his file (Mizan News Agency). Meanwhile, Markazi Province Head of the Judiciary announced that he had “a history of

[attempting] suicide and inflicting harm on himself", without making any references to a criminal record. (ISNA, January 9, 2018). Regarding Mr. Heidari's manner of death, Markazi Province Police issued an announcement one day after his death without mentioning his name, where it stated that the guard making the rounds had noticed that the defendant had committed suicide by tying his clothes around his neck. (ISNA, January 6, 2018). Four days after Mr. Heidari's death, The Province's head of the Judiciary alluded to signs of self-inflicted [wounds] observed on Mr. Heidari's body, and announced that a final [determination of the] cause of death must be made by the Medical Examiner's Office. (ISNA, January 9, 2018).

Markazi Province Police denied that Mr. Heidari's arrest had anything to do with the public protests and announced that he had been arrested following reports of drug sale on one of Arak's streets to the relevant police precinct. According to that announcement, Mr. Heidari was arrested while selling drugs and engaging in a fight with several petty drug dealers, and 10 grams of Heroin were discovered on him at the time of the arrest. Markazi Province Police denied the news that he had died following a blow to the head with a club during public protests and said that such news was the work of "certain enemies and haters" "who have ill will" and spread "false" news and have "hostile intent with the objective of sewing divisions". The Police also threatened the disseminators of such false news with "swift action". (ISNA, January 6, 2018).

Mr. Heidari's body was buried on the morning of January 6, 2018, at Arak's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery, Section 34, in the grave designated by the authorities, under pressure and threats from police and security forces.

Familys' Reaction

Mr. Heidari's family held services for him in the afternoon of that same day at Imam Hassan Asgari Mosque in Arak's Rudaki neighborhood. Following threats made by the authorities, Mr. Heidari's family and relatives did not particularly want to discuss his case but denied the officials' claim that his arrest had to do with drug addiction or possession of drugs, and stated that those allegations were not true. (Boroumand Center interview, Iran Human Rights Campaign).

There was a deep fracture measuring approximately 4 inches on the upper left hand side of his skull, at the extremity of which there was a bump that seemed to have been caused by a blow with a heavy object

According to friends and acquaintances, Mr. Heidari's family is under tremendous pressure from security officials to keep silent about his death. People who knew Mr. Heidari have given testimony that Mr. Heidari was neither an addict nor a drug dealer, and that he was a healthy, hard-working young man. According to them, such allegations are an outrage and a blatant injustice to him and his family. (Boroumand Center interview). According to Mr. Heidari's uncle (his father's brother), he was not an addict and the family does not know what has happened, but what [the officials] are saying is not true. (Iran Human Rights Campaign).

According to persons with knowledge of the case, based on the account of some of Mr. Heidari's relatives who have witnessed his body, there were signs of beatings on his body, and there was a deep fracture measuring approximately 4 inches on the upper left hand side of his skull, at the extremity of which there was a bump that seemed to have been caused by a blow with a heavy object. Mr. Heidari's body had been sent to the Medical Examiner's Office prior to burial but there is no information regarding the Medical Examiner's report. (Boroumand Center interview).

A Summary of the Defects of Mr. Heidari's Legal Proceedings

Based on statements made by persons with knowledge of the case, Vahid Heidari was beaten by law enforcement officials, and the beating was the cause of death. Those statements alone should be enough to prompt the prosecutor to open a [criminal] case and conduct the necessary investigations in order to discover the truth. The Medical Examiner (Coroner's Office) can certainly determine whether the cause of death was suicide or murder at the hands of another person. Although the authorities have stated that the victim's body has been examined by the Coroner's Office, no report of said examination has been seen or announced thus far. In an interview with Mizan News Agency, the Arak Prosecutor stated that there was footage of the moment Vahid Heidari committed suicide in prison. The footage has not been put at the disposal of Vahid Heidari's family thus far; if such footage does exist, his family and his attorney should have access to it.

Pursuant to Iranian law, torture and beatings are strictly prohibited and the perpetrator will be charged with a crime. If the accused dies as a result of torture, the perpetrator will be charged with intentional murder. Based on available information, judicial authorities dismissed the charge of murder from the get go and without conducting the necessary investigations, whereas the proper course of action would have been to first conduct the necessary investigations at the prosecutor's office and then render an opinion on the case.

The authorities claim Vahid Heidari was arrested for transporting and dealing drugs, and not for partaking in demonstrations and gatherings. In spite of the existence of serious doubts about the accuracy of this claim, it must be noted that the reason(s) for an individual's arrest has no bearing on his/her treatment [at the hands of law enforcement officials] and on the course of investigations and adjudication. In other words, even assuming that Vahid Heidari was arrested on drug charges, it was still necessary to observe the law as stated above, and to conduct investigations into murder.

Copyright © 2021, Abdorrahman Boroumand Center

[Contact us](#)