

URGENT ACTION

IRANIAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST ARRESTED

Women's rights activist Maryam Bidgoli was arrested at her home on the morning of 21 July 2011 and transferred to Langaroud Prison in Qom. She has been imprisoned to serve 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, a sentence which she challenged as illegal.

Maryam Bidgoli is a member of the One Million Signatures Campaign (also known as the Campaign for Equality), a grassroots movement working towards an end to discrimination against women in Iran. On 29 December 2010, she and **Fatemeh Masjedi** were summoned to report within three days to prison officials in Qom to begin serving a six-month prison sentence. Although they initially remained free after submitting a legal challenge against their convictions and sentences, Fatemeh Masjedi was nonetheless arrested on 28 January 2011. Having served the sentence, Fatemeh Masjedi has now been released. On the morning of 21 July, Maryam Bidgoli was also arrested, at her home in Qom and transferred to Qom's Langaroud Prison to serve her six-month sentence.

Both women had been arrested on 7 May 2009 for gathering signatures calling for an end to laws that discriminate 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". Branch Three of the provincial appeal court reduced this to six months' imprisonment.

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

- Urging the authorities to release Maryam Bidgoli 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;
- Reminding them 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 6 SEPTEMBER 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.php?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,
Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: In Persian and English, send via feedback form on the website:

<http://www.dadgostariqom.ir/tabid/85/Default.aspx>

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 second update of UA 3/11. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/004/2011/en and www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/012/2011/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The One Million Signatures Campaign, also known as the Campaign for Equality, launched in 2006, is a grassroots 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 is the first case in which a court 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 "in accordance with Islamic criteria" 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.

Name: Fatemeh Masjedi and Maryam Bidgoli

Gender m/f: f

Further information on UA: 3/11 Index: MDE 13/070/2011 Issue Date: 27 July 2011

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