

URGENT ACTION

JAILED LAWYER'S HEALTH AT SERIOUS RISK

Jailed human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh's health is at serious risk after the Iranian authorities returned her to prison from hospital, even though a doctor said she needed a heart-related medical procedure. She had been hospitalized when her health severely deteriorated on a hunger strike, which she is doing in protest at the Iranian authorities abuses in the criminal justice system, including their refusal to release eligible prisoners held on politically motivated charges. She is a prisoner of conscience who must be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*Head of judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi
C/o Permanent Mission of Iran to the UN
Chemin du Petit-Saconnex 28
1209 Geneva, Switzerland*

Dear Mr Ebrahim Raisi,

*On 10 August 2020, unjustly jailed human rights lawyer **Nasrin Sotoudeh**, aged 57, began a hunger strike in protest at the Iranian authorities ongoing abuses in the criminal justice system. On 19 September 2020, Nasrin Sotoudeh, whose health deteriorated on hunger strike, was transferred to a hospital outside of prison. Reza Khandan, Nasrin Sotoudeh's husband, said on Twitter at the time that she was in "dire health" and was suffering from an irregular heartbeat, low blood pressure, and shortness of breath making her unable to complete sentences. After she was transferred to Tehran's Evin prison on 23 September, she communicated in a phone call that she needed a medical procedure on her heart according to doctors who treated her in the hospital outside prison. Despite this, she is now held in the women's ward quarantine section of Evin prison while on hunger strike, without the round-the-clock presence of health professionals monitoring her condition. Her transfer from hospital to the quarantine section of the prison raises serious concerns that she is not receiving the specialized medical care she requires, which is unavailable in prison. During her hospitalization, security forces barred her family from communicating with her and her family was not able to access her treating physicians or test results. The lack of information surrounding her diagnosis only adds to her family's anguish about her health and wellbeing.*

Nasrin Sotoudeh was sentenced to a total of 38 years and six months in prison and 148 lashes following two grossly unfair trials in 2016 and 2018 for her peaceful human rights work, including opposing Iran's abusive, degrading and discriminatory forced veiling laws and the death penalty. In late March 2020, a prison official verbally told Nasrin Sotoudeh that she had been granted a pardon for the 2016 sentence, but she has not been formally notified in writing. If this pardon applies, under Iran's sentencing guidelines, she must serve 12 years. She and her family have been subjected to repeated reprisals and harassment, including most recently the arrest of Mehraveh Khandan, her daughter, on 17 August 2020 and the blocking of her bank accounts.

I urge you to release Nasrin Sotoudeh immediately and unconditionally as she is a prisoner of conscience, jailed solely for her peaceful human rights work. Pending her release, ensure that she is provided with the specialized health care she needs outside prison, in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent, and that she has family visits. I also urge you to ensure an end to state harassment and intimidation of her family.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Following Nasrin Sotoudeh's transfer from Evin prison to hospital, she was subsequently admitted to the hospital's critical care unit and guarded by security forces, including some who remained in her room at all times and intruded, with impunity, on her privacy while she underwent intimate medical examinations.

Nasrin Sotoudeh was arbitrarily arrested at her home in Tehran on 13 June 2018 and taken to Evin prison, where she has been imprisoned since her arrest. Her trial before Branch 28 of the Revolutionary court in Tehran took place on 30 December 2018 in her absence as she had refused to attend, citing the unjust nature of the proceedings, and for which she had been denied access to her lawyer. In her indictment, the prosecution authorities listed seven charges against her, four of which were based on her opposition to forced veiling: "inciting corruption and prostitution"; "openly committing a sinful act by... appearing in public without a hijab"; "disrupting public order"; and "disturbing public opinion". The other three charges against her – "forming a group with the purpose of disrupting national security", "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" – were also based on peaceful activities that the authorities have deemed as "criminal". These activities include belonging to human rights groups such as the Centre for Human Rights Defenders and the Campaign for Step by Step Abolition of the Death Penalty. In a separate case from September 2016, Nasrin Sotoudeh was sentenced to five years in prison for "assisting in hiding spies with the intent to harm national security" by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, which tried her in her absence because the court authorities said she was not wearing appropriate Islamic dress and refused her entry. See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/0024/2019/en/> for further information.

Nasrin Sotoudeh issued the following statement when she commenced her hunger strike on 10 August 2020:

Human rights activists,

In the midst of the coronavirus crisis which has engulfed Iran and the world, the conditions of political prisoners have become so difficult and arduous that their continued detention is impossible under these oppressive conditions. The case of political [prisoner] convicts are based on unbelievable charges of espionage, spreading corruption on earth, acting against national security, corruption and prostitution, and forming illegal groups on Telegram channels - charges which must be up to ten years of imprisonment or the death sentence. Many defendants, from the beginning of the formation of the case until the verdict is issued, are denied access to an independent lawyer or [the ability] to freely communicate with their own lawyer. Judges of the Revolutionary Court shamelessly and repeatedly state to political [prisoner] defendants that they issue verdicts solely based on reports from intelligence and security agencies, and the interrogator tells the defendant the verdict upon their arrest. Lawyers who attract the wrath of Revolutionary Court judges are sent to prison. Defendants who have faced unbelievably serious charges are given the maximum sentence, and some cases, even more than the maximum sentence. Then a political prisoner who has been issued with their sentence under such unjust conditions will sit in disbelief hoping for a legal path forward.

Courts of appeal, parole, suspension of punishment and postponement of sentences, as well as a new law which emphasises issuing a minimal sentence has been promised, but in extrajudicial proceedings the exercise of all these legal rights is left to the discretion of the interrogators and so the last doors left for political prisoners are closed. Many of these prisoners are now eligible for parole, and many would be released through implementation of the new law, but prisoners are still treated as if there was no such law and that they have no right to such legal opportunities. Prisoners' pleas seeking viable legal paths have been left unanswered.

For all the pleas left unanswered and for the demand of the release of political prisoners, I will go on hunger strike. In the hope of the establishment of justice in my country, Iran.

Nasrin Sotoudeh, women's ward of Evin prison, 10 August 2020.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Persian and English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 18 November 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Nasrin Sotoudeh (her/she)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/0024/2019/en/>