

## IRAN: ALIEH AGHDAM-DOUST: PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE



Women's rights activist Alieh Aghdam-Doust (left) was arrested in her home town of Fouman, northern Iran and brought under guard to begin serving a three-year prison sentence at Evin Prison, Tehran on 31 January 2009. Alieh Aghdam-Doust, who was born on 23 July 1953, is a prisoner of conscience, who is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

On 12 June 2006, Alieh Aghdam-Doust, took part in a peaceful demonstration in Tehran against laws discriminating against women in Iran. The protest was forcibly broken up by police, who injured some of the demonstrators and arrested 70. She was charged before Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran in June 2007 and later sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering" under Article 610 of the

*"You should participate as well. Why didn't you defend your daughters' and wife's rights by attending the legal peaceful gathering?"*

Alieh Aghdam-Doust to the judge presiding at her trial, according to journalist Zhila Baniyaghoub

Penal Code and to a four months' suspended prison sentence and 20 lashes for "disturbing public order" under Article 618 of the Penal Code. A host of vaguely-worded provisions in the Penal Code are used to criminalize peaceful dissent in Iran, including "acting against state security", most of which are tried before Revolutionary Courts.

Alieh Aghdam-Doust appealed against her conviction and sentence, but although the decision to uphold the three-year sentence was taken nearly a year before her detention, neither she nor her lawyers were informed about the results of her appeal before she was detained. Under Article 213 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, she and her lawyer should have been informed of the Appeals Court decision, either in writing or in person. Others who attended the demonstration have been acquitted, or have had their sentences overturned or suspended on appeal.

Nasim Ghovani, one of Alieh Aghdam-Doust's lawyers, told an international NGO, the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHR)*: "I received a call from Alieh in Fouman at 2pm on 31 January. She told me that agents from the Implementation of Sentences Department came to take her to Tehran to begin serving her prison term". She and another lawyer also representing Alieh Aghdam-Doust later found that the appeals court had upheld her three-year sentence for "acting against national security" about one year ago.

Nasim Ghanavi added, "If we had been informed before, we could have applied for legal possibilities.... We don't know why we haven't been informed."

According to the ICHR, Alieh Aghdam-Doust called her lawyer, Nasim Ghanavi on 24 February 2009 and asked for money, personal belongings and clothes. Nasim Ghanavi however stated, "Alieh's niece has her belongings ready but she has been unsuccessful in delivering them, whilst Alieh needs them in prison". She added, "I have gone to prison two times to visit my client, but I couldn't get the written permission from the court warden. No one has visited Alieh since she was arrested on 31 January 2009 because none of her next of kin live in Tehran". On 2 March 2009 she told journalists in Tehran that she had made three requests to meet Alieh Aghdam-Doust in prison, but all had been turned down.

Alieh Aghdam-Doust was a teacher at the time of the Islamic Revolution and was later forced out of her job. She spent six years in prison between 1983 and 1989 in connection with her political beliefs and activities. She underwent a painful divorce and has no surviving children.

The youngest of 10 children, she has no close relatives in Tehran and is very isolated. The Campaign for Equality has a petition on their website calling for her release. <http://www.change.org/english/spip.php?article461>.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

*“These excessive actions against women’s rights activists occur despite the fact that their actions and activities are absolutely legal and in accordance with the constitution and in line with their civil rights”*

Extract from the petition for Alieh Aghdam-Doust by the Campaign for Equality

### 1. Write to the Head of the Judiciary

Start your message “Your Excellency”

Head of the Judiciary  
Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi  
Office of the Head of the Judiciary  
Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran 1316814737,  
Islamic Republic of Iran  
Email: [shahroudi@dadgostary-tehran.ir](mailto:shahroudi@dadgostary-tehran.ir) (In subject line write: FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi)

#### In your message ask Ayatollah Shahroudi to:

- Order the immediate and unconditional release of Alieh Aghdam-Doust, as she is a prisoner of conscience held solely for her peaceful activities demanding an end to laws discriminating against women ;
- Review the conviction and sentence of Alieh Aghdam-Doust with a view to overturning it, and noting that neither she nor her lawyer were informed of the appeal court’s decision to uphold her conviction before it was implemented ;
- Ensure that she has regular access to family members and her lawyer and any necessary medical treatment during her imprisonment;
- Uphold the rights to freedom of expression and assembly as guaranteed in Article 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Iran is a party
- Uphold the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which protects human rights defenders from violence or threats as a result of their work.

### 2. Write messages of support to Alieh Aghdam-Doust, such as “Thinking of you” (hard copies are preferable to emails, which are unlikely to be delivered, but emails may be sent in addition)

Alieh Aghdam-Doust  
Women’s Section  
Evin Prison  
Chamran Highway, Near Hotel Azadi, Dasht-e Behesht Street, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran  
Fax: +98 21 240 3910  
Email: [evin@tehranprisons.ir](mailto:evin@tehranprisons.ir) (mark: For Alieh Aghdam\_Doust)