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Iran: Deaths of Detained Protesters Raise Concerns of Ill-Treatment

Thousands Arrested During Protests at Risk
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(Beirut) – New reports of deaths in detention in Iran raise grave concerns about the treatment of thousands of people arrested during the widespread protests by government forces, Human Rights Watch said today. On January 7 and 8, 2018, activists reported at least two deaths of detainees arrested during the recent protests in cities of Tehran and Arak. Iranian authorities should ensure that all deaths in detention and allegations of ill-treatment are swiftly and independently investigated, and that anyone responsible is brought to justice.

On January 7, a committee of Iranian activists established to document and monitor arrests during the 2017-2018 protests reported that Sina Ghanbari, a 23-year-old man from Tehran, died in the “quarantine” ward of Evin prison in Tehran under “unknown circumstances.” On January 5, the Center for Human Rights in Iran reported that Vahid Heidari, a protester arrested in Arak, Markazi province, had died under unknown circumstances in detention and had been buried that day.

“The reports of deaths make it critically important to investigate these cases immediately and to bring anyone responsible for ill-treatment to justice,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “The legacy of Kahrizak prison, where the 2009 protesters were tortured and killed, and persistent impunity for these crimes, casts a dark shadow on the situation for people arrested since these protests began.”



Announcement of Vahid Heidari’s death, 2017.

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On January 8, two members of the Iranian parliament and the head of Tehran's prisons confirmed the death of Ghanbari, in Evin prison in Tehran. Tayebeh Siavoshi, a parliament member from Tehran, told the *Iranian Labor News Agency (ILNA)* that when she asked the Intelligence Ministry about Ghanbari's death, authorities told her that police arrested Ghanbari and handed him over to judicial authorities, and that he committed suicide while in detention. Mahmoud Sadeghi, another parliament member from Tehran, also tweeted that Intelligence authorities had confirmed Ghanbari's death to Sadeghi.

Mostafa Mohebi, the head of Tehran's prisons, told ILNA news that on the morning of January 6, Ghanbari hanged himself in the Evin bathroom, and that investigations are ongoing. Two sources who closely monitor the situation of detainees but wished to remain anonymous confirmed to Human Rights Watch that suicide was the apparent cause of death, but they did not provide any information on Ghanbari's detention conditions.

Authorities in Markazi province have confirmed the death of Heidari without mentioning his name but claim that he also committed suicide. On January 7, Alef news website reported that Markazi province police had said that a person arrested for selling drugs on January 1 had committed suicide in prison. On January 9, Ghassemi, the Markazi province prosecutor, confirmed the death of a man in a police detention center in Arak, claiming that there is a video of him committing suicide, and that authorities at the medical examiner's office are investigating his death.

On the same day, Mohammad Najafi, a lawyer in Arak, told Human Rights Watch that he found out about the death of Heidari, a street vendor born in one of the villages around Arak who was arrested during the protests, through local contacts. He added that Heidari's family was told that their son was addicted to drugs and committed suicide in prison. "The people who saw the body told us that there were cuts and bruises on the left side of his forehead that could be a sign of being beaten by a baton." Najafi said. "I have received numerous reports from people who were detained by authorities that they harshly beat them during their arrest and detention in Arak."

In the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections, three detainees arrested for their role in protests – Amir Javadifar, Mohammad Kamrani, and Mohsen Ruholamini – died at Kahrizak detention center, outside Tehran, which was operated by Iran's Law Enforcement Forces. In 2010, the victims' families and rights activists reported that two other detainees, Ramin Aghazadeh Ghahremani and Abbas Nejadi-Kargar, died after their release from the facility, allegedly due to injuries suffered there. Authorities have refused to link their deaths to injuries at Kahrizak.

On January 10, 2010, a parliamentary panel investigating detentions after the disputed 2009 presidential election determined that Saeed Mortazavi, the former Tehran prosecutor general, was directly responsible for the ill-treatment of detainees in Kahrizak Prison. On November 26, 2017, the Appeals Court of Tehran sentenced Mortazavi to two years in prison for complicity in Ruholamini's murder.

On January 9, Sadeghi, the parliament member, told *Khaneh Mellat* news agency that authorities arrested 3,700 people during the protests that started on December 28 in Mashhad and spread across the country. He also estimated the total number of students arrested by authorities to be between 40 and 68. But earlier accounts estimated that a larger number of students had been detained, including dozens of student activists and members of university student groups.

On January 5, Parvaneh Salahshoori, a member of Parliament from Tehran, told Jame'e No Telegram channel that more than 90 students have been arrested, most likely by the Intelligence Ministry. On the same day, Sadeghi also told *Shargh* newspaper that 55 students had been arrested in Tehran alone. Human rights groups have identified 40 arrested students, including student activists.

On January 8, Shokoufeh Yadollahi, mother of Kasra Nouri, a university student and a member of Gonabadi Dervish community who was detained in Evin prison for ten days, told Human Rights Watch that intelligence authorities did not provide an arrest warrant when they arrested Nouri and three of his friends, Mohammad Sharifi Moghadam, Mohammad Reza Darvish, and Faezeh Abdipour, at the Dey Hospital in Tehran where they were visiting a family friend who was hospitalized, on December 30.

