Iran: lengthy jail terms for dual national and British Council worker

August 27, 2019

By [Frances Perraudin](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/frances-perraudin) and agencies

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/27/iran-jails-dual-national-and-british-council-worker-for-spying>

[Iran](https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran) has sentenced a British-Iranian woman to 12 years in prison after accusing her of spying for Israel, while upholding the 10-year sentence of another UK resident.

A spokesman for the Iranian judiciary, Gholamhossein Esmaili, said on Tuesday that Anousheh Ashouri – the latest Iranian national with a western passport to be detained in Iran – had been sentenced to 12 years for ties to Israel’s Mossad spy agency.

Ashouri’s sentence included 10 years for allegedly feeding information to Israeli intelligence and two years for receiving €33,000 (£30,000) in illicit funds from the country. She was ordered to pay the same amount in fines.

A Foreign Office spokesperson said the UK was supporting Ashouri’s family and the embassy in Tehran was continuing to request consular access. The spokesperson said the FCO urged Iran to allow all dual nationals detained in Iran to be reunited with their families.

Meanwhile an appeals court upheld a 10-year prison sentence against Aras Amiri, an Iranian national and British Council worker. Amiri was living in London when she was arrested in 2018 during a trip to Iran to visit relatives.

Last week Amiri’s fiance, James Tyson, [accused the UK government of being “utterly blind to their responsibility”](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/22/aras-amiri-fiance-james-tyson-uk-government-utterly-blind-iran) to try to secure her release. He said British officials had initially claimed they could not help Amiri because she was an Iranian citizen.

Amiri, who worked as an artistic affairs officer for the British Council, was arrested last year when she was visiting her ailing grandmother in Iran. In May she was sentenced to prison on spying charges after she claimed she had refused to become an informant for Iran’s intelligence service.

Esmaili said she had been identified “because of her cultural infiltration in society through arts and her widespread activities”.

Tyson said his fiance had become close to her cellmate, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the Iranian-British citizen [serving a five-year sentence for alleged spying](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/04/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-iranian-jail-british-husband-appeals-foreign-office).

“They’re sort of housemates in many ways. They’re very supportive of each other … telling stories, sharing books they have and cooking together,” he said. “In many ways it’s good that they could have each other, actually, through this time.”

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who worked for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, was arrested by Iranian authorities in 2016 as she was leaving Tehran.

An Iranian national, Ali Johari, was also sentenced to 12 years in jail on Tuesday after being accused of spying for Israel. Esmaili said Johari had “widespread connections with Mossad” and had met “various elements linked to the Zionists”.

The verdicts came amid tensions between Iran and Britain, a US ally, over the seizure of oil tankers in recent weeks. An Iranian tanker was seized off the British overseas territory of Gibraltar on 4 July on suspicion of shipping oil to Syria in breach of EU sanctions.

[That vessel has been released](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/18/iran-tanker-at-centre-of-diplomatic-row-set-to-leave-gibraltar) but Iran continues to hold a British-flagged tanker it seized in the Gulf on 19 July for breaking “international maritime rules”.

A statement from the FCO said: “The treatment of all dual nationals detained in Iran is a priority and we raise their cases at the most senior levels. We urge Iran to let them be reunited with their families.”