



Amnesty International USA May Newsletter on Iran with Information and Action Ideas

Now that summer is here, many groups will be tabling at street fairs and other venues. Included in this newsletter are two petitions that can be used at street fairs. One petition is on behalf of the seven educators from the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education who have been condemned to four and five year prison sentences solely for their peaceful efforts to provide education to Baha'i young people excluded from Iranian universities because of their religion. The other petition calls for the release of Iranian labor leader Reza Shahabi, sentenced to prison for his peaceful trade union activities.



Imprisoned labor activist Reza Shahabi

Please also find a summary of a recent project on “Exploring the Use of the Arts to Promote Human Rights in Iran” that took place in Chicago in April; an action on two courageous Iranian human rights lawyers who have recently been sentenced to harsh prison terms, and a piece about the recent crackdown against freedom of artistic expression.

Amnesty International has also joined other partner organizations in a campaign to protest the suppression of academic freedom in Iran, including the imprisonment of students and academics and the persecution of students and educators on religious, political and ideological grounds. Included in the newsletter is a poster highlighting 31 brave student activists currently in prison solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and association.



Moving billboard in Washington DC credit: United4Iran

SPEAK OUT FOR IMPRISONED IRANIAN STUDENTS

Hassan Asadi Zeidabadi
 Javad Alikhani
 Mohammad Ahadi
 Babak Dashab
 Majid Dorri
 Moeen Ghamin
 Mahdieh Golrou
 Bahareh Hedayat
 Saiid Jalalifar
 Ali Jamali
 Milad Karimi

Mehrdad Karami

Mehdi Khodaii

Omid Kokabi

Habibollah Latifi

Shabnam Madadzadeh

Ali Malihi

Aliakbar Mohammadzadeh

Atefeh Nabavi

Zia Nabavi

Hamed Omidi

Hossein Ronaghi Malaki

Hamed Rouhi Nejad

Roozbeh Saadati

Arash Sadeghi

Afshin Shahbazi

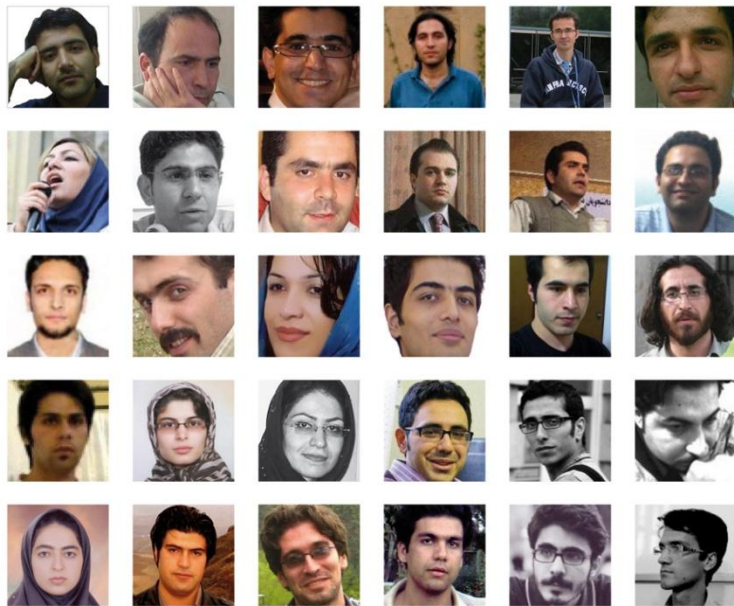
Fereshteh Shirazi

Ieghan Shahidi

Abolfazl Tabarzadi

Majjid Tavakoli

Shahin Zeinali



PRIMARY SUPPORTERS :

Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

Amnesty International
 Boroumand Foundation
 Green Activists in London

Green Students for a Democratic Iran - Southern California
 Human Rights Activists
 Human Rights Watch

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran
 Iranian democratic student association in George Washington University
 Iranian Green Quest of Graduates and Students

Solidarity with Iran's Democratic Movement (Canada)
 Students for Iranian Green Movement Association (Canada)
 Student Green Movement of Vancouver in Solidarity with People of Iran

Supporting Student Movement in Iran(Sigma), University of Victoria (Canada)
 The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
 United for Iran

Chicago program “Exploring the Use of the Arts to Promote Human Rights in Iran”

