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IRAN: Supporter of "Mourning Mothers", Ms. Mansoureh Behkish sentenced to imprisonment on appeal

Paris-Geneva, July 11, 2012. 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), was informed of the appeals ruling issued against of human rights defender Ms. Mansoureh Behkish.

<http://www.fidh.org/IRAN-Supporter-of-Mourning-Mothers,11957>

FIDH - Worldwide Human Rights Movement

On July 5, 2012, Ms. Mansoureh Behkish, a supporter of the "Mothers of Park Laleh" (the "Mourning Mothers" of Iran)[1], also known for fighting against the death penalty, received the text of the Appeals Court's ruling regarding her appeal against the first instance sentence.

Ms. Behkish had been sentenced on December 25, 2011 to four years and six months of imprisonment by Branch 15 of the Islamic Revolution Court: four years on charges of "assembly and collusion against national security through the establishment of the Mourning Mothers" and six months on charges of "spreading propaganda against the system".

The appeals court has now combined the two parts of her sentence. As a result, her 6-month imprisonment term has been included in the four-year imprisonment sentence. The appeals court has also suspended three years and six months of the sentence for a period of 5 years, which means she will have to serve those 3.5 years in addition to any new sentence, if convicted on similar charges over the next 5 years.

Consequently, Ms. Behkish is now facing a six-month custodial imprisonment sentence and is at risk of being arrested any time.

The Observatory recalls that on June 12, 2011, Ms. Mansoureh Behkish was arrested by a group of security agents in a street of Tehran. She was released on bail on July 9, 2011. Ms. Behkish has been subjected to interrogations and arbitrary detentions in the past as a result of her human rights activities. She had previously been arrested on August 29, 2008, December 5, 2009 and then on January 9, 2010 together with more than 30 women supporters of the "Mothers of Park Laleh". On March 17, 2010, she was prevented from travelling to Italy to visit her children and her passport was confiscated. She was then banned from travelling abroad. Ms. Behkish lost six members of her family during the executions and prison massacres that took place in the 1980s and has consistently come under great pressure not to visit their graves or otherwise commemorate them.

The Observatory believes that the sentence against Ms. Ms. Mansoureh Behkish merely aims at intimidating her and impeding her from carrying out her human rights activities. More generally, it also aims at intimidating all human rights defenders in Iran.

The Observatory therefore urges the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally put an end to the judicial harassment of and drop all the charges against Ms. Ms. Mansoureh Behkish and release all human rights defenders arbitrarily detained, and more generally to conform to 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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[1] The "Mourning Mothers" ("Madaran-e Azardar") are women whose family members were killed, executed, detained or disappeared in the context of political violence since 1981. They call for the acknowledgement of secret political executions in the past three decades and disclosure of burial places of the victims. In the aftermath of the post-election violence in June 2009, they organised silent public protests each Saturday evening in Tehran's Laleh

Park, calling for the release of all political prisoners and abolition of the death penalty.