

# URGENT ACTION

## IRANIAN WOMEN FACE PRISON FOR RIGHTS PETITION

**At any moment, women's rights activists Fatemeh Masjedi and Maryam Bidgoli could be sent to prison for six months for peacefully collecting signatures for a petition demanding an end to discrimination against women in law in Iran.**

**Fatemeh Masjedi** and **Maryam Bidgoli** are both members 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 Iranian law. On 29 December 2010, both were summoned to report within three days to prison officials in Qom to begin serving a six-month prison sentence, but they remain free pending further legal challenges against their convictions and sentences; however, Amnesty International fears they could be imprisoned at any moment. They had both been 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. If imprisoned, Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience.

Among the reasons for upholding the sentenced given in the appeal court verdict was the fact that the two women had "signed a letter complaining about the situation of human rights in Iran, and stating that Iran's candidacy for a seat on the Commission on the Status of Women had no merit and that the presence of Iran on this Commission would be a threat to world peace and security". The verdict also referred to an interview given by Maryam Bidgoli to the opposition website *Jaras*, and a statement signed by 600 members of the women's movement on the occasion of 12 June [the anniversary of a demonstration against discrimination against women in law].

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

- Urging the Iranian authorities to not imprison Fatemeh Masjedi and Maryam Bidgoli as they have been charged and convicted solely for their peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association, including their human rights activities, such as gathering signatures for a petition to end discrimination against women in Iranian law;
- 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 18 FEBRUARY 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](http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter) (English)  
[http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?  
p=letter](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>

or to [ryasat@dadgostariqom.ir](mailto:ryasat@dadgostariqom.ir)  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**  
Governor of Qom Province  
Hossein Iranmanesh  
Email: In Persian and English, send via  
feedback form on the website:  
<http://www.ostan-qom.ir/ostandar-c>

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.** Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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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 at collecting 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 time that 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.

Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution provides for equal rights of 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 Signature Campaign have always stressed that their activities fully conform to Iranian law.

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