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The UIA Urges an End to All Forms of Harassment against Prominent Iranian Lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, and her Family

The UIA expresses its grave concerns about the ongoing detention of Ms Nasrin Sotoudeh, a prominent Iranian human rights lawyer and the 2012 recipient of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize.

Ms Sotoudeh has been detained in Tehran's Evin Prison since June 13, 2018. At the time of her arrest, she was reportedly informed that her detention related to her conviction in absentia to a five-year prison term. She has since been informed of several additional charges, including "assembly and collusion against national security," and "spreading propaganda against the state".

Ms Sotoudeh has long been committed to the defence of human rights and has represented several political prisoners, including women who have been arrested and prosecuted for peacefully protesting against the compulsory veiling in Iran. Shortly before her arrest, Ms Sotoudeh had also expressed criticism about the recent implementation of the Note to Article 48 of Iran's 2015 Code of Criminal Procedure, which requires individuals accused of certain offenses, including those national security related, to choose their legal representative from a list of lawyers approved by the Head of the Judiciary, clearly undermining their right to a lawyer of their own choosing.

On August 25, 2018, Ms Sotoudeh had reportedly started a hunger strike protesting her detention and the harassment of her family and friends by Iranian authorities following her arrest. A few days later, on September 4, 2018, Mr. Reza Khandan, Ms Sotoudeh's husband, who has been informing about his wife's situation and publicly campaigning for her release, was arrested. According to the information received, Mr. Khandan has been charged with "spreading propaganda against the system" and "colluding to commit crimes against national security."

Unfortunately, the UIA is well aware that this is not the first time Ms. Sotoudeh has been persecuted for practicing her profession. In January 2011 Ms Sotoudeh was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment on charges that included "propaganda against the regime" and "acting against national security". Her sentence was reduced to six years on appeal and she was released early in September 2013 after receiving a pardon. However, she continued to suffer harassment, intimidation, imprisonment, as well as a ban on practising law, which she was able to overturn in 2014 after undertaking daily protests outside Iran's Bar Association. Thus, despite overwhelming personal and professional hardships, Ms Sotoudeh has repeatedly demonstrated her commitment to her work as a lawyer, to human rights and to the independence of the legal profession.

The UIA condemns the recurrent harassment, including at the judiciary level, which Ms Sotoudeh and her family face. It is clear that this harassment is solely aimed at preventing Ms Sotoudeh from freely and independently performing her professional activities and her peaceful and legitimate activities in defence of human rights. The UIA calls upon Iranian authorities to immediately put an end to such mistreatment.

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Today, the UIA reiterates its firm support of Ms Nasrin Sotoudeh. The UIA urges Iranian authorities to take all necessary measures to immediately and unconditionally release Ms. Sotoudeh and Mr. Khandan, and to ensure the full respect of their rights to due process, in accordance with international standards, including the right to defence by attorneys of their choosing and the right to a fair trial.

Moreover, while she remains in detention, the UIA calls on Iranian authorities to ensure that Ms Sotoudeh receives the medical attention needed during her hunger strike.

Finally, **the UIA is mindful that the persecution of Ms. Sotoudeh and her husband is not an isolated case, and that in Iran, many lawyers are similarly persecuted for exercising their profession.** Among other cases, the UIA is concerned by reports that on August 31, 2018 human rights lawyer Payam Derafshan, who represents Ms Sotoudeh, was arrested along with his colleague Farokh Forouzan as they arrived at the house of another imprisoned lawyer, Arash Keykhosrqavi. Mr. Derafshan and Mr Forouzan were apparently released on bail a week after their arrest.

The UIA calls on Iranian authorities to allow all lawyers and human rights defenders in Iran to practice their profession, freely and independently.

The UIA will continue to closely monitor the case of Ms Sotoudeh and her husband, as well as the situation of all human rights lawyers and defenders in Iran.

More about the UIA

UIA is the global and multi-cultural organisation for the legal profession, established in 1927 and now with members in 110 countries, which provides professional development, learning, promotes the rule of law, defends the independence and freedom of lawyers worldwide, and emphasizes friendship, collegiality and networking among members.

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