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Blogger dies in Iran's Evin prison

New York, March 19, 2009--The Committee to Protect Journalists called today for an immediate investigation into the March 18 death of an Iranian blogger imprisoned in Tehran's notorious Evin prison.

Omidreza Mirsayafi's lawyer, Muhammad Ali Dadkhah, told the UK's [Times Online](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article5938146.ece) (http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article5938146.ece) that prison officials told him that his client had committed suicide. Dadkhah said that before his death, Mirsayafi had expressed concerns about his health, "but the doctors there didn't take this seriously and said he was faking it."

Mirsayafi, 28, whose writing appeared on the now-defunct cultural blog, *Rooznegar*, was sentenced in November 2008 to 30 months in prison for insulting Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 revolution. A second charge of insulting Islam was pending against him, according to local and international news reports. Mirsayafi began his prison term in February.

"We are alarmed by the sudden death of blogger Omidreza Mirsayafi and demand an immediate, transparent investigation into what happened," said Mohamed Abdel Dayem, CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program coordinator. "We send our condolences to Mirsayafi's family and friends."

Mirsayafi was arrested in April 2008 and charged with insulting the founding leaders of the Islamic Republic and denigrating Islam, according to a local organization called Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI). An Iranian blogger told the *Times Online* that the reason for Mirsayafi's imprisonment was linked to an entry he had written in which he questioned Iran's support for the Lebanon-based Hezbollah group. In an [interview](http://www.hra-iran.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=444:845&catid=156:47&Itemid=343) (http://www.hra-iran.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=444:845&catid=156:47&Itemid=343) with HRAI after the court decision, Mirsayafi rejected the ruling, saying that he had confessed under duress and also said that the court didn't mention any specific item on his blog as the reason for his sentence.

Tehran's Evin prison is infamous for the numerous political prisoners, journalists, and bloggers being held there. In 2003 [Zahra Kazemi](http://cpj.org/2004/07/government-agent-acquitted-in-photographers-death.php) (<http://cpj.org/2004/07/government-agent-acquitted-in-photographers-death.php>), an Iranian-Canadian photojournalist, died after being detained there for three weeks. She was arrested for taking pictures outside the prison.

Iranian-American freelance journalist [Roxana Saberi](http://cpj.org/2009/03/us-journalist-held-in-iran-without-charge.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/03/us-journalist-held-in-iran-without-charge.php>) is currently being held in Evin prison. She has been detained since late January. Iranian-Canadian blogger Hossein Derakhshan has also been detained since November 2008, but his whereabouts remain unknown. At least five Iranian journalists, not including Saberi and Derakhshan, were serving time in various Iranian prisons as of December 1, 2008, according to CPJ research.

"Mirayafi's death greatly increases our concern for Roxana Saberi's well-being," Abdel Dayem said.

Editor's note: The original text of this alert has been changed to correct the last name of the victim, Omidreza

Mirsayafi.

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