Stuck in an airport for almost two weeks, Iranian beauty queen says she will be killed if she is deported

October 28, 2019

By [Helen Regan](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/helen-regan) and [Joshua Berlinger](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/joshua-berlinger)

CNN

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/28/asia/iran-beauty-contestant-philippines-asylum-intl-hnk/index.html>

An Iranian beauty queen who has spent almost two weeks inside Manila's international airport says she will be killed if she is sent back home and is seeking asylum in the Philippines.

Bahareh Zare Bahari, a contestant in the recent Miss Intercontinental pageant in Manila, claims Tehran is attempting to silence her because of her public stand against the government.

In a press release last week, the Philippines Immigration Department said the international police agency Interpol issued a worldwide request to arrest Bahari, known as a red notice. The statement did not specify which country requested the red notice, but Bahari told CNN that an immigration official told her Iran requested one in 2018.

"I have been living here since 2014 and I've not gone back to Iran. I explained to them many times, how can I have a criminal case in Iran when I've been living here?" she told CNN by phone.

Bahari said she has been confined to a passenger room in Terminal 3 of Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport since she arrived from Dubai 12 days ago. "I'm really mentally sick," she said, adding that the uncertainty over her case is wearing her down.

Bahari believes she is being targeted for supporting the exiled Reza Pahlavi, the son of the Shah of Iran overthrown in the country's 1979 revolution.

The beauty queen blamed the situation on Iranian authorities, saying it came up because she used an image of Pahlavi and the flag of the former Iranian monarchy as props during a recent competition. Bahari said she made the statement "to try and be the voice of my people."

She also believes she may be targeted because of her social activism in Iran. Bahari said that she became a teacher there because she wanted girls to learn "they are not things, they are not toys, they are human and they have same right as boys."

The Philippines Department of Immigration and Department of Justice have not responded to CNN's request for comment. Requests for comment made to the Iranian embassy in Manila and the Iranian government in Tehran have not been answered.

Bahari said she moved to the Philippines about five years ago to study dentistry and has since been on a student visa that renews annually. She said her existing visa is valid until January 2020.

She told CNN by phone from the airport terminal that she was denied entry when she returned to the Philippines on October 17 from a trip to the Middle East, upon which she claimed asylum.

Bahari said that if a legitimate red notice had been issued for her arrest, then she would not have been able to acquire other visas for her trip to the Middle East.

In its statement, Philippines immigration authorities said Bahari was also accused of assault and battery in the Philippines city of Dagupan. The statement did not say whether this was the reason a red notice had been issued, or if the complaint originated in Iran. Not all red notices are made publicly available due to the confidential nature of international criminal investigations. Interpol's press office said the agency does not comment on specific cases or individuals "except in special circumstances and with the approval of the member country concerned."

Asked about the assault allegations, Bahari said they were "a big lie" and designed to force her back to Iran. She said there were no pending cases against her in the Philippines.

Human Rights Watch deputy director Phil Robertson said in a statement that "there have been repeated incidents where rights repressing states in the Middle East have abused the (Interpol) process to try to force the return of dissidents overseas."

He said the organization was concerned about the "mysterious" red notice, "especially since under Interpol rules a red notice is null and void if the person named in the notice is found to be a refugee fleeing from the state that issued it."