

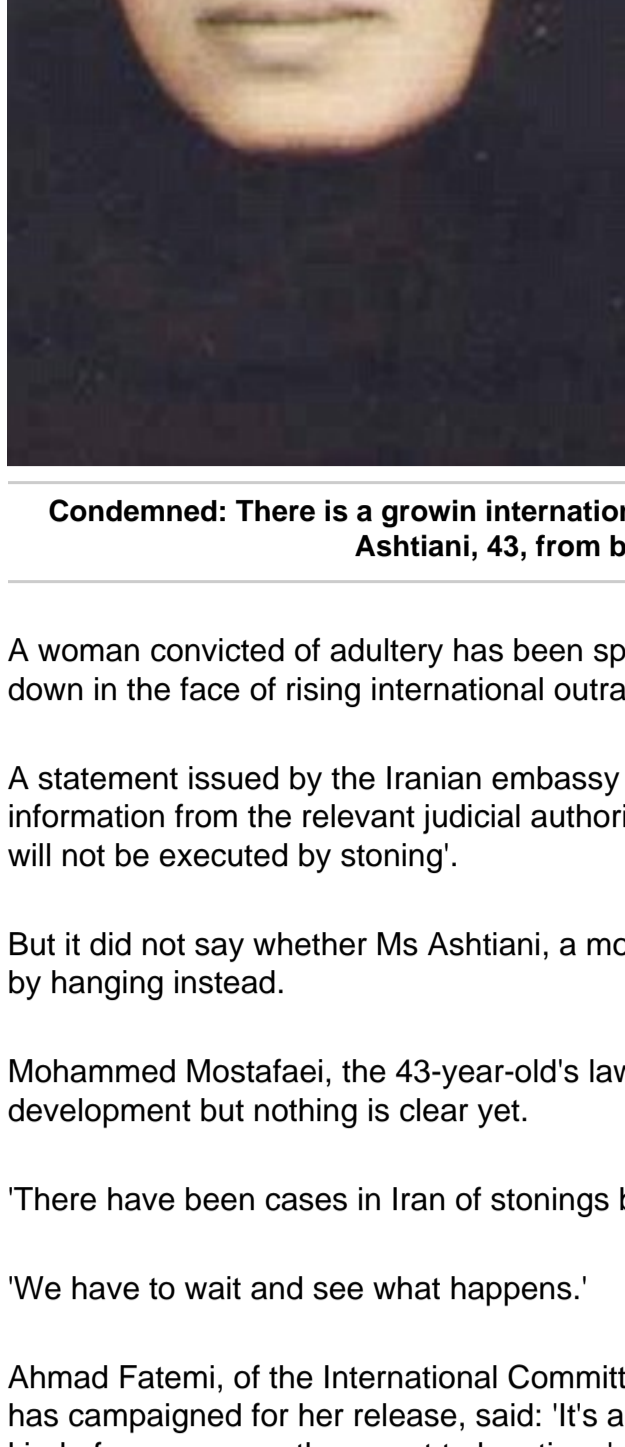
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# MailOnline

## Iran backs down: World fury forces Tehran to spare 'adulterous' mother from being stoned - but will they hang her instead?

By [Wii Longbottom](#)

Last updated at 10:22 AM on 9th July 2010



**Condemned:** There is a growing international campaign to stop Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, 43, from being stoned to death

A woman convicted of adultery has been spared execution by stoning after Iran backed down in the face of rising international outrage.

A statement issued by the Iranian embassy in London said that 'according to information from the relevant judicial authorities in Iran [Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani] will not be executed by stoning'.

But it did not say whether Ms Ashtiani, a mother-of-two, would be spared or executed by hanging instead.

Mohammed Mostafaee, the 43-year-old's lawyer, told The Times: 'This is a positive development but nothing is clear yet.'

'There have been cases in Iran of stonings being changed to hangings.'

'We have to wait and see what happens.'

Ahmad Fatemi, of the International Committee against Stoning and Execution, which has campaigned for her release, said: 'It's a tactical retreat... they never expected this kind of pressure, so they want to buy time.'

