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Intelligence Ministry Forces Father of Slain Protester to Repeat Authorities' Version of Events on State TV



Iran's Intelligence Ministry coerced the father of a dead protester into claiming in front of a camera that his son was killed during an armed confrontation with security forces, the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) has learned.

The footage was then aired on state TV.

“What you saw in that video is a father's forced confession against his son,” a relative of Saro Ghahremani told CHRI.

Prior to being pressured by the ministry to keep quiet about her son's case, Saro Ghahremani's mother described signs of torture and beatings on her son's body to some of her relatives, added the source, who requested anonymity for fear of state retribution for speaking to the media.

“When they delivered Saro’s body, the agents took his father [Mohammad Ghahremani] away and a few hours later that video was aired on IRIB,” said the source.

Iran’s state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) has repeatedly colluded with Iran’s judiciary and security forces by airing forced confessions to influence public opinion.

The body of 24-year-old Saro Ghahremani was delivered to his parents by agents of the Intelligence Ministry on January 13, 2018, 11 days after he was arrested at an anti-government demonstration in Sanandaj, the capital of Iran’s Kurdistan Province.

The Committee for the Defense of Detainees reported on January 13 via Twitter that no one besides Saro Ghahremani’s parents were allowed to attend his burial.

When he was 18, Saro Ghahremani was arrested and imprisoned for 18 months for “political and security reasons,” added the committee.

In the video that aired on IRIB on January 13, Mohammad Ghahremani said his son was a member of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, an outlawed separatist militant organization, and died after a shootout with Iran’s security forces.

The source who spoke to CHRI denied the accusations and noted Saro Ghahremani had never been an armed member of the group.

“The governor of Sanandaj said Saro had been imprisoned for carrying a gun but we all know that in the Islamic Republic of Iran if you are arrested with a weapon, the punishment is death or life in prison,” said the source. “But Saro was released after less than two years in prison. Why? Because he had been charged with being a Komala sympathizer, not an armed member. The governor is lying to cover up a crime.”

Many Iranians took to social media to criticize IRIB’s broadcast of Mohammad Ghahremani’s forced statement.

“I spoke to Saro’s father today. He and his family are under intense security pressures. They are not in a normal state. Out of respect for the heartbroken parents, do not retweet IRIB’s shameful clip,” tweeted Iranian journalist Fereshteh Ghazi on January 14.

Saro Ghahremani’s case received more publicity after Iranian actress Bahare Rahnama shared a photo of herself standing beside him.

Expressing condolences to Saro’s family for his death “in the recent confrontations,” Rahnama said the “calm and shy” young man had worked for a time as a motorcycle courier for her restaurant in Tehran.

Hours later, Rahnama tweeted that she had been told by an official that Saro Ghahremani was a terrorist.

“I was contacted by the governor’s office in Sanandaj and told that Mr. Ghahremani was killed because of his collaboration with a terrorist organization and that I should not incite riots and cause more young people to get hurt with my wrong information. I replied that the officials should present evidence to the public,” she tweeted.

Kurdish political activist Ehsan Soltani reacted to the accusations against Saro Ghahremani by tweeting on January 14: “They took the grieving father to the Intelligence Ministry’s office in Sanandaj, put a camera in front of him and told him to read a statement saying that his son had been killed in an armed clash. But they have not said when or where it happened exactly. This is similar to the... shameless allegations made against Sane Jaleh.”

After Jaleh was killed during an anti-government rally in Sanandaj in February 2011, the authorities publicized a fabricated story that he had been a staunch supporter of the Islamic Republic who had been killed by protesters. His family and friends vehemently denied the claim.

In an interview with the Iranian government’s official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) on January 14, the governor of Sanandaj, Mohammad Ebrahim Zarei, repeated the accusations against Saro Ghahremani and claimed no one had been hurt during any of the anti-government protests in the city.

He repeated the claim on January 15.

“The individual mentioned on social media was attached to a terrorist group and was killed along with one of his comrades during an armed confrontation with our agents in the outskirts of Sanandaj,” said Zarei.

After his death, Saro Ghahremani’s mother opened an account on Instagram called “Saro, Mother’s Love” and posted photos of her son with captions such as, “Innocent Saro.”

At least 25 people were killed after anti-government demonstrations broke out across Iran on December 28, 2017. The protests were harshly repressed by the authorities and more than 4,000 demonstrators were arrested.

At least two detainees died while in custody under mysterious circumstances.