

Sentencing of four women human rights defenders to six months in prison

Paris - Geneva, September 5, 2008. 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), expresses its deepest concern about the sentencing of four members of the One Million Signatures Petition Campaign, which primarily seeks to put pressure on the Iranian legislators in order to withdraw provisions that have adverse effects on women's human rights.

On September 2, 2008, the Tehran Revolutionary Tribunal sentenced **Ms. Parvin Ardalan, Ms. Nahid Keshavarz, Ms. Jelveh Javaheri and Ms. Maryam Hosseinkhah**, to six months' imprisonment for “publishing information against the State”, for having written articles for two online newspapers that defend women's rights in Iran: Zanestan and Tanir Bary Barbary. They have all been released on bail after having appealed their sentences.

In the past, the four women defenders were already subjected to various acts of judicial harassment. They had all taken part, on March 4, 2007, in a peaceful gathering in front of the Tehran Revolutionary Court to mark International Women's Day. On this occasion, 33 women's rights activists had been arrested, including Ms. Ardalan, Ms. Keshavarz, Ms. Javaheri and Ms. Hosseinkhah.

On April 28, 2008, Ms. Parvin Ardalan had been notified that, subsequent to a hearing that took place on February 4, 2008, the 13th Chamber of the Tehran Revolutionary Court had sentenced her to two years' imprisonment for having participated in the March 2007 gathering. On April 24, 2007, she had already been sentenced to three years' imprisonment, of which two and a half were suspended, for “collusion and assembly endangering national security”. She had appealed her sentence^[1].

On April 2, 2007, Ms. Nahid Keshavarz had been arrested at the Laleh park, in Tehran, while collecting signatures in support of the Campaign. On April 3, she had been taken to the Revolutionary Court, where she had been asked to sign a statement agreeing to end her activities within the Campaign. When she refused to do so, she was charged with “actions against national security” and transferred to the Evin prison. On April 14, 2007, she had been released on bail^[2].

On December 1, 2007, Ms. Jelveh Javaheri had been summoned for questioning to the Security Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. She spent several hours in interrogation, and was subsequently charged with “disruption of public opinion”, “propaganda against the State”, and “publication of lies” on the website of the One Million Signatures Campaign. She was then transferred to the Evin prison. On January 2, 2008, Ms. Javaheri was released after her bail amount was reduced from 50,000 euros to 4,000 euros^[3].

On November 17, 2007, Ms. Maryam Hosseinkhah, also a member of the Women's Cultural Center and editor of the site of the Campaign, had been summoned to the Security Branch of the Revolutionary

Courts. This summoning intervened a few days after an order issued by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Judiciary shut down the site of the Women's Cultural Centre. After having been interrogated for over two hours, Ms. Hosseinkhah was charged with “disruption of public opinion”, “propaganda against the State”, and “publication of lies” through the publication of untrue articles on the sites of the Women's Cultural Centre and of the One Million Signatures Campaign. Ms. Hosseinkhah was then ordered to return to the Revolutionary Courts for further interrogation on the following day. On November 18, 2007, when Ms. Hosseinkhah arrived in Court, an arrest order was issued against her and she was immediately arrested and transferred to Evin prison. On January 2, 2008, Ms. Hosseinkhah was released after her bail amount was reduced from 95,000 euros to 4,000 euros[4] .

The Observatory expresses its deep concern about these sentences against these four women human rights defenders, which is once again evidence of the ongoing harsh repression of the Iranian authorities against human rights defenders, in particular women's rights activists involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign. The Observatory thus recalls that more than a hundred of women's rights activists have been arrested, interrogated, and/or sentenced in the past two years and that the Government has raised over one million Euros by imprisoning the activists and releasing them on high bail[5] .

Moreover, the Observatory urges the Iranian authorities to guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Ms. Ardalan, Keshavarz, Javaheri, and Hosseinkhah, as well as all activists engaged in the One Million Signatures Campaign, and to ensure that they be granted a fair and impartial trial shall they appeal their sentencing, so that the charges against them be dropped as they seem to merely sanction their human rights activities and as such are arbitrary.

The Observatory also calls upon the Iranian authorities to put an end to any acts of harassment against all Iranian human rights defenders and to conform with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998.

The Observatory further wishes to insist on the fact that Iran had committed to “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights” by presenting its candidacy to the Human Rights Council 2006 election and had insisted in this regard on the fact that the country had “continuously put great efforts into safeguarding the status and inherent dignity of the human person as well as the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms”. In order to ensure the continuation of these efforts, the Observatory urges the Islamic Republic of Iran to conform with international human rights standards.

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[1] See Observatory Annual Report 2007 and Urgent Appeal IRN 006 / 0508 / OBS 073, issued on May 2, 2008. [2] See Observatory Annual Report 2007. [3] Idem. [4] Idem. [5] Idem.

L'OMCT a son siège à Genève, en Suisse. Elle coordonne le réseau SOS-Torture composé de 282 organisations régionales et internationales dans 93 pays sur cinq continents.

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