

THE OBSERVATORY - PRESS RELEASE

IRAN: Arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of human rights defenders continue

Paris-Geneva, September 16, 2011. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), condemns the continuing repression of human rights defenders in Iran, notably lawyers and women's rights defenders.*

Over the last days, Iranian lawyers have continued to be subjected to judicial harassment. On September 14, 2011, Ms. **Nasrin Sotoudeh**, a prominent human rights lawyer known for defending juveniles facing death penalty, prisoners of conscience, human rights activists and children victims of abuse, was sentenced by Branch 54 of the Appeals Court to six years of imprisonment and a 10-year ban on practising as lawyer. Thus, the Appeals Court slightly reduced Branch 26 of the Islamic Revolution Court's sentence of 11 years' imprisonment, 20 years' ban on practising law and 20 years' ban on travelling abroad on charges of "propaganda against the State", "collusion and gathering with the aim of acting against national security" and "membership of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC)". The accusations against Ms. Sotoudeh were based mainly on interviews with foreign media about her clients who were jailed after Iran's disputed June 2009 presidential election. As of today, she remains arbitrarily detained in Section 350 of Evin prison.

On September 13, another prominent human rights lawyer, Mr. **Mohammad Seifzadeh**, a founding member of the DHRC, who is currently in Evin prison since his arrest in April 2011, was summoned to the court and was notified of the new charge of "propaganda against the system". This is believed to be connected to a letter he wrote from prison to former President Khatami on July 21, 2011. In that letter, he had mentioned the widespread breach of the law in the judiciary and stated that there was no solution but to dissolve the illegal authorities such as the Islamic Revolution Courts and the Special Clergy Court and to reform the judiciary's structure. Furthermore, he said due process and citizen rights had not been respected in the case of about 200 political prisoners in Section 350 of Evin prison, where he is being held. The Observatory recalls that on October 29, 2010, Mr. Mohammad Seifzadeh was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment and ten years' ban on practice as lawyer by Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court, on charges of "acting against national security" through founding the DHRC, and "propaganda against the regime" through interviews with foreign media. However, in June 2011, Mr. Seifzadeh's family was told that the Appeal Court had reduced his prison sentence to two years.

Additionally, on September 11, Mr. **Farshid Yadollahi**, a lawyer and member of the Human Rights Commission of the Bar Association, who has been involved in the defence of Gonabadi Dervishes, was arrested. At the time of writing, his family had no news about him. According to his wife, she and her husband were guests at a friend's house, where the security agents attacked. They broke the door, beat up Mr. Yadollahi and handcuffed him. Then, they took laptops, ID cards, mobile phones, computers and books from the host's house. This arrest follows the sentencing on January 23, 2011 of Mr. Farshid Yadollahi, as well as another lawyer, Mr. **Amir Eslami**, also a member of the Human Rights Commission of the Iranian Bar Association and a lawyer of Gonabadi Dervishes, to six months of imprisonment by the Court of First Instance of Kish Island, on charges of "forging title of lawyer", "acting against national security", "publishing lies" and "disturbing public minds". In the second week of September, other lawyers of the Dervishes had already been detained after attacks on the Dervishes in the town of Kuwar (Fars province in the south). These included Messrs. Amir Eslami, **Afshin Karampour** and later **Omid Behroozi**. Another lawyer of the Dervishes, Mr. **Mostafa Daneshju**, is already serving a seven-month prison sentence in Sari in northern Iran since May 2011.

In addition, other human rights defenders have continued to suffer harassment, notably women human rights defenders. Ms. **Somayyeh Tohidloo**, a blogger and PhD student of sociology who had been arrested on June 14, 2009 and spent 70 days in detention before being released on bail, in punishment for her campaign in favour of the right to vote, was lashed 50 times in Evin prison on September 14. Following her arrest in 2009, she had been sentenced to one year imprisonment, 50 lashes and fine for allegedly insulting Mr. Ahmadinejad in her blog. However, her prison sentence was dropped.

On September 3, 2011, Ms. **Faranak Farid**, a member of the One Million Signatures Campaign, was arrested while shopping. Her arrest would be linked to demonstrations that took place on the same day over the drying of Lake Oroumieh, calling on the Iranian authorities to remove dams on rivers feeding the lake. She was reportedly beaten during her arrest. As of today, she remains detained in Tabriz central prison. It is not known whether charges were brought against her.

Finally, on September 15, Ms. **Maryam Bahreman**, a civil society activist involved in the defence of women's rights, notably as a member of the One Million Signatures Campaign in Shiraz, was released on bail after four months of detention including 55 days in solitary confinement. Yet, she is still facing the charge of "acting against national security".

The Observatory firmly denounces the ongoing arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of above-mentioned human rights defenders in Iran, with the only aim to sanction the legitimate exercise of their human right activities.

Accordingly, the Observatory urges the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders presently detained in the country, to put an end to any kind of harassment against them and to guarantee in all circumstances their physical and psychological integrity, in line with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights instruments ratified by Iran.

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