

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## Human rights defenders barred from leaving Iran, Tunisia

As human rights activists across the world marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) yesterday, both the governments of Iran and Tunisia prevented leading human rights activists from travelling abroad.

Iranian security authorities barred lawyer and women's rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh from taking a flight from Tehran to Italy, where she was due to collect a human rights award, and Tunisian security authorities prevented two human rights defenders, journalist Lotfi Hidouri and lawyer Mohammed Abbou, from travelling from Tunis to attend a conference in Beirut organized by the World Association of Newspapers. These were the latest in a series of actions taken by the authorities in both Iran and Tunisia to prevent human rights activists taking part in activities abroad.

Nasrin Sotoudeh was stopped from taking her flight after she had passed through passport control at Tehran's Emam Khomeini airport. Two security officials in plain clothes made her surrender her passport without explanation. She was due to be presented with an award by Human Rights International, an Italian human rights organization in Bolzano, Italy, on 12 December 2008. Her husband will now receive the award on her behalf. A member of the independent Defenders of Human Rights Centre in Iran and a lawyer, she has acted as defence counsel for human rights activists such as those charged for promoting the One Million Signature Campaign in support of equal rights for women, and juvenile offenders facing the death penalty.

In Tunisia, Lotfi Hidouri, who works for *Kalima*, an independent online news magazine and belongs to the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia, was detained by security officials when he attempted to take a flight from Tunis Carthage Airport to Beirut. He was handcuffed and taken to a police station in Ben Arous, south-east Tunis, ostensibly in order to appear before a public prosecutor today.

Mohammed Abbou was also prevented from travelling to attend the same event in Beirut on the grounds that he was unable to produce a document from the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights confirming that he is no longer restricted following his release from prison in July 2007. He was previously prevented from travelling in August 2007, when the authorities told him for the first time that he had been made subject to a one year travel ban at the time of his release. That ban should have elapsed at the end of July, but Abbou has received no official confirmation of this and was prevented from travelling to France in October 2008.

Meanwhile, Tunisian security authorities physically prevented members of the Tunisian League for Human Rights from entering the organization's office in Tunis to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UDHR.

Amnesty International is calling on both the Iranian and Tunisian governments to lift the travel bans on these and other human rights activists and allow them to travel abroad in pursuit of their human rights work. It urges both governments to recognize the valuable role played by human rights defenders and to promote and support their work in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (as it is commonly known), adopted by the UN 10 years ago.

## Background

Human rights activists in both Iran and Tunisia are subject to frequent harassment and intimidation by the security authorities in their countries, and prevented from travelling abroad to attend human rights training workshops and seminars and to collect awards. In most cases, they are not informed why they are not permitted to travel or under what legal authority, and they have no effective remedy against such bans. In October, the Iranian authorities prevented women's rights activist Sussan Tahmasebi from travelling to South Africa to attend an international conference on women's rights that was held in November. Previously, they barred Parvin Ardalan, another women's rights activist, from travelling to Sweden to collect a human rights award in March 2008.

Public Document

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