Amnesty International and a number of partners sponsored a program, lasting over several days, that was designed to highlight the use of the arts to promote awareness and inspire creative activism on behalf of human rights in Iran. The program involved presenting examples of creative use of different media—film, photography, and the graphic novels -- to engage larger and more diverse audiences and inspire them to imagine and carry out new forms of human rights activism. It featured the graphic novel *Zahra's Paradise*, the photo exhibit "Interrupted Lives: Portraits of Student Repression in Iran" and the short documentary film "Education Under Fire." Co-sponsors of the program included: Amnesty International groups 113 and 50; The Chicago-area Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies; the Chicago Amnesty OCAN group; Northeastern Illinois University and the Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh Leadership Fund at NEIU; the DePaul University Amnesty student group; The Northeastern Illinois University Amnesty International student group; DePaul University International Human Rights Law Institute; the AIUSA Middle East Coordination Group; the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation; United4Iran.

The first event was held at the DePaul University Art Museum on the evening of April 9. Amir presented his graphic novel *Zahra's Paradise*, the film "Education Under Fire" was screened and writer Saideh Pakravan discussed her own novel that was written as a response to human rights violations in Iran. On April 11 Amir spoke to arts students at Columbia College as a guest of the college's Center for Book & Paper Arts. On Wednesday night April 11 Amir addressed a standing-room only crowd at the Book Cellar, a popular independent book store in the Lincoln Square neighborhood of Chicago. Amir spoke engagingly about *Zahra's Paradise* and its inspiration, led a very lively discussion, and later signed copies of the book that members of the audience had purchased.



Event at DePaul University Art Museum, Persepolitan Networks Image by: Amir Normandi

On April 11, Dr. Roya Boroumand of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation and her assistant Daniel Leal set up the "Interrupted Lives" photography exhibit in a high traffic area of Northeastern Illinois University's Student Center. The student body at Northeastern Illinois is remarkably diverse, with a large proportion of students being low-income, immigrants, children of immigrants, the first students in their families to attend college and/or older students who have to work part-time and care for their families in addition to pursuing their studies so it was very valuable to enable a more diverse and non-traditional student body to view and interact with the exhibit and learn about the persecution of their peers—students—in Iran. On the evening of April 12 about 120 people attended a program at Northeastern Illinois called "Human Rights in Iran: Reports on Interrupted and Lost Lives and the Resilience of Bravery and Hope." This was held in conjunction with NEIU's Asian-American Heritage Program and

was open to the public so the audience was composed of NEIU students and faculty, members of Chicago's Iranian-American community, members of the Chicago-area Baha'i community, as well as those attending the Asian-American Heritage program, including those from the local area as well as out-of-town speakers and guests. The latter group would likely not have had the occasion to attend a program on Iran but for the fact that this program was held as part of the larger conference so we had an opportunity to reach a large audience we don't ordinarily have the opportunity to reach. During the program, Roya Boroumand spoke about her photo exhibit, Amir spoke about Zahra's Paradise, the film "Education Under Fire" was screened, and two Baha'i students from Iran spoke briefly about their experiences, followed by discussion with the audience.

In addition to the main programs the following additional programs were held: 1) DePaul University's International Human Rights Law Institute held a panel on the human rights implications of Iran's legal system on April 10 which was attended by many students from DePaul Law School as well as other law schools in Chicago, and some lawyers. The panel included John Marshall Law School Professor Shahram Dana who is an expert on international law, DePaul University professor Kaveh Ehsani, and Amnesty International USA's Iran country specialist Elise Auerbach; 2) Amir spoke about the graphic novel Zahra's Paradise to a class in the Department of Communication, Media and Theatre at Northeastern Illinois University followed by a lengthy discussion about the creative process and how to reach audiences and engage them on challenging issues with the students who are interested in different careers in the field of Communications; 3) Amnesty co-sponsored a film screening of "This is Not a Film" by persecuted Iranian film director Jafar Panahi at the Gene Siskel Film Center on Sunday April 15 and the Iran country specialist was able to make opening remarks at the event, which featured presentations by Northwestern University professor and expert on Iranian film Hamid Naficy and film scholar Milos Stehlik of Facets Cinematheque in Chicago. The event was moderated by NPR World View producer Steve Bynum; 4) On April 19 Iran country specialist Elise Auerbach made a presentation to students at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, a suburb of Chicago. Moraine