

URGENT ACTION

WOMEN'S RIGHTS DEFENDER FACES 34 YEARS IN JAIL

Prominent detained Iranian human rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, faces up to 34 years in prison and 148 lashes, after two grossly unfair trials. The charges against her stem solely from her peaceful human rights work, including her defence of women protesting Iran's abusive forced *hijab* (veiling) laws, and her outspoken opposition to the death penalty.

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

Head of the Judiciary Ebrahim Raisi
C/o Permanent Mission of Iran to the UN
Chemin du Petit-Saconnex 28
1209 Geneva, Switzerland
Email: iranunog@mfa.gov.ir

Dear Mr Raisi,

Nasrin Sotoudeh, a prominent human rights lawyer and women's rights defender who has been arbitrarily detained in Tehran's Evin prison since her arrest on 13 June 2018, faces a total of up to 34 years in prison and 148 lashes in relation to two ongoing court cases. I appeal to you to release her as she is a prisoner of conscience.

Nasrin Sotoudeh is awaiting a court verdict following a grossly unfair trial that took place, in her and her lawyer's absence, on 30 December 2018 before Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. She has been prosecuted on seven charges, some of which are related to her opposition to forced hijab laws, including "inciting corruption and prostitution" and "openly committing a sinful act... by appearing in public without a hijab". Some of her legitimate activities that the authorities have cited as "evidence" against her include: opposing forced hijab; removing her headscarf during prison visits; defending women who peacefully protested against forced hijab; giving media interviews about the violent arrest and detention of women protesting against forced hijab; and placing flowers at the scene where a woman protester was violently arrested. Other charges brought against her include "forming a group with the purpose of disrupting national security" and are based, in part, on her work with three human rights groups including the Campaign for Step by Step Abolition of the Death Penalty.

Following her arrest, the authorities informed Nasrin Sotoudeh for the first time that, in September 2016, Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran had convicted her, in her absence, in a separate case and sentenced her to five years in prison. She was not present during that trial because, on the day of the hearing, the court authorities said she was not wearing appropriate Islamic dress and refused her entry. She had initially been charged with "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security". However, the judge, in breach of procedure, convicted her on another charge, that of "assisting in hiding spies with the intent to harm national security", citing legitimate activities such as her meetings with foreign diplomats to convict her. This case is now before an appeal court.

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, please ensure that she has regular contact with her family and a lawyer of her choosing. I urge you to stop criminalizing the work of women's rights defenders, including those who peacefully protest against forced hijab, and abolish forced hijab laws.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested at her home in Tehran on 13 June 2018, and taken to Evin prison, where she is being detained in the women's ward. She was denied access to a lawyer of her choosing for months after her detention. Following her arrest, Nasrin Sotoudeh went on two hunger strikes. In August 2018, she wrote a letter from inside prison announcing that she was going on hunger strike to protest her arbitrary detention and the judicial pressures imposed on her family and friends; referencing the arrest of her friend and fellow human rights defender Farhad Meysami. In November 2018, she went on hunger strike again in protest at the Iranian authorities' continued detention of Farhad Meysami, and their arrest of Nasrin's husband, Reza Khandan, who had been arrested on 4 September 2018. Both men have since been convicted of "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" and each sentenced to a total of six years in prison in relation to their support of the campaign against forced *hijab*.

The most recent charges against Nasrin Sotoudeh stem from her peaceful human rights work, including through her defence of women who were prosecuted in 2018 for peacefully protesting the abusive, discriminatory and degrading forced *hijab* laws in Iran. In her indictment, the prosecution authorities listed seven charges against her, four of which were based on her opposition to forced *hijab*: "inciting corruption and prostitution"; "openly committing a sinful act by... appearing in public without a hijab"; "disrupting public order"; and "disturbing public opinion". Nasrin Sotoudeh's peaceful human rights activities against forced *hijab*, including those undertaken in her role as a lawyer, such as meeting with her clients, have been used to build a criminal case against her. 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, and publishing news about Shaparak Shajarizadeh, who was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment, 18 of which were suspended, for her peaceful protest against forced *hijab*. Even Nasrin Sotoudeh's insistence on choosing an independent lawyer instead of one from the list of 20 selected by the head of the judiciary has also been cited by the prosecution authorities as a criminal act. Her trial, which took place on 30 December 2018 before Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, did so in her absence. She had refused to attend her trial, citing the unjust nature of the proceedings.

In September 2016, Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran tried Nasrin Sotoudeh on the charges of "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security". On the day of her trial, she was denied entry to the courthouse and the hearing was held in her absence. She was not informed that she had been tried and convicted until after her most recent arrest. The court verdict made no mention of the aforementioned charges. Instead, the judge convicted her on the more contentious charge of "assisting in hiding spies with the intent to harm national security" under Article 510 of the penal code and sentenced her to five years in prison, two years more than the maximum statutory punishment for this offence. In her court verdict, the authorities accused her of working with "counter-revolutionaries" based inside and outside Iran to threaten national security, and of "holding secret meetings with foreign diplomats and people who were suspected of being intelligence officers based in foreign embassies in Tehran" under the "pretext" of human rights. It also stated that "she had been given €50,000 for the Sakharov Prize so that she could sustain her activities against national security and for the overthrow of the state". In 2012, while serving a previous prison sentence in Evin prison, Nasrin Sotoudeh was awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, jointly with Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, by the European Parliament. Amnesty International understands that she has never received a monetary award for the prize.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Persian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 15 April 2019.

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Nasrin Sotoudeh (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/8734/2018/en/>