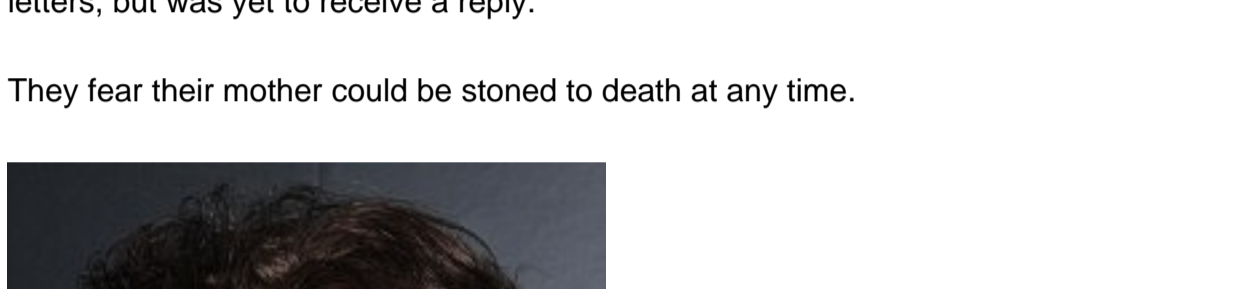
British politicians have been lending their support to efforts to stop the stoning as the international outcry increased.

Foreign Minister William Hague described stoning as a 'medieval punishment that has no place in the modern world', adding: 'If the punishment is carried out it will disgust and appal the watching world.'

In May 2006, a court in the northern city of Tabriz convicted Ms Ashtiani of having an 'illicit relationship' with two men and sentenced her to 99 lashes.

Later that year, the mother-of-two was accused of murdering her husband. Those charges were dropped, but a panel of judges re-opened the inquiry into adultery charges.

Ashtiani was convicted by a majority of three judges to two, according to a legal loophole called 'udicial knowledge', which permits judges to make decisions based on their personal feelings, regardless of actual evidence.



**Barbaric:** A woman is pictured being buried before she was stoned to death in Iran. The punishment has been written into the country's penal code since the Islamic Revolution in 1979

Actors Emma Thompson, Colin Firth and Juliette Binoche, fashion designer Katherine Hamnett and playwright Sir David Hare are among a host of celebrities who have signed up to the campaign for her release.

Author Philip Pullman, film producer Lord Puttnam, director Sir Richard Eyre and philosopher A.C. Grayling are also backing calls for clemency.

The son of the condemned woman, 22-year-old Sajad Ghadarzade, had risked his own freedom by sending a letter to human rights groups in which he rejects the adultery charges against his mother and says repeated attempt to secure her release have fallen on deaf ears with Iranian authorities.

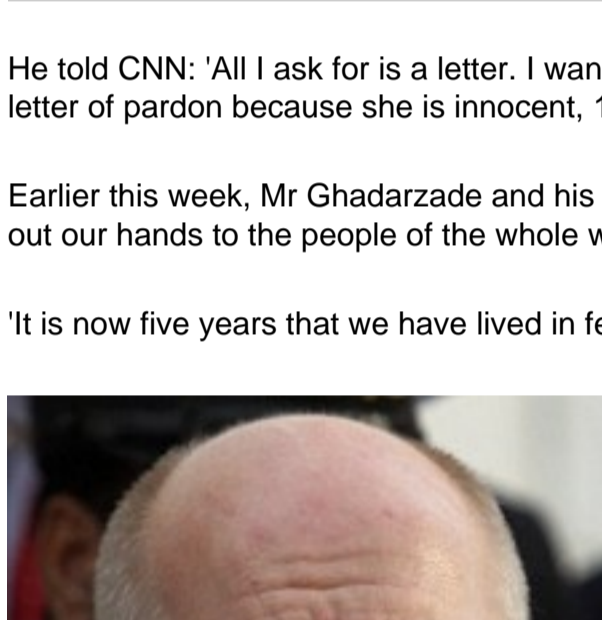
In the letter, he told Iran's judiciary chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani: 'I, as an Iranian citizen who has not yet succeeded in getting an audience with your office, say to you, the head of the judiciary who tells the television networks day in, day out, that justice must prevail and officials guilty of misconduct must be punished, that there is no justice in this country.'

Mr Ghadarzade, who lives in Tabriz, said the family had travelled six times to Tehran to petition Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad and written hundreds of letters, but was yet to receive a reply.

They fear their mother could be stoned to death at any time.



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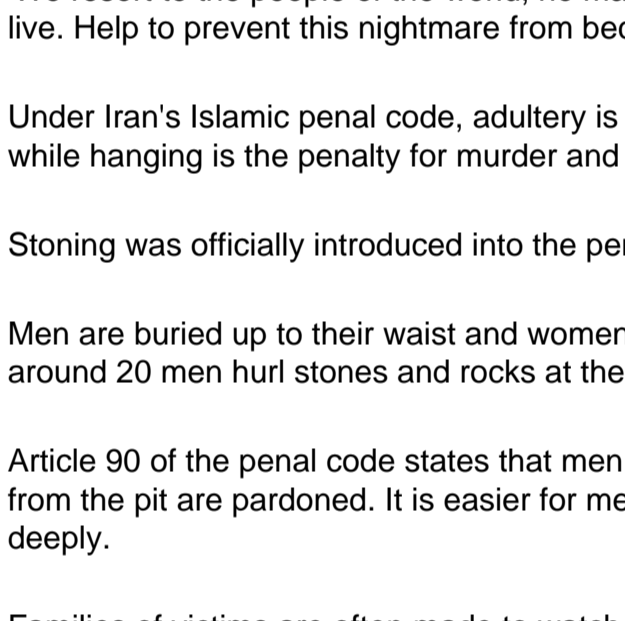
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**Outrage:** British actors Colin Firth and Emma Thompson have joined a growing list of celebrities calling for clemency for Sakineh Ashtiani

