

Head of judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15, 1050
Bruxelles, Belgium

Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) rights defender Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani, 31, known as Sareh, and another woman, Elham Choubdar, 24, were sentenced to death after the Revolutionary Court in Urumieh, West Azerbaijan province, tried them in early August 2022 and subsequently convicted them of “corruption on earth.” Official statements, state media reports, and statements made by prosecution officials to Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani since her arrest in October 2021 indicate that she was targeted for discriminatory reasons tied to her real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity, as well as her peaceful LGBTI rights activism, including on social media, and her association with LGBTI asylum seekers in Iraq. On 18 July 2022, state media affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards aired a homophobic video portraying Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani as a “criminal” for publishing online content which “promoted homosexuality” and “challenged the stigma around religiously forbidden [namashrou] sexual relations”. The propaganda video linked Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani’s peaceful online LGBTI rights activism to unfounded accusations of “gambling” and “smuggling women and girls from Iran to Erbil [Iraq]” in a bid to vilify her. Court documents and other information reviewed by Amnesty International indicate that Elham Choubdar was similarly targeted for discriminatory reasons related to her real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity, LGBTI supportive activities on social media, and association with Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani.

The proceedings leading to the women’s convictions and sentences were grossly unfair. Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani was forcibly disappeared for 53 days following arrest. During this time, she was subjected to abusive interrogations without access to a lawyer, prolonged solitary confinement, homophobic insults, death threats and threats to take away the custody of her children, which violate fair trial rights and the absolute prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International understands that Elham Choubdar was pressured to make “confessions”. Moreover, the offence of “corruption on earth” fails to meet requirements for clarity and precision needed in criminal law and breaches the principle of legality and legal certainty. Officials told the two women of their sentences on 1 September 2022 in Urumieh prison, where both are held. Their cases have been appealed to the Supreme Court.

I ask you to immediately quash the convictions and death sentences of Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani and Elham Choubdar, and immediately release both as they are targeted based on discriminatory reasons related to their real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity and peaceful activities in defence of the human rights of LGBTI people. Pending their release, ensure they are given regular access to lawyers of their choosing and family. I further urge the Iranian authorities to establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty, decriminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct, and adopt legislation to protect LGBTI people from discrimination, violence and other human rights violations.

Yours sincerely,