#### Date: 31 January 2011

# **URGENT ACTION**

### IRANIAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST ARRESTED

Women's rights activist Fatemeh Masjedi was arrested on 28 January while travelling from Qom to Tehran. Her current place of detention is unknown, but it is feared she may have been arrested to begin serving a six-month prison sentence imposed for her peaceful collection of signatures for a petition demanding an end to discrimination against women in law in Iran. If so, she is a prisoner of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Fatemeh Masjedi is a member of the One Million Signatures Campaign (also known as the Campaign for Equality), a grass-roots movement working towards an end to discrimination against women in Iranian law. On 29 December 2010, she and Maryam Bidgoli were summoned to report within three days to prison officials in Qom to begin serving a six-month prison sentence, but they remained free after submitting a further legal challenge against their convictions and sentences. Maryam Bidgoli, though currently free, could also be imprisoned at any moment.

Both women were arrested on 7 May 2009 for peacefully gathering signatures in support of ending discriminatory laws against women in Iran and were released after two weeks in detention. They were sentenced to one year's imprisonment by Branch Two of the Revolutionary Court in Qom on 29 August 2010 for "spreading propaganda against the system in favour of a feminist group (the Campaign) by distributing and collecting signatures for a petition to change laws discriminating against women, and for publication of materials in support of a feminist group opposed to the system". This was reduced to six months on appeal by Branch Three of the provincial appeal court.

#### PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Persian, English or your own language:

- Asking to be informed of the reason for Fatemeh Masjedi's arrest and her current place of detention, and calling for her to be granted immediate access to her family and her lawyer;
- If she has been arrested to begin serving her six-month prison sentence, urging that she be released immediately and unconditionally, as she is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and association, including human rights activities such as gathering signatures for a petition to end discrimination against women in Iranian law;
- Urging the Iranian authorities not to imprison Maryam Bidgoli, as she would also be a prisoner of conscience;
- Reminding the authorities that the peaceful gathering of signatures to petitions demanding changes in the law is not a crime and is covered by the right to freedom of expression, provided for by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party.

#### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 MARCH 2011 TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei The Office of the Supreme Leader Islamic Republic Street – End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street Tehran.

Islamic Republic of Iran Email: Via website:

http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php? p=letter (English)

http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.p

hp?p=letter (Persian)

Head of the Qom Provincial Judiciary Mr Hamzeh Khalili Office of the Head of the Judiciary PO Box 184-37195, Azadegan Square, Shahid Abedi Boulevard.  $\Omega$ om

Islamic Republic of Iran Email: In Persian and English, send via feedback form on the website: http://www.dadgostariqom.ir/tabid/85/Default.as

#### And copies to:

Secretary General, High Council for Human Rights Mohammad Javad Larijani

High Council for Human Rights C/O Office of the Head of the Judiciary Pasteur St, Vali Asr Ave., south of

Serah-e Jomhuri Tehran 1316814737 Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@humanrights-iran.ir (In subject line: FAO Mohammad Javad Larijani)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 3/11. Further information: http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/004/2011/en





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#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The One Million Signatures Campaign, also known as the Campaign for Equality, launched in 2006, is a grass-roots initiative composed of a network of people committed to ending discrimination against women in Iranian law. The Campaign gives basic legal training to volunteers, who travel around the country promoting the Campaign. They talk with women in their homes, as well as in public places, telling them about their rights and the need for legal reform. The volunteers are also aiming to collect one million signatures of Iranian nationals for a petition demanding an end to legal discrimination against women in Iran. Dozens of the Campaign's activists have been arrested or harassed for their activities for the Campaign for Equality, some while collecting signatures for the petition.

This case is the first in which a court in Iran has ruled that the Campaign constitutes a group which "aims to harm national security". In all previous cases, individuals charged with security offences relating to their collection of signatures for the Campaign were acquitted either by lower or by appeal courts. Fatemeh Masjedi and Maryam Bidgoli had asked for a further judicial review on these grounds.

Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution provides for equal rights for all Iranians. Article 21 requires the rights of women to be protected and Article 26 allows the "formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations... provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic republic." Members of the One Million Signatures Campaign have always stressed that their activities fully conform to Iranian law.

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