

JOINT STATEMENT

by ILGA World, ILGA Asia, and 6Rang (Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network)

Iran: Retract the death penalty sentence and release LGBTI activists Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani (Sareh) and Elham Choubdar

Geneva, 8 September 2022 - Iran must immediately retract the death penalty sentence imposed on LGBTI activists Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani (Sareh) and Elham Choubdar and drop all charges against them - human rights organisations ILGA World, ILGA Asia, and 6Rang (Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network) said today.

“We are outraged at Iran’s inhumane decision to sentence two LGBTI human rights defenders to death”, ILGA World co-Secretaries General Luz Elena Aranda and Tuisina Ymania Brown said. “We urge the international community to condemn the brutality of this punishment in the most unambiguous terms, and we appeal to the United Nations and all international agencies to do everything in their power, to the full extent of international law, to prevent this atrocity. The sentence must be overturned. Sareh and Elham must be released”.

At the end of August 2022, the Revolutionary Court of Urumieh, in the West Azerbaijan Province of Iran, sentenced them both to death under the charge of “corruption on Earth”, leaving their lawyers with 20 days to appeal the decision. [As ILGA World's State-Sponsored Homophobia report points out](#), the vague provision of ‘corruption on Earth’ does not contain any explicit reference to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics, but has nevertheless been used in the past against LGBTI individuals.

Following the international outcry about the news, the Iranian judiciary’s news agency [stated](#) that the sentencing was for charges relating to allegedly trafficking of women to a neighbouring country.

“Such accusations are unsubstantiated,” said Shadi Amin, Coordinator of 6Rang (Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network). “The Islamic Republic authorities have a long-standing record of making up charges against activists to justify corporal punishment. It is clear to all of us that what has taken place is not due process, and that all charges against the activists should be dropped”.

Death penalty sentences in Iran have intensified in recent months. [Reports have indicated](#) that the Iranian authorities have sentenced at least 251 people to death between 1 January and 30 June 2022 amid [well-documented patterns](#) of executions being systematically carried out following grossly unfair trials.

Iran is among the six UN member States where, to date, the [death penalty is still the legally prescribed punishment for consensual same-sex sexual acts](#). There are also five additional UN member States where certain sources indicate that the death penalty may be imposed for consensual same-sex conduct, but where there is less legal certainty on the matter.

In 2017, the UN Human Rights Council [issued a resolution](#) condemning the imposition of the death penalty as a sanction for consensual same-sex relations (among others). The resolution built upon [a report by UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#), where he examined its

disproportionate impact on different groups and its discriminatory use based on gender or sexual orientation.

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Notes to editors

ILGA World is the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, a worldwide federation of more than 1,800 organisations from over 160 countries and territories campaigning for the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people. <https://ilga.org>

ILGA Asia is the Asian region of ILGA World, representing more than 190 member organisations across the region. <https://www.ilgaasia.org/about>

6Rang (Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network) aims to raise awareness on sexual rights in Iran, and eradicate LGBTI-phobia and violence against lesbian and transgender people in particular, as well as the LGBTI community in general. <https://6rang.org/>

The stories of Zahra Sedighi Hamadani and Elham Choubdar

Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani (Sareh), 31, lived in Erbil, Iraq, and used a virtual platform to speak about the human rights of LGBTI people. In October 2021, she was arrested in Iran while attempting to cross the border to seek asylum in Turkey. She had to flee after being targeted for participating in an interview with *BBC Persian* and speaking up on the situation of LGBTI persons in Erbil. She was [charged](#) with crossing the border illegally as well as of “promoting homosexuality”, although no evidence has been offered to substantiate the accusations. [Reports](#) indicate that Sareh was coerced into confessing to these ‘crimes’ - potentially through acts of torture, including solitary confinement and threats of having the custody of her two children taken away from her.

Elham Choubdar, 24, is a wedding dresses shop owner and a friend of Sareh, with whom she had appeared on some Instagram live sessions. After Sareh was arrested, the same happened to Elham, who was charged for encouraging corruption and depravity.

At the end of August 2022, the Revolutionary Court of Urumieh, in the West Azerbaijan Province of Iran, sentenced them both to death for “corruption on Earth”, leaving their lawyers only with 20 days to present an appeal.