



Human Rights Now

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Human Rights Now Statement on the conviction of Iranian lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh

Human Rights Now, a Tokyo-based human rights NGO, calls on Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Nasrin Sotoudeh, prominent Iranian lawyer sentenced to serve a cumulative sentence of 38 years in prison and 148 lashes.¹

Sotoudeh, known for her human rights advocacy as a lawyer, worked on prominent cases defending dissidents held in arbitrary detention, young women who peacefully protested the compulsory hijab law by publicly removing their headscarves, domestic violence victims, juveniles on death row, and persecuted journalists, activists, and religious minorities.

Because of her activism and international advocacy, Sotoudeh was sentenced *in absentia* on 4 September 2016 to five years for propaganda against the state (article 500 of the 1996 Islamic Penal Code, as amended) and for insulting Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei (article 514 IPC). She was arrested 1 year and 9 months later, on 13 June 2018, with no knowledge of the charges against her. Additionally, on 30 December 2018 she was again sentenced *in absentia* to 33 years and 148 lashes due to her work against compulsory hijab and her human rights advocacy, for which she was charged with encouraging people to commit corruption and prostitution (article 639 IPC); appearing without the hijab at the premises of the magistrate's office (article 638 IPC); spreading propaganda against the system (article 500 IPC); being a member of the illegal and anti-security groups Defenders of Human Rights Centre, LEGAM and National Council of Peace (article 498 IPC); disrupting public order (article 618 IPC); and spreading falsehoods with intent to disturb the public opinion (article 698 IPC). The verdict was communicated to Sotoudeh only on 9 March 2019. In both proceedings, Sotoudeh was denied the right to counsel of her own choice.

HRN strongly condemns this practice of criminalizing of human rights defenders' activities which suppresses civil society space, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion in Iran. Corporal punishment also continues to be imposed in Iran notwithstanding the government's obligation to prohibit cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.² We firmly join the international community in protesting the arbitrariness of Sotoudeh's convictions and the unfairness of her proceedings and call on the government of Iran to respect and guarantee the fundamental rights of its citizens, including freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of expression and association, and the right to a fair trial with access to counsel of one's own choosing.

HRN urges the government of Iran to review Sotoudeh's sentences and to immediately release her to respect these rights of hers. We also urge the government take effective measures to prevent the persecution and punishment of lawyers and human rights activists for their legitimate activities and to take effective measures to prevent future reoccurrences consistent with its international obligations.

¹ UNOHCHR, "Iran: UN experts "shocked" at lengthy prison sentence for human rights lawyer NasrinSotoudeh", 14 Mar. 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24333&LangID=E>.

² OHCHR, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 8 Feb. 2019, A/HRC/40/24, paras 12 – 13.