



Joint Statement by International Athletes and Sports Personalities on the Imminent Execution of Iranian Boxing Champion Mohammad Javad Vafaei Sani

November 2025

We, athletes and sports figures from around the world, strongly condemn the Iranian regime's decision on 4 October 2025 to uphold the death sentence of Mohammad Javad Vafaei Sani, a 30-year-old boxing champion and coach from Mashhad.

Mohammad Javad has spent more than five years in prison under torture and solitary confinement for taking part in the 2019 pro-democracy protests and supporting the democratic opposition PMOI (MEK).

His case is not an isolated tragedy. Iran has a grim history of executing athletes for their beliefs, including the captain of the national football team Habib Khabiri and the captain of the national women's volleyball team Forouzan Abdi, the latter executed alongside 30,000 political prisoners during the 1988 massacre. In 2020, Iranian wrestling champion Navid Afkari was executed after participating in peaceful protests in 2018.

In recent months, the Iranian authorities have executed numerous other protesters on similar bogus charges with total impunity. These political executions are a callous attempt by the authorities to frighten and silence an increasingly restive population no longer willing to accept their corrupt and oppressive rule.

Sport is meant to inspire hope, unity, and courage. The execution of a champion for his political views is a direct assault on these values and a warning to every athlete who dares to speak out.

We call on the United Nations, international sports federations, and governments to act immediately to save the life of Mohammad Javad. The world must not stand by while Iran silences its champions.

We stand with Mohammad Javad. We stand for justice.

SIGNED:

1. **Martina Navratilova** - (Czech Republic/United States)
Former world no. 1 women's tennis player
2. **Sharron Davies MBE** - (United Kingdom)
Swimmer, Olympic medallist
3. **Riley Gaines** - (United States)
Swimmer, twelve-time NCAA All-American
4. **Craig Foster AM** - (Australia)
Former Captain of the national football team of Australia
5. **Tracy Edwards MBE** - (United Kingdom)
1990 Yachtsman of the Year; Skipper of the first all-female crew Whitbread Round the World Yacht Race
6. **Carilyn Johnson** - (United States)
Ultrarunner, 4-time member of Team USA; 2-time gold and 1-time silver medallist team member at the IAU 24-Hour World Championship
7. **Ali Ziaei** - (Canada)
Former National Sanshou Champion and member of Canadian National Wushu Team
8. **Inga Thompson** - (United States)
Cyclist, 3-time Olympian, 10-time US National Champion, and 3-time World Medallist
9. **Kim McGinnis Russell** - (United States)
Former Head Women's Lacrosse Coach at Oberlin College; Member of the Women in Sport Commission of World Lacrosse (WL) 2024
10. **Nancy Hogshead** - (United States)
Swimmer, 3-time Olympic gold medallist
11. **Linda Blade** - (Canada)
Coach; Former NCAA All American and National Champion of Canada in track & field
12. **Bahram Mavaddat** - (Iran)
Footballer; 1978 FIFA World Cup player
13. **Patricia Reid** - (United Kingdom)
Rower, Olympic single sculler, 4-time British National Champion; Commonwealth Games silver medallist
14. **Marissa Williamson Pohlman** - (Australia)
Boxer, Olympian, gold medallist at the 2023 Pacific Games
15. **Florent Betorangal** - (France)
Mix martial arts combatant, former 100% Fight champion

16. **André Matias** - (Angola)
Rower; Olympian; 2-time silver medallist in the African Championships
17. **Monica Aksamit** - (United States)
Saber fencer; Olympic bronze medallist; Pan American Games gold medallist
18. **Shea McAleese** - (New Zealand)
Olympic hockey player; Commonwealth Games silver medallist
19. **Asghar Adibi** - (Iran)
Footballer; Former Member of Iran's National Football Team
20. **Brendan Schwab** - (Australia)
Former Executive Director of the World Players Association
21. **Milad Sharif** - (United States)
Wrestler; 2025 US Beach Wrestling gold medallist
22. **Anne Wafula Strike MBE** - (United Kingdom)
Paralympic wheelchair racer