Iranian teenager who posted distorted pictures of herself is jailed for 10 years

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An Iranian woman who posted heavily distorted images of herself online has been sentenced to 10 years in jail, her lawyer has said, a year after she was arrested over her social media activities.

Sahar Tabar, 19, whose real name is Fatemeh Khishvand, came to prominence after posting images of herself with a gaunt, zombie-like face. At one point she had 486,000 followers on Instagram.

She was charged with corruption of young people and disrespect for the Islamic Republic. In spring she pleaded for release from detention, saying she had contracted Covid-19.

At one point Tabar called on the actor Angelina Jolie, whom she resembled in some of her photos, to campaign for her release, saying: “The Islamic Republic has a history of tormenting women. We need to be united against this gender apartheid.”

The charges against Tabar first included blasphemy, inciting violence, gaining income through inappropriate means and encouraging youths to corruption. She said she had been cleared of two of the four charges against her, but did not want to comment further because she was still hoping for a pardon.

Iranian state TV broadcast her confession in late October last year. Her expressions of remorse drew a great deal of sympathy. The report described Tabar as “a victim with an abnormal personality and mental state” who sought “vulgarity” on social media.

Medical records also suggested that she had a mental illness, with a history of visits to psychiatric hospitals, making the 10-year sentence even less explicable. Her lawyers had asked for her to be bailed, and pointed to her age at the time she committed the alleged offences.