

# Iran: a call to release detained lawyers and other defenders of rights

Monday 13 December 2010, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 29 November 2010).

## **Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition Call for the Iranian authorities to release Nasrin Sotoudeh and other lawyers defending women's rights detained arbitrarily**

On the occasion of 29 November, International Day of Women Human Rights Defenders, the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition calls on the Iranian authorities to release Nasrin Sotoudeh, a lawyer and defender of women's human rights, detained since 4 September 2010 in Evin Prison, Tehran. Sotoudeh has been held in solitary confinement where she is at risk of torture or other ill treatment, since her arrest. In protest at her detention and treatment, Sotoudeh went on hunger strike between 31 October and 15 November 2010.

We deplore that that Iranian authorities refused to release her in spite of numerous demands made by civil society groups in Iran and internationally, in blatant violation of her fundamental rights as a human rights defender. Her arrest, as well as the arrest and detention of women human rights defenders, including members of the One Million Signatures Campaign, some of whom have been tortured, attests to the alarming level of repression and state violence in Iran. A culture of impunity persists in the country, and urgent actions must be taken to make the government accountable for its gross violations of human rights.

On 23 November, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay expressed concern for the fate of human rights defenders in Iran, particularly Nasrin Sotoudeh, whose case she called part of a much broader crackdown. Navi Pillay urged the Iranian authorities to review her case urgently and expedite her release. [\[1\]](#)

Sotoudeh, who has defended Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi and numerous human rights activists, was arrested on 4 September 2010. She has been held in solitary confinement as she awaits trial on charges of "acting against national security," "congregation and collusion with intent to disrupt national security," and "cooperation with the Center for Human Rights Defenders." She has in the past criticized the Judiciary for serious flaws in the handling of her clients' cases.

At least two other female human rights lawyers – Sara Sabaghian and Maryam Kiyan Ersi active in the defence of journalists, bloggers, young people and women are also currently detained in Iran. They were arrested together with three other human rights lawyers at the Tehran airport upon returning from a trip to Turkey on 13 November and charged with "activities against State security". Their arrests, including the detention of child rights' lawyer Mohammad Oliaifar since May, are part of a wholesale crackdown by the Iranian authorities on defence lawyers for human rights defenders.

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus in 1998, declares that states "shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of [human rights defenders] against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary actions" as a consequence of their legitimate effort to promote human rights.

The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provide that lawyers must be allowed to carry out their work “without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference.” In addition, it affirms the right of lawyers to freedom of expression, also provided for in Article 19 of the ICCPR, which includes “the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights”.

The Iranian authorities must release immediately Nasrin Sotoudeh and other detained lawyers of women and other human rights defenders in Iran in compliance with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran ratified without reservation in 1975.

Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition

Amnesty International (AI)

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia)

Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID)

Baobab for Women’s Human Rights

Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR)

Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL)

Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)

Front Line International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (Front Line)

Human Rights First

Information Monitor (Inform)

International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP)

Isis International

ISIS-Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange (ISIS-WICCE)

The Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women’s Rights (CLADEM)

MADRE (International Women’s Rights Organisation)

Peace Brigades International (PBI)

Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights (UAF)

Women’s Initiative for Gender Justice (WIGJ)

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML)

World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)

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## **Footnotes**

[1] See [http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/un\\_iranian\\_crackdown.php](http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/un_iranian_crackdown.php)