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Daughter Of Ahmadinejad Adviser Seeks Asylum In Germany

After Public Debut of Her Controversial Film, Narges Kalhor Fears Return to Iran

By CATHRIN SCHAEER

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The daughter of one of Iranian President Mahmoud [Ahmadinejad's top advisers](#) is seeking political asylum in Germany.

After attending the [German](#) film festival Perspective, which showcases documentaries and features with a human rights focus, 25-year-old Iranian filmmaker Narges Kalhor has applied for political asylum in Germany. Her father is Mahdi Kalhor, who is Ahmadinejad's adviser on cultural affairs and a media spokesperson for the [Iranian regime](#).

Narges Kalhor studied film and graphics in Tehran and had been working for an advertising firm in the city. She has made seven short films, one of which was shown as part of a special section on Iran during the Perspective film festival which took place in Nuremberg last week. Her film "Darkhish," or "The Rake," is an adaptation of Franz Kafka's short story about torture in prison, "In The Penal Colony."

Narges Kalhor was supposed to fly back to Iran on Tuesday. However on Monday afternoon she applied for political asylum in Germany instead.

She told SPIEGEL ONLINE in a telephone interview Wednesday that she had received several phone calls from Iran two days after the festival. "I was told that people in Iran knew about the film and that reports about it had appeared on the Internet in Farsi," says Kalhor, who admitted she had not expected news of her appearance at the film festival to travel so far and so quickly.

"I was told that it would be better not to come home and that if I went back now I would be met at the airport by the secret police," she said. "There were a lot of people at the festival who are [against the Iranian regime](#). I did not have permission to make my film in Iran either."

The film, which is critical of torture and was partially inspired by the protesters who were arrested after Iranian national elections in June, was filmed in a Turkish bathhouse that was made to look like a torture chamber. Kalhor, who also took to the streets in June to protest with friends, some of whom were arrested, has said she hopes that viewers see parallels between the film and the situation in Iran.

Father Unaware Of Daughter's Plans

"If I went back it would be [very dangerous](#) for me. At least here I have security," says Kalhor, who is currently sharing a room with a Kurdish woman in a refugee center near Nuremberg.

Kalhor told SPIEGEL ONLINE that she had left Iran without declaring her intention to attend the film

festival. Even her mother, with whom she lived, had not known. As for her father, Kalhor says she [has not been in touch with him for years](#). Mahdi Kalhor divorced Narges' mother a year ago due to differences of opinion, some of which were political.

During her time in Germany, Kalhor was also interviewed by fellow Iranian film maker, Hana Makhmalbaf. The interview was conducted in Farsi and then posted on the Web site YouTube on Monday (see video above). According to a [translation](#) by writers at the Associated Press, Kalhor, wearing a green scarf -- green being the color of the [Iranian protest movement](#) -- says in the interview that she supports the opposition. She also says that she was certain her father had not seen her film nor knew where she was. "I came from my own desire, for cinema, and I have to continue," she added.

Kalhor senior, who has been a close ally of Ahmadinejad for almost a decade, told the official Iranian news agency IRNA that he had been completely unaware of his daughter's plans.

"This issue is one of the symbols of a media and soft war that the opposition has launched," Mahdi Kalhor told IRNA. His daughter was being used by enemies of the regime for propaganda purposes, he said. Mahdi Kalhor, himself a former filmmaker, has in the past criticized films such as the Oscar-nominated animated feature "Persepolis," which won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes in 2007, for being anti-Iranian.

A Political Cause Celebre?

Asked whether she is worried about becoming a [political cause](#) celebre because of her father's influential position in Iran, Narges Kalhor said: "I can't do anything about that. Maybe I will have particular problems because of my father and his work for the regime. But I myself work privately."

For the next three weeks, Kalhor will be staying in the refugee center. During that time, she will have three interviews with the German authorities to ascertain her status as an asylum seeker, the first of which is next week.

Should everything go well and she get permission to stay in Germany, Kalhor, who speaks German better than English, told SPIEGEL ONLINE that she would like to be able to tell her own story somehow, whether in film or words. "I would love to make more films and to be able to work in my chosen career. If I go back to Iran, I know I will never get to make any more films."

"Anyway," she concludes, "I have no options. I cannot go back to Iran."

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