



THE OBSERVATORY
for the Protection of Human Rights
Defenders

a joint programme



April 9, 2009

President Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
The Presidency
Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Your Excellency:

We, the undersigned members of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, submit this statement to express our deepest concerns regarding the imprisonment of Alieh Eghdamdoost, as well as the recent arrest of 12 other human rights defenders in Iran.

Alieh Eghdamdoost, together with dozens of other activists, was arrested at a women's rights demonstration in Tehran in June 2006. On July 6, 2007, she was sentenced to a prison term of three years and four months, and 20 lashes. On appeal, the prison term was reduced by four months, and the judge overturned the lashings. Her sentence of three years is now being implemented, making her the first woman to have a sentence related to women's rights activism actually implemented. Eghdamdoost was taken from her home on January 31, and has been held in Evin prison since. The fact that Eghdamdoost has been sentenced to a three-year sentence that she is now forced to serve, while some others arrested on the same day faced no charges, were acquitted, or received suspended sentences, demonstrates the completely arbitrary nature of these judicial proceedings. Her imprisonment also sets a dangerous precedent for all women engaged in human rights activism in Iran.

The implementation of Eghdamdoost's sentence is taking place against a backdrop of increased repression of all human rights defenders, including women's rights activists. Reliable sources have reported that on March 26 Iranian security forces detained 12 members of the One Million Signatures Campaign and Mothers for Peace, as they were sitting in their

cars on a street corner in Tehran, preparing to make New Year's visits to the family members of some prisoners of conscience.

The One Million Signatures Campaign, launched in August 2006, is a grassroots movement to raise awareness about gender-based discrimination in the law and to promote gender equality. Mothers for Peace are a diverse coalition of women seeking to promote a culture of peace in Iran and who condemn all forms of military aggression. Both groups employ peaceful methods to promote their message, whether through disseminating petitions, collecting signatures, or organizing and presenting lectures. As such, we consider members of both groups to be human rights defenders.

The twelve individuals arrested on March 26 were: Ali Abdi, Delaram Ali, Bahara Behravan, Farkhondeh Ehtesabian, Shahla Forouzanfar, Arash Nasiri Eghbali, Mahboubeh Karami, Khadijeh Moghaddam, Leila Nazari, Amir Rashidi, Mohammad Shoorab, and Soraya Yousefi.

After three days, ten of them were released on bail, but two activists, Mahboubeh Karami and Khadijeh Moghaddam, were kept in detention.

On April 5, the ten released activists were charged with "disturbing of public opinion," and "disruption of public order," charges all ten deny.

The two others, Karami and Moghaddam, who were also due to be arraigned on April 5, did not appear in court on that day. The deputy prosecutor informed their attorneys that they would be brought the following day, but in fact were kept in jail. In the end, Karami was released on April 7, and Moghaddam on April 8. Moghaddam faces charges in connection with a protest Mothers for Peace held on January 11, against Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.

We strongly object to the arrest, detention and prosecution of these human rights defenders. The frequent arrest and prosecution of human rights defenders for non-violent exercise of their freedom of expression has been inconsistent with Iran's obligations under international law.

Even more concerning, based on the facts as we understand them, the persons arrested on March 26 were not engaged in a public activity, but were planning visits to private residences at the start of the New Year, as is customary amongst Iranians. The circumstances of their arrest simply do not even remotely support lodging charges such as "disrupting public order," or "disturbing public opinion," and appear as deliberate efforts to silence and intimidate these activists. We note, with great concern, that since the One Million Signatures Campaign has been launched, dozens of its members have been arrested, summoned for interrogation, monitored, banned from travel and prosecuted.

The efforts of these activists to promote gender equality and a culture of peace should be applauded, not hampered. The U.N. Declaration on Human Rights Defenders stipulates that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive

for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels.” The actions of the Iranian authorities stand in stark violation of this principle.

We urge the authorities to reverse their ruling on Eghdamdoost’s case and release her from detention.

Furthermore, we call upon the authorities in Iran to drop all charges against all 12 activists arrested on March 26, and further, to cease the repression and prosecution of all peaceful human rights defenders in Iran.

Thank you for your attention to these urgent matters.

Sincerely,

Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Baobab for Women’s Human Rights

Front Line, The International Foundation for Human Rights Defenders

Human Rights First

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific

Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders