

# 30 MINS TO 6

A Documentary in memory of Behnoud Shojai



## IRAN

53 minutes

Directed by:  
Producer:

**MANIA AKBARI**  
**MANIA AKBARI**

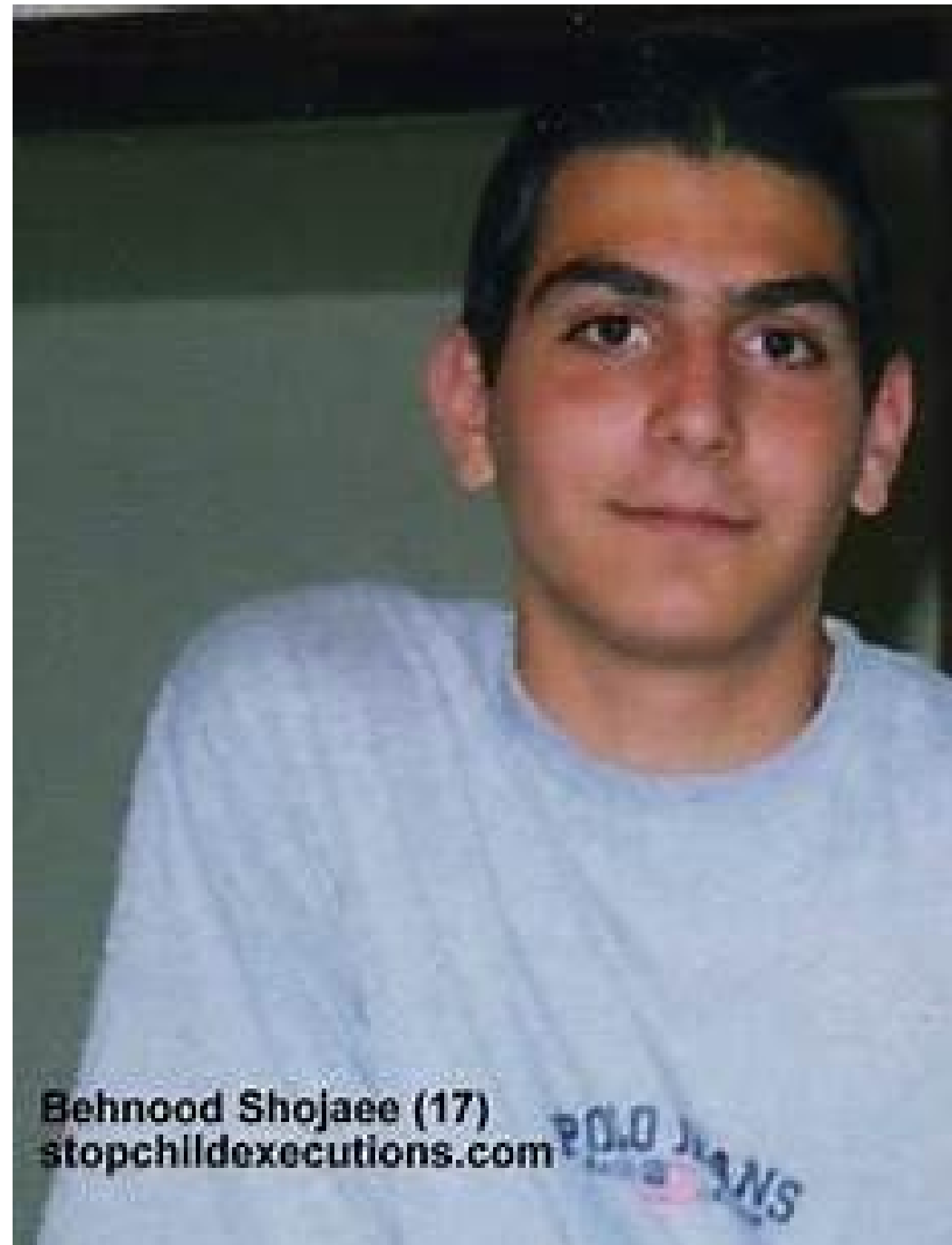
### **Synopsis:**

30 minutes to 6 am in October 2009, a minor, Behnoud Shojae, was executed in Iran after being found guilty of hitting his friend in a mass quarrel with a fatal knife blow. His sentence caused a great deal of controversy in the country, since by law the decision to execute Behnoud had to be taken by the mother of the victim. Drawing on this event as the basis of her documentary, Mania Akbari interviews a series of men and women in order to highlight and attempt to understand both forgiveness and its opposite, revenge. Unsurprisingly, there are no straight answers, but rather a process of self-discovery (for interviewees, filmmaker and viewers) as the questions explore the limits of these two diametrically opposed notions. Questioning to what extent this act of punishment represents justice or simply a perpetuation of violence, Akbari intersperses the interviews with fragments of films made by key figures in the history of Iranian cinema that focus on violence, revenge and death. Films such as *Roozhaye Bi Taghvim* by Mehrdad Oskouei, *Shahr-E-Ziba* by Asghar Farhadi, *Gavaznha* by Masoud Kimiai, *Gheisar* by Masoud Kimiai and *Ganje Qarun* by Syamak Yasemi. Many, if not all, of these extracts show the importance and strength of the family in Iran, as origin and perpetrator of this kind of revenge. Tellingly, when one of the interviewees strongly condemns the mother who does not pardon the kid, another, a very young woman, wonders what kind of pressures her family may have exerted on her. By juxtaposing images of these household Iranian films with interviewees' testimonies (some derived from personal experience, others merely speculative), Akbari draws attention to how we understand, and how art (here specifically cinema) functions as a representation of society. Since these films depict a society in which violence and revenge are deeply engrained, to what extent are they critical or implicated; do they interrogate or simply create a spectacle? If the latter, do they