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Iran: Independent investigation into schoolgirl's critical injuries needed amid mounting evidence of a cover up

The international community must demand that the Iranian authorities allow the [UN Fact-Finding Missions](#) and other independent monitors to enter the country to investigate the circumstances leading to the hospitalization of 16-year-old Armita Garawand, who fell unconscious on a Tehran metro train after reports she was assaulted by an enforcer of Iran's compulsory veiling laws, and has been in a coma since, said Amnesty International, amid mounting evidence of a cover up by the authorities.

In the days following her hospitalization, Iranian authorities arrested a journalist investigating the incident and circulated propaganda videos on state media featuring Armita Garawand's visibly distressed parents and friends reluctantly reiterating the state narrative that she collapsed due to low blood pressure.

In an additional attempt to conceal the truth, the authorities also released edited CCTV footage. Analysis by Amnesty International's Evidence Lab reveals the video frame rate was increased in four sections and detected a gap of three minutes and 16 seconds in the footage.

"Iranian authorities are waging a concerted campaign of denial and distortion to cover up the truth about the circumstances that led to Armita Garawand's collapse, chillingly reminiscent of their bogus narratives and unplausible explanations of Mahsa/Zhina Amini's hospitalization just over a year ago," said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Given the lack of prospects for impartial and independent investigations domestically, the international community must press the Iranian authorities to allow access to the UN Fact-Finding Missions and other independent monitors to uncover the truth about what led to the hospitalization in critical condition of yet another girl, amid reports of assault related to compulsory veiling laws. The international community must also demand that Armita Garawand's relatives, friends and journalists seeking the truth are protected from reprisals and harassment."

On 1 October 2023, Armita Garawand was admitted to Fajr hospital in a coma after falling unconscious in a train at a metro station in Tehran. According to informed sources, security forces have established a heavy presence at the hospital entrance, preventing visitors and even forbidding people from recording videos from their phones. The sources reported that the authorities permitted her parents inside the hospital on several occasions, but under restrictions, limiting them to seeing her briefly.

On 2 October 2023, Iranian newspaper Shargh Daily [reported](#) that journalist Maryam Lotfi had been arrested after going to Fajr hospital to investigate. Maryam Lotfi was released on bail the same day.

On 5 October 2023, the Guardian newspaper [quoted](#) an eyewitness saying that soon after Armita Garawand entered the train carriage, a woman agent enforcing compulsory veiling in the metro "screamed at Armita Garawand asking her why was she not covered". The eyewitness, as cited by the Guardian, added, "Armita then told her 'Do I ask you to remove your headscarf? Why are you asking me to wear one?' Their argument then turned violent. The hijab enforcer started physically attacking Armita and ... violently pushed her."

Iranian state media hastily responded to the reports by attributing Armita Garawand's collapse to "a drop in blood pressure".

On 3 October 2023, state media released a [video](#) featuring multiple shots of Armita Garawand's parents reluctantly reiterating the state narrative. During the video her mother repeatedly pauses and hesitates while describing the events.

In another scene a woman, identified vaguely as a "relative", is seen standing next to Armita Garawand's mother, Shaheen Ahmadi. The woman claims that allegations of assault against Armita

Garawand were not correct and that the family has been allowed to review all the CCTV footage and said that “it was all ok”. Armita Garawand’s visibly distressed mother is heard interrupting the woman noting that the family had not viewed all the footage.

On 5 October 2023, state media released another [video](#) which shows the interrogation of two of Armita Garawand’s schoolfriends in which they repeated the authorities’ narrative about her collapse. The video also shows CCTV footage of a young woman without a headscarf purported to be Armita Garawand on 1 October entering the station, stepping onto a train, and then being carried off the same train by her friends and other female passengers.

Amnesty International’s Evidence Lab analyzed the CCTV camera footage from the metro station published by Iranian state media outlets. Video analysis concluded that the footage has been edited and the frame rate has been increased in four sections of the video. Based on the footage time stamps, three minutes and 16 seconds of the metro footage are missing.

Amnesty International has documented the Iranian authorities’ long-standing pattern of subjecting victims’ families to harassment, intimidation and threats of reprisals in order to force them into reiterating official state narratives which absolve authorities of responsibility for human rights violations. The organization therefore has serious concerns that Armita Garawand’s family and friends have been forced to appear in propaganda videos and reiterate the state narrative under duress and threats of reprisals.

Amnesty International is calling on members of the international community to pursue legal avenues at the international level, including through the principle of universal jurisdiction, to initiate criminal investigations against Iranian officials responsible for the widespread and systematic human rights violations against women and girls.

Background:

Armita Garawand’s hospitalization comes against a backdrop of an [intensified campaign of oppression](#) in recent months against women and girls who defy Iran’s abusive and discriminatory compulsory veiling laws. This has encompassed harassment and violent attacks by state agents and vigilantes against women and girls who appear in public unveiled, confiscation of cars, denial of access to employment, education, healthcare, banking services and public transport, and cruel judicial sentences.

On 27 April 2023, the mayor of Tehran, Alireza Zakani, introduced a “hijab and chastity plan” for the municipality, which relies on a special municipal security force (*yegan-e hefazat-e shahrdari*) to confront women and girls who do not wear headscarves in the metro.

On 20 September 2023, Iran’s parliament passed a bill that, if approved by the Guardian Council, would further erode the human rights of women and girls who defy compulsory veiling.

Under Iran’s Islamic Penal Code, women who are seen in public without a headscarf can be punished with a prison sentence, flogging or a fine.