



IRAN IN-DEPTH

Emerging Evidence Contradicts Official Claims of Detainee Suicides

January 12, 2018

By Radio Farda

Iranian officials have confirmed that at least two detained protesters arrested during the anti-establishment protests in the cities of Tehran and Arak have died behind bars.

The officials say that Sina Ghanbari and Vahid Heydari committed suicide in Evin's Quarantine ward and Arak prison, respectively.

Ghanbari, 23, died in custody in Tehran under unknown circumstances on January 7. The authorities claimed he killed himself in Evin Prison.

Heydari, 22, died in detention at the 12th Police Station in Arak at some point around the turn of the new year, the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) reported.

His lawyer told CHRI that the authorities are trying to cover up the real reason for his death by claiming he committed suicide.

Furthermore, according to New York-based CHRI, evidence of a severe blow to Heydari's skull was detected before his body was buried. Heydari's family has been pressured to avoid speaking to the media.

Radio Farda contacted Heydari's cousin, who said the family has not seen the body and then abruptly said goodbye and hang up. This could be a sign that the victim's immediate family members prefer to refrain from any public comments on his death.

However, in an exclusive interview with Radio Farda, Ali Bagheri, a human rights activist based in Arak, said Heydari's family have been threatened to keep quiet about the suspicious death.

“Vahid was a peddler on the margins of Arak’s main bazaar. Protests in Arak flared up on December 31, and Vahid was detained on January 1. The security forces dragged him to the 12th Precinct, aka Razavi; on January 5, they informed Vahid’s family that he had committed suicide and died behind bars,” Bagheri said.

According to Bagheri, security forces ordered Heydari’s relatives to refrain from talking about his death; therefore, they are all too scared to say anything about the case.

“The security forces told Vahid’s family that he was detained while distributing narcotics and that his case could have complications for the whole family. So, Vahid’s relatives are scared and have decided to keep their silence,” Bagheri told Radio Farda.

Moreover, Mohammad Najafi, who works in the city of Arak where Heydari was arrested, told CHRI, “This young man was a protester. They arrested him and then they beat and killed him. Now they want to destroy his reputation.”

On January 10, Central Province Prosecutor Abbas Ghassemi confirmed that one person had died in detention in Arak, the provincial capital, but did not mention Heydari by name.

“There were definite signs of self-harm on this individual. There is also footage of the moment he committed suicide. Therefore, the evidence confirms that his death was caused by suicide,” Ghassemi told Mizan, the judiciary’s official news agency.

Ghassemi did not elaborate on how or why the alleged suicide was being filmed.

Meanwhile, Bagheri, who has personally talked with Vahid’s uncle and cousin, said a 10-centimeter (roughly 4-inch) wound was found on Vahid’s left temple ending in a swollen point.

“These wounds show that Vahid could not commit suicide. Nobody can commit suicide in that way,” Bagheri told Radio Farda.

A memorial service was held for Heydari under the heavy presence of security forces.

Authorities confirmed the arrest of 100 protesters during recent protests in Arak, the capital of Iran’s central province.

“There is no independent source on the number of detentions in Arak,” Bagheri said. “But the figure presented by the authorities only refers to those detainees who are officially charged. However, an unknown number of detainees have been freed on bail and some of them testify that they had been tortured behind bars.”

The medical examiner has not yet issued a report on the cause of Heydari’s death.

Amnesty International has called upon Iran officials to lay the groundwork for an impartial and independent investigation concerning the two victims.

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