Yadollahi said that witnesses told the family when the students resisted arrest without a warrant, a plain clothes official told security forces to beat the detainees, which they did. Yadollahi said her son was in ward 209 of Evin prison and has not had access to a lawyer. On January 9, Majzooban news website reported that authorities released Nouri, Sharifi Moghadam, Darvish and Abdipour from prison.

On January 5, Seyed Farid Mousavi, another Tehran member of Parliament, tweeted that when he followed up on the arrests of students with authorities, he was told that most of the arrests were “preventive” and that the students would be released soon.

On January 3, Mohammad Aghazadeh, a veteran journalist, tweeted that authorities arrested his son Soheil Aghazadeh, a University of Tehran student, at his home, though he had not participated in the protests.

Several members of parliament have announced that they are looking into the situation for detainees, particularly students. On January 7, Nahid Khodabakhsi, a member of the Tehran City council, tweeted that she has asked the council to invite the families of detainees to attend a city council session. On January 7, Masoumeh Ebtekar, Iran's vice president for women and family affairs, tweeted that President Rouhani insisted during a cabinet meeting on the release of all university students

On January 9, Bahram Parsai, the spokesperson for the parliamentary commission on citizens' rights, told *Iranians Student News Agency (ISNA)* that the commission has submitted an official request to the Justice Ministry to visit prisons, including Evin, without clarifying whether the request is related to recent incidents. Authorities have not established any formal inquiries into the alleged unlawful use of force and the

circumstances that led to the deaths of at least 21 people in relation to the protests, as well as the mass arrests across the country.

Human Rights Watch compiled reports of arrests and releases through January 8, based on separate official announcements as reported in the news media. Out of 1,858 announced arrests, the authorities had announced the release of 356 but the total number of those currently detained is unknown. Family members of detainees have gathered in front of Evin prison in Tehran in hope of getting news about their loved ones.

On January 9, Nasrin Sotoudeh, a prominent human rights lawyer, told Human Rights Watch that several families at Evin told her that after news about Ghanbari's death, they are extremely concerned about the wellbeing of their loved ones.

With a history of persistent impunity and a dismal record of investigating abuses, Iran should allow Iranian and foreign independent investigators including the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran to visit detention centers and investigate the alleged abuses, Human Rights Watch said.

“The judiciary should immediately and unconditionally release anyone solely arrested for peaceful dissent and ensure fair trials and due process rights for those charged with a recognizable crime,” Whitson said. “Either parliament members or the president who claim to support the right to peaceful assembly should establish an official inquiry and provide clear answers to the victims and their families.”

Arrests Confirmed by Officials:

City, Province	Number	Source
Markazi Province	396	On January 4, according to Qassem Abdollahi, the head of Judiciary in Markazi Province, ISNA reported. https://goo.gl/ia8wnq
Mazandaran Province	3	On January 3, Ebrahim Heidari, the head of charity affairs in Mazandaran province, confirmed the arrests for allegedly attacking a shrine, Asr Iran reported. https://goo.gl/zRjnns
Gorgan Province	170	On January 6, Mostafa Haghi, Gorgan's prosecutor, announced the arrests, Tasnim news reported. https://goo.gl/kf9RBw

Western Azarbaijan	30	On January 3, Alireza Radfar, political deputy of the Western Azarbaijan governor, Khabar Online reported. https://goo.gl/RJ2hXQ
NazarAbad, Alborz	6	On January 4, Mohammad Ghayoumi, NazarAbad, a prosecutor for NazarAbad, Tasnim news agency reported. https://goo.gl/pNYYVd
Mamasi, Fars	9	On January 2, Governor Rahmatollah Faramazi of Mamasi, Negah Fars reported. https://goo.gl/nGSV6a
Hamedan	150	On January 2, Governor Ali Taal of Hamedan, Fars News reported. https://goo.gl/hsrRvi
Kerman	80	On January 2, Qolamali Abuhamzeh, the head of the Sarallah Divison of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Keyhan newspaper reported. https://goo.gl/D9iDYv
Mashhad, Razavi Khorasan	138	On January 2, Hasan Heidari, Mashhad prosecutor, Raja news reported. https://goo.gl/3VZ7dz
Kashan, Kashan	60	On January 2, Mohammad Takbirgoo, Kashan prosecutor, Young Journalists Club (YJC) reported. https://goo.gl/AVAer4
Ardabil, Ardabil	40	On January 2, Atabae, Ardabil prosecutor, Mehrnews reported. https://goo.gl/7FTahM
Robat Kareem, Tehran	9	On January 2, Abdollahzadeh, the head of police in Robat Kareem, Donya-e-Eghtesad reported. https://goo.gl/KkcHfd

Tehran, Tehran	450	On January 2, Ali Asqar Nasserbakht, the political deputy to Tehran's governor, ILNA reported. https://goo.gl/czXo9o
Qazvin, Qazvin	40	On January 8, Hojattoleslam Sadeghi Niaraki, the Qazvin prosecutor, Mehrnews reported. https://goo.gl/jW4PpK
Isfahan Province	100	On January 2, Islamic Republic News Agency reported. https://goo.gl/UKKbD9
Hormozgan Province	177	On January 8, Saeed Asadi Hormozgan prosecutor, Donya-e-Eghtesad reported. https://goo.gl/BoE3Dp
Total	1,858	

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