Iranian schoolgirl ‘beaten to death for refusing to sing’ pro-regime anthem

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<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/oct/18/iranian-schoolgirl-beaten-to-death-for-refusing-to-sing-pro-regime-anthem>

Another schoolgirl has reportedly been killed by the Iranian security services after she was beaten in her classroom for refusing to sing a pro-regime song when her school was raided last week, sparking further protests across the country this weekend.

According to the [Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers’ Trade Associations](https://t.me/kashowra/13123), 16-year-old Asra Panahi died after security forces raided the Shahed girls high school in Ardabil on 13 October and demanded a group of girls sing an [anthem that praises Iran’s supreme leader](https://www.iranintl.com/en/202205212367), Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

When they refused, security forces beat the pupils, leading to a number of girls being taken to hospital and others arrested. On Friday, Panahi reportedly died in hospital of injuries sustained at the school.

Iranian officials denied that its security forces were responsible and, after her death sparked outrage across the country, a man identified as her uncle appeared on state TV channels claiming she had died from a congenital heart condition.

[Schoolgirls have emerged as a powerful force](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/oct/09/iran-protests-schoolgirls-videos-khamenei) after videos went viral of classrooms of pupils waving their hijabs in the air, taking down pictures of Iran’s supreme leaders and shouting anti-regime slogans in support of [Mahsa Amini](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/sep/23/how-iran-erupted-after-mahsa-amini-death-protests), the 22-year-old woman who died after being detained by Iran’s morality police for not wearing her hijab correctly in August.

The Iranian authorities responded by launching a series of raids on schools across the country last week, with reports of officers forcing their way into classrooms, violently arresting schoolgirls and pushing them into waiting cars, and firing teargas into school buildings.

In a statement posted on Sunday, Iran’s teachers’ union condemned the “brutal and inhumane” raids and called for the resignation of the education minister, Yousef Nouri.

News of Panahi’s death has further mobilised schoolgirls across the country to organise and join protests over the weekend.

Among them was 16-year-old Naznin\*, whose parents had kept her at home for fear that she would be arrested for protesting at her school.

“I haven’t been allowed to go to the school because my parents fear for my life. But what has it changed? The regime continues to kill and arrest schoolgirls,” says Naznin.

“What good am I if I simply sit outraged at home? Myself and fellow students across Iran have decided to stand in protest on the streets this week. I’ll do it even if I have to now hide it from my parents.”

19-year-old Nergis\* also joined the protests, and was hit by rubber bullets in her back and legs. She says Panahi’s death has motivated her and her friends to continue to protest, despite the danger.

She says what happened to Panahi – as well as the deaths of two other schoolgirls, 17-year-old [Nika Shahkarami](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/06/mother-of-dead-iran-schoolgirl-accuses-authorities-of) and 16-year-old [Sarina Esmailzadeh](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/oct/07/another-teenage-girl-dead-at-hands-of-irans-security-forces-reports-claim), both at the hands of the Iranian security forces – has united young people across Iran under a common cause.

“I don’t have a single relative in Ardabil, but with this brutal crackdown on our sisters, who were just 16 years old, they’ve awakened the whole nation,” she says.

“We never knew we were so united – across the Baloch regions as well as the Kurdish regions. The world has heard about Nika, Sarina and Asra, but there are so many other nameless children who we know nothing about.

“It’s not just Asra’s death,” she says. “The Islamic Republic has been killing our people for 40 years, but our voices weren’t heard. Let the world know this is no longer a protest – we are calling for a revolution. Now that you’re all listening to our voices, we will not stop.”

According to the latest report by the [Iran Human Rights](https://iranhr.net/en/articles/5520/) group, 215 people, including 27 children, have been killed in the nationwide protests, as of 17 October.

\*Names have been changed