

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iran-new-light-on-death-in-detention-of-26-11-2012,43729.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Iran

A step forward?

## New light on death in detention of blogger Sattar Beheshti

26 November 2012

Reporters Without Borders, intent on ensuring the death of the blogger **Sattar Beheshti** does not go unpunished, awaits with great interest the final outcome of the investigation by the Iranian justice authorities.

### ***State prosecutor's investigation***

On 22 November, the Tehran prosecutor's office published a statement on "progress in the investigation and identification of those responsible for the death of Sattar Beheshti, and its responsibility regarding citizens' rights". It described the sequence of events, from the day of his arrest to the discovery of his body in his cell at the headquarters of the FTA, Iran's cyber police.

"Since the first day of the investigation, the prosecutor's office has questioned officers implicated in the case and the victim's fellow prisoners ... A number of people, including police officers, those responsible for interrogating him and warders at the detention centre have been charged and placed in custody to enable further investigations to reach a clear conclusion," the statement said.

These comments mirror those made in the past two weeks by various government leaders but the statement also gives new information about the cause Beheshti's death: "The latest opinion of the medical commission published on 20 November 2012 indicates, at the current stage of the investigation and with the available information, that determination of the definitive cause of death is not possible, but as no reason or evidence of illness leading to death was observed during the examination of the corpse and the supplementary investigations, the most likely cause of death can be the phenomenon of shock, which if verified, could be caused by a blow or blows on sensitive areas of the body or through severe psychological pressure."

Reporters Without Borders acknowledges that the latest statement by the prosecutor is a step forward. However, the organization deplores the lack of clarity and transparency. "Vital elements of the case are still missing, and too many questions remain unanswered concerning the cause of his death and the part played by the police and the Iranian justice system," the press freedom organization said.

"We are afraid that the results of this investigation will be a disappointment and will not lead to the identification of those implicated in the death of Sattar Beheshti. The final result must not reiterate these half-truths with the aim of appeasing national and international pressure. The justice system must allow his family to speak and to attend hearings and the trial must be held in public. The courts must allow the truth to come out."

### ***Contradictory statements***

The prosecutor's statement was published after a series of statements and denials by various government officials.

Ahmad Shojai, a representative of the [Iranian Legal Medicine Organization](#), said in an interview for the [Mehrnews](#) agency on 19 November that "although we have not reached a final conclusion, the results of several examinations carried out on Sattar Beheshti's body

indicate no trace of poison or any suffocation (...) In our view this individual died a natural death."

These comments were initially contradicted by the journalist **Abolfazl Abedini Nasr**, one of his fellow inmates in Section 350 of Tehran's Evin prison. Nasr said Beheshti "complained of having been beaten and tortured by the police." In reprisal, Nasr was placed in solitary confinement in Evin's high security wing, Section 209.

In a statement issued on 21 November, the [Iranian Legal Medicine Organization](#), distanced itself from the comments of its leader, Shojai, saying "the organization has submitted its report to the justice authorities and denied all statements made in its name about the results of the inquiry".

Mehdi Davatgary, a judge appointed by Parliament's national security commission to conduct his own inquiry, told the [Mehrnews](#) agency on 19 November: "Even if Sattar Beheshti died of natural causes, those responsible for assaulting him will be prosecuted."

The Tehran state prosecutor announced on 13 November that several people had been arrested in connection with the investigation into the blogger's death but did not identify them. The next day, General [Esmail Ahmadi Moghadam](#), the chief of police, said they had been brought before the public prosecutor for questioning.

Mohammad Hossein Asfary, a member of parliament's national security commission, nonetheless told the official news agency Irna the same day that, while seven people had been arrested by the Tehran military prosecutor's office (in charge of prosecuting crimes by members of the army and police), some had been released on bail of 50 million toman.

### ***Beheshti's family under pressure***

Reporters Without Borders is concerned by the treatment of Beheshti's family and deplores the vile methods used to silence them and deny them their legitimate right to file a complaint and have access to legal advice.

In an interview posted on the [Sahamnews](#) website on 21 November, Beheshti's mother clearly confirmed that the family was being subjected to pressure and she requested justice for her son.

"They came with an arrest warrant for my daughter," she said. "They told us to say nothing or she would be arrested. I know that my son was not suffering from any ailment ... He was in good health when they arrested him and he was dead when they brought me the body. I ask international authorities and organizations not to leave me on my own. The people responsible for my son's death must be punished."

Nasr, the journalist who denied that Beheshti died from natural causes, has been detained since 2 March 2010 and was sentenced in April 2011 to 11 years in prison for his journalistic activities.

He is one of the inmates who saw Beheshti during the 12 hours the blogger spent in Evin prison's Section 350 on 31 October. After being questioned by a member of the investigation into Beheshti's death, Nasr was transferred to Karon prison in Ahvaz (in Khuzestan province) on 15 November. He was transferred back to Evin on the Tehran prosecutor's orders the next day but was placed in an isolation cell in Section 209.

According to his family, he has been on hunger strike since 15 November in protest against these punitive measures. He was moved back into section 350 of Evin prison on 22 November.

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