simply perpetuate the problem? Filmed against Akbari's own photographic work in Akbari's studio, the interviewees range from her own son, a student, to a filmmaker, art collector, architect, butler, housewife, psychotherapist, sociologist, graphic Designer, lawyer, painter, linguist and film critic. None of these people are introduced or given an identity until the very end of the film, when the credits include a photograph alongside their names and job descriptions. This anonymity is crucial, as it puts the focus on the issues being discussed – the details of Behnoud's case only become apparent as the film proceeds. Moreover, without 'experts' to offer some sort of guidance (a staple of talking heads documentaries), the viewer also gets caught in a game of guessing about respondents and their motives, creating a (necessarily) more complicated process of identification and/or rejection. This finely judged disorientation is further enhanced by the form of the film itself. With no introduction to the participants, the viewer is confronted at first with what feels like a machine gun-like montage of sentences from their testimonies. Edited together in random order, it's only afterwards that each individual is permitted to develop their own point of view. It's a formal strategy that highlights the problematic nature of any judgement based on a swift assessment. 30 Minutes to 6 AM clear aim is to be as objective and inclusive as possible - even if the filmmaker is openly opposed to violence – clearly signalled by the variety of people interviewed, in terms of profession, gender and age. Yet perhaps the most interesting point raised in Akbari's film is also the elephant in the room: how our sense of grief, guilt, humility, social responsibility and violence differs greatly in the shift from an individual experience to the collective. It is therefore no coincidence that these interviews are conducted with a group of people, who (not always talking from personal experience) are participating as individuals in a collective debate on what is at the end of the day an individual's isolated decision. The upshot is a questioning of the deeply problematic notion of the collective.

