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Iran must release prisoner of conscience Zhila Bani-Yaghoub

The Iranian authorities must release prisoner of conscience Zhila Bani-Yaghoub, an award-winning journalist and women's rights activist, Amnesty International said.

The call came after Bani-Yaghoub, the editor of the [Focus on Iranian Women](#) website, was summoned to Evin Prison on 2 September 2012 to serve a one-year prison sentence.

In addition to her imprisonment, she has been banned from media and journalistic activities for 30 years after conviction of "spreading propaganda against the system" and "insulting the president".

"The Iranian authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Zhila Bani-Yaghoub, who is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression and allow her to resume her profession," said Ann Harrison, Amnesty International's Deputy Programme Director for Middle East and North Africa.

"Journalists in Iran face numerous restrictions on their legitimate work, including peaceful criticism of the authorities and reporting on human rights. The Iranian authorities must relax unlawful restrictions on them and release all journalists held solely for their journalism and human rights work".

Bani-Yaghoub had previously been tried and acquitted of similar charges on three occasions and in April 2011 was further charged with "having a personal blog without any authorization from government authorities".

She was awarded the 2009 Courage in Journalism prize by the International Women's Media Foundation in 2009 and the Freedom of Speech Award from Reporters Without Borders in 2010.

Bani-Yaghoub, whose husband, Bahman Ahmadi Amou'i (or Amouie), was editor at the business daily paper Sarmayeh before he was imprisoned, was arrested alongside her husband in 2009 shortly after the controversial presidential victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

She was released two months later, but her husband remained in prison where he is serving a five-year prison sentence after conviction of "gathering and colluding with intent to harm national security", "spreading propaganda against the system", "disrupting public security" and "insulting the president".

On 26 June 2012, Bahman Ahmadi Amou'i was transferred from Evin Prison to Raja'i Shahr Prison where he is held in "internal exile" and was not allowed family visits for the first 50 days.

Amnesty International has also repeatedly called on the Iranian authorities to immediately release other prisoners of conscience, including journalist and political activist Isa Saharkhiz, who was detained without charge or trial for more than a year before being sentenced in September 2010 to three years' imprisonment for "insulting the country's leadership" and "propaganda against the system".

In August 2011 he was sentenced to an additional two years in prison in connection with his previous activities as a journalist, increasing his prison term to five years.

Isa Saharkhiz is in poor health and spent the last six months in hospital.

On 28 August 2012 he was moved from hospital to Section 209 of Evin Prison, reported to be run by the Ministry of Intelligence.

He started a hunger strike the same day in protest against his transfer and also stopped taking his medication on 3 September 2012.

Iranian journalists face persecution

Iranian journalists expressing views contrary to those of the authorities have long been persecuted.

Dozens have been harassed, detained and imprisoned in recent years after unfair trials and many of those arrested because of their non-violent professional activities before and after the disputed June 2009 election remain in prison, often held in poor conditions,

Some are in extremely poor health, such as prisoner of conscience Mohammad Sadiq Kaboudvand, a journalist and member of Iran's Kurdish minority who is serving a 10 and a half year prison term for his peaceful journalistic activities.

Some of those who have been released still remain under pressure, having been forced to make significant bail payments to secure their release.