

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Broadcast of Coerced Confession, Failure to Investigate Torture

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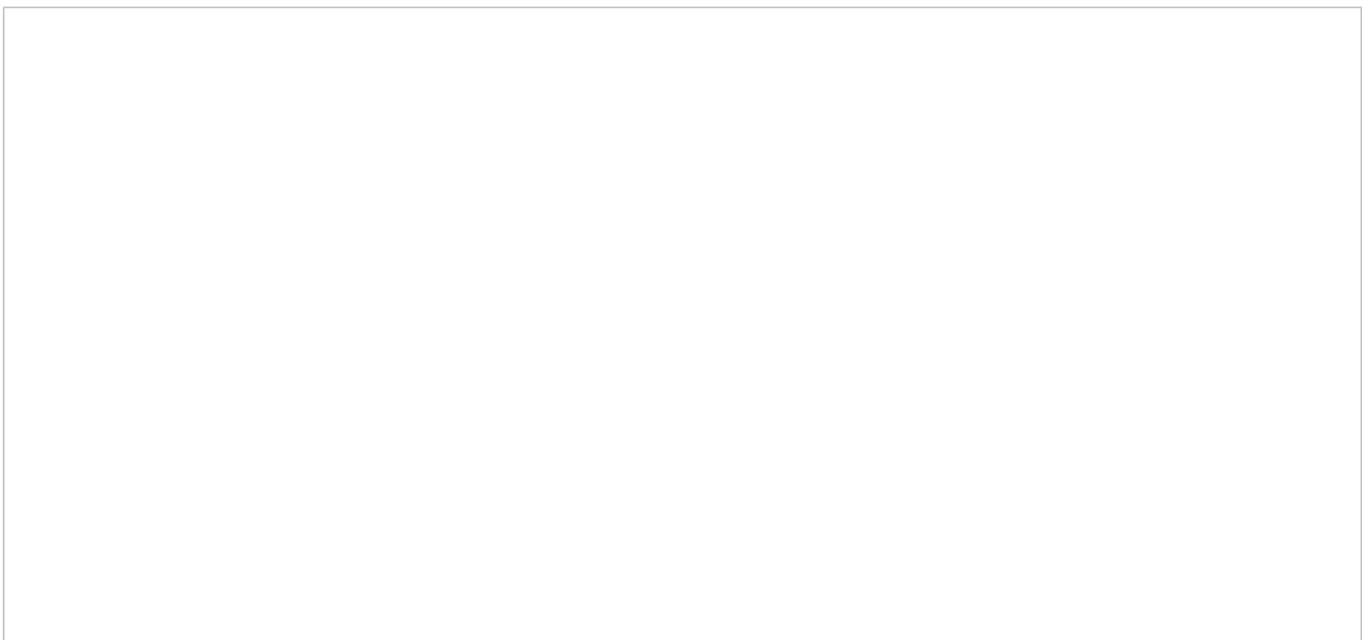
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(Beirut) [Iranian](#) authorities on January 20, 2019 arrested two activists who had alleged that authorities tortured them in detention, Human Rights Watch said today. The arrests of Ismael Bakhshi, a prominent labor rights activist, and Sepideh Gholian, a journalist and labor rights activist, came the day after Iranian state television broadcast confessions that they said they were forced to make in detention.



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Screen shot from Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) Channel 2 of likely coerced confession of Sepideh Gholian and Esmael Bakhshi. Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) Channel 2

On January 4, Bakhshi, a leading representative for the workers at the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company in Shush, Khuzistan Province, posted on his [Instagram](#) account that he had been severely beaten during his 25-day detention in November 2018 by the Intelligence Ministry in Khuzistan province. On January 9, Gholian said on her Twitter account that she had witnessed authorities severely beating Bakhshi at the time of his first arrest on November 18, when they were peacefully protesting unpaid wages for fellow Haft Tappeh workers and authorities arrested them.

Iran's security agencies are using smear campaigns, torture, and forced confessions against activists like Ismael Bakhshi and Sepideh Gholian, who have the temerity to defend workers rights, said [Michael Page](#), deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. Broadcasting activists confessions on State TV only raises more concerns about torture and mistreatment in detention.

Despite initial promises, the authorities have failed to conduct any credible investigations into the torture allegations. On January 19, [Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting \(IRIB\) Channel 2 broadcasted a program](#) that include confessions by Bakhshi and Gholian in detention. The video also accused the activists of being connected to Iran's banned Worker Communist Party.

On January 21, [Khodarahm Gholian, Gholians father, told the Radio Farda website that authorities](#) did not show an arrest warrant when they arrested his daughter. When his son Mehdi tried to prevent authorities from entering the house, they beat him and arrested him as well. The authorities told his daughter that they would destroy her if she spoke out after being released, the father added. On January 21, [after the authorities rearrested Gholian, BBC Persian TV channel broadcasted a video of Gholian](#) recorded before her most recent arrest in which she says that during her detention in November, authorities beat her with a cable to force her to confess that she was after overthrowing the government and hijacking the demands of the laborers in Iran.

Several parliament members demanded clarification from the Intelligence Ministry after Bakhshis January 4 post. The parliament, Rouhani administration, and the judiciary subsequently announced a committee to investigate Bakhshis torture allegations. However, on January 8, after Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi, met with parliament members, [Ali Najafi Khoshroodi, the spokesperson for the parliament national security commission, told reporters](#) that the Intelligence Ministry denied the torture allegations. On January 9, [Farzaneh Zilabi, Bakhshis lawyer, told Rouydad 24 news website](#) that her client has been under pressure to retract his torture claim.

On January 14, [Hojatoleslam Montazeri, the prosecutor general, told reporters](#) that the investigative committees report said that Bakhshi had not been tortured and by making such claim, he was pursuing political goals.

Torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment are banned at all times, and evidence obtained by torture or other coercion may not be submitted as evidence in a trial. Torture is also a crime of universal jurisdiction, meaning states are required to arrest and investigate anyone on their territory credibly suspected of involvement in torture anywhere and to prosecute them or extradite them to face justice.

The [United Nations Principles on Torture Investigations](#) state that alleged victims of torture or ill-treatment, witnesses, those conducting the investigation, and their families shall be protected from violence, threats of violence, or any other form of intimidation that may arise pursuant to the investigation.

Human Rights Watch and other groups have documented abuses and torture in Iranian prisons, as well as persistent impunity for these serious violations. 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 the murder of Mohsen Ruholamini in Kahrizak detention center after the 2009 crackdown.

Irans government-run Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) has a [long history of parading Irans critics and their family members on national TV](#), where they are forced to make so-called confessions or public statements meant to discredit them and their causes. Human rights groups have documented several instances in which dissidents, activists, and journalists were featured in pseudo-documentary videos intended to prove their guilt, though it was very likely they were coerced to participate in them.

Iranian authorities announcements that they actually investigate torture claims are still rarely true, and the arrest of Bakhshi and Gholian looks like a response after they bravely spoke out about Irans bankrupt justice system, Page said.

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