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## **Iran releases prominent human rights lawyer**

Amnesty International welcomes the release of prominent Iranian human rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, and at least 11 political activists.

“While the releases are a positive development, they must be a first step that paves the way for the release of all prisoners of conscience held solely because they peacefully exercised their rights,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director at Amnesty International.

Nasrin Sotoudeh was sentenced, in September 2010, to six years in prison on charges of “spreading propaganda against the system” and “acting against national security”, including membership of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders (CHRD).

Amnesty International adopted her as a prisoner of conscience and has campaigned for her immediate and unconditional release.

“To be more than a mere symbolic measure, the Iranian authorities should now overturn her prison sentence, revoke the travel ban and the ban against her practising law. They must also end their routine harassment and imprisonment of anyone working to defend human rights,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui

The Iranian authorities have given no reason for her release and no indication of whether it is unconditional.

“The release of Nasrin Sotoudeh and others must mark a fundamental shift in Iran’s policies on human rights and the way the authorities deal with peaceful activists and critics. Otherwise it risks being seen as a calculated public relations stunt ahead of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York next week.”

Nasrin Sotoudeh’s experience in detention is emblematic of the treatment of political detainees in Iran’s infamous prisons. She was prevented from having regular visits with her husband, Reza Khandan, and two young children. On one occasion her husband was detained overnight for his peaceful advocacy to secure his wife’s release.

The authorities also placed an illegal travel ban on her 13-year-old daughter in 2012. Nasrin Sotoudeh staged a 49-day hunger strike in prison, which she ended when the authorities lifted the travel ban against her daughter.

Nasrin Sotoudeh thanked all Amnesty International members who have taken action for her release. “I have been aware of all your efforts on my behalf and I want thank-you and all your colleagues for your work,” she said.