by Mar Diestro Dopide



# BEHNOUD SHOJAEI



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Further Information on UA 114/08 (MDE 13/065/2008, 29 April 2008) and follow-ups (MDE 13/066/2008, 8 May 2008; MDE 13/081/2008, 12 June 2008; MDE 13/101/2008, 25 July 2008) – Imminent execution  
IRAN Behnoud Shojaee (m), aged 20, juvenile offender Behnoud Shojaee is again in imminent danger of execution: his family was unable to afford the diyeh, or financial compensation, required to obtain a pardon. His execution, which was due to take place on or around 12 August has been postponed until the end of August 2008. Behnoud Shojaee was sentenced to qesas (retribution) by Branch 74 of the Criminal Court in Tehran on 2 October 2006, after he was found guilty of killing a boy named Omid the previous year, when he was 17. Behnoud Shojaee had no legal representation at his trial. He was twice granted a stay of execution by the head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, to allow time for further negotiations over diyeh between his and Omid's families. However, although the Omid's family agreed to reduce the diyeh they demanded, from US\$2,085,000 to US\$625,000, this is still more than Behnoud Shojaee's family can afford.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Since 1990 Iran has executed at least 35 juvenile offenders, eight of them in 2007 and four in 2008. The family of a murder victim have the right either to insist on execution, or to pardon the killer and receive financial compensation. A convicted murderer has no right to seek pardon or commutation from the state, in violation of Article 6(4) of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The execution of juvenile offenders is prohibited under international law, as stated in Article 6 (5) of the ICCPR and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), of which Iran is a state party to and so has undertaken not to execute anyone for crimes committed when they were under 18. On 8 July 2008, during a press conference in Geneva, Switzerland, Amnesty International published a joint statement with over 20 other international and regional human rights organizations calling on Iranian authorities to stop imposing the death penalty for crimes committed by juvenile offenders, and to uphold their international obligation to enforce the absolute prohibition on the death penalty in such cases. See Iran: Spare four youths from execution, immediately enforce international prohibition on death penalty for juvenile offenders, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/iran-spare-four-youths-execution-immediately-enforce-international-prohi>

## Mohammad Mostafaei Blogpost

### **Behnoud Shojaee was executed**

#### **Mohammad Mostafaei Blogpost**

October 11, 2009: Behnoud Shojaee committed murder when he was 17. He was executed on Sunday, October 11, 2009, at 5:30 am because the family of the victim did not withdraw the complaint. According to section 37 of the Convention on the Rights of a Child, it is forbidden to convict or execute anyone under 18 years of age. The Islamic parliament signed the convention in 2000. It was also approved by the Guardian Council. According to Section 9 of the Civil Rights, this convention is the law, thus it is obligatory to abide by it. However, Iran proceeds to ignore the law and continues to give death sentences to adolescents.

Mohammad Mostafaei, one of Behnoud Shojaee's lawyers, talked about the last moments of Behnoud's life in his personal blog:

I was waiting for the time to pass before I had to go to Evin prison. Around 2:30 am, I met with Kouhyar and we went to prison. Also, there were approximately 200 social rights activists and mothers whose children were killed [presumably in post-election events]. We were waiting for the victim's parents to arrive. After one hour, we saw the mother and father of Ehsan (the murdered victim) and his sister and brother. Everyone went to the family and tried to convince them to drop the complaint. The atmosphere was very dense. The door of the prison was opened. I entered and so did Mr. Oliyafard [Behnoud Shojaee's other lawyer], and the parents of the victim.

We sat for a while in the waiting room. The thought was to get the parents of the victim to drop the case so he would be spared execution. We could hear the prayers of the activists from outside the prison. After a few minutes, we were admitted to another salon. Behnoud was there along with a few of the prison guards. When the parents of the victim entered the room, Behnoud kneeled in front of them and begged them to not execute him. The head of convictions prepared the conviction papers. A few of the prison guards, Mr. Oliyafard, and I went to the parents of the victim and begged them to not go through with the execution. The mother of the victim replied, "I cannot think right now. I have to put the rope around his neck." After a few minutes, we heard the Call for Prayer. Behnoud walked to another room to say his last prayers. He went to ask God for forgiveness. After the prayer, we all went to the prison grounds. My entire body was shaking and I didn't know what would become of this boy without a mother. When Behnoud kneeled in front of the parents of the victim, he told the mother, "I don't have a mother. Please act as a mother and tell them to not execute me." We all went to another room. In that room, there was a metal stool and a blue plastic hanging rope suspended above it. The parents of the victim entered that room. Then they brought Behnoud into that horrible room where they carried out the executions. I had never heard of sole executions in Evin prison. I thought it strange that only Behnoud was being executed that night.

Maybe this was the unfortunate fate that took him to die all alone. The people present in the room asked the parents to forgive and to stop the execution. The mother said you have to put the rope around his neck. Behnoud stood on top of the stool and they put the rope around his neck. After only a few seconds the mother and father of the victim ran toward the stool and pulled it away. I could not tolerate watching. Right when they pulled the stool away, everything became dark. Behnoud was gone.

Today, Behnoud is not among his friends in prison anymore. They feel his absence. I did everything I could, but it was not effective enough. I still believe that he did not deserve to die. He shouldn't have been executed. But he was executed.





