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Iran: End harassment of women's rights defenders - Human Rights Groups Protest imminent imprisonment of Delaram Ali

Amnesty International (AI)
Equality Now (EN)
Federation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH)
Front Line (FL)
Human Rights First (HRF)
Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML)
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Seven leading international human rights organizations today demanded that the Iranian authorities immediately set aside the prison sentence against a women's rights defender, and drop charges against others facing trial because of their peaceful activities demanding equal rights for women in Iran.

Amnesty International (AI), Equality Now (EN), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Front Line (FL), Human Rights First (HRF), Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) were reacting to news that 24 year old social worker and women's rights defender **Delaram Ali** faces imminent imprisonment. In July 2007, she was sentenced to 34 months in prison and to a 10 lash flogging on charges of "participation in an illegal gathering," "propaganda against the system" and "disrupting public order and peace." These charges were brought against her after she participated in a peaceful demonstration in Tehran's Haft Tir Square on 12 June 2006 calling for an end to discriminatory legislation against women. She was beaten by police during her arrest and had her left hand broken. At her trial, her defence lawyer was not allowed to speak and address the court in her defence.

Delaram Ali received a phone call from the authorities on 4 November 2007 in which she was told that her appeal against conviction and sentence had been completed and that she should report to the court by 10 November for the sentence to be carried out. She was warned that, if she failed to do so, she would face arrest. She was told that her prison sentence had been reduced to 30 months' imprisonment and the flogging sentence had been commuted, but as yet, neither she nor her lawyers have received any other notification – under the law, she should be issued with the court's written verdict.

Several other women's rights defenders have been sentenced to prison terms in connection with the June 2006 demonstration but all are currently free awaiting the outcome of appeals. If Delaram Ali is imprisoned, she will be the first to have her sentence implemented.

The authorities have also been harassing members of the Campaign for Equality, launched shortly after the 12 June 2006 demonstration, which aims to collect a million signatures of Iranians to a petition demanding an end to legislation, which discriminates against women. More than a dozen people have been arrested while collecting signatures. Most recently, **Ronak Safarzadeh** and **Hana Abdi**, active members of the Campaign in Kordestan province, were detained on 9 October and 4 November and are currently held without charge or trial in Sanandaj, apparently by local officials from the Ministry of Intelligence.

Amnesty International, Equality Now, FIDH, Front Line, Human Rights First, Women Living Under Muslim Laws and OMCT would regard the imprisonment of Delaram Ali, solely for her peaceful actions as a defender of women's rights, as a gross violation of her rights to freedom of expression and association. Her summons appears to be part of a deliberate campaign by the Iranian authorities to intimidate human rights activists and wider civil society in Iran, where an unprecedented crack down on peaceful dissent is underway.

In addition, the above-mentioned organisations expressed concern at the degree to which Iranian security forces who ill-treat detainees during arrest are able to act with impunity. Delaram Ali lodged a complaint against her ill-treatment during arrest, along with the others who were beaten, but in October 2007, despite the existence of photographs of the demonstration showing ill-treatment, and the medical evidence presented, the case against the police officers who had been present at the demonstration was dismissed.

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