He told CNN: 'All I ask for is a letter. I want a letter for my dear mother. Please write this letter of pardon because she is innocent, 100 per cent innocent.'

Earlier this week, Mr Ghadarzade and his sister Farideh, 17, wrote: 'Today we stretch out our hands to the people of the whole world.'

'It is now five years that we have lived in fear and in horror, deprived of motherly love.'



© Reuters

**Foreign Secretary William Hague has joined in the outcry**

'Is the world so cruel that it can watch this catastrophe and do nothing about it?'

'We resort to the people of the world, no matter who you are and where in the world you live. Help to prevent this nightmare from becoming reality. Save our mother.'

Under Iran's Islamic penal code, adultery is punishable by stoning to death or flogging, while hanging is the penalty for murder and other crimes such as drug trafficking.

Stoning was officially introduced into the penal code after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Men are buried up to their waist and women up to their breasts before a group of around 20 men hurl stones and rocks at them until they are dead.

Article 90 of the penal code states that men or women who manage to free themselves from the pit are pardoned. It is easier for men to escape because they are not buried so deeply.

Families of victims are often made to watch and death is caused by concussion and brain damage caused by repeated blows to the head.

John Kerry, chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said: 'Stoning is an appalling and barbaric punishment.'

'The government of Iran should abolish this act as a legitimate form of punishment.'

Howard Berman, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, added: 'I am horrified by the Iranian Government's plan to execute Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani and to do so in the cruelest way imaginable.'

'This is inhumane.'

In December 2008, a man convicted of adultery escaped death by stoning after dragging himself out of the pit he had been buried in.

But two other alleged male adulterers were killed in the same incident in the north-eastern city of Mashhad.

Iranian activists against stoning say it is not prescribed in the Koran.

Iran has the highest execution rate in the world. Amnesty International has recorded 126 executions between January and June - among them five political prisoners.

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Colin Firth and Emma Thompson are outraged!

No wonder the Eye-Ran-EE-ans gave up.

- John, Dublin, 09/7/2010 13:45

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These barbaric medieval countries, with their religious fascists are a disgrace

- moss, leith east, 09/7/2010 13:43

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How is she guilty of adultery? My understanding of this case is that the woman was a widow at the time of her alleged 'offence' and therefore cannot have committed adultery.

The truth of the matter is that these nutters hate all women and view them as sub-humans. These women are made to cover themselves from head to toe, as Muslim men are apparently incapable of controlling themselves and might be overcome by lust if they see any part of a female.

If they believe in any kind of God at all they must believe that God made all the humans and other creatures on the earth.

Shame on these vermin.

Pull the armies of the West out of these countries now - but before they leave, let them train and arm the WOMEN so that they can get rid of these barbarians and live in peace in their own lands.

- Maureen, Omagh, 09/7/2010 13:35

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Wonder what the Iranians want this time?

This is a barbaric punishment that has no place in the modern world, or even the medieval world.

- Chris Carr, Southampton, 09/7/2010 13:23

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This is sharia Law. Although stoning is not prescribed for adultery in the Qu'ran, the hadith ( the accounts of the founder of Islam's life and sayings do) and thus they imitate him.

From the Hadith:

Bukhari (6:60:79) - Two people guilty of "illegal intercourse" are brought to Muhammad, who commands that they be stoned.

Bukhari (83:37) - Adultery is one of three justifications for killing a person, according to Muhammad.

Muslim (17:4196) - A married man confesses that he has adultery (four times, as required). Muhammad orders him planted in the ground and pelted with stones. According to the passage, the first several stones caused such pain that he tried to escape and was dragged back.

Muslim (17:4206) - A woman who became pregnant confesses to Muhammad that she is guilty of adultery. Muhammad allows her to have the child, then has her stoned

- Ian Shelt, UK, 09/7/2010 13:15

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Forgiveness and redemption are not features of their religion then?

- Roy, Southend, UK, 09/7/2010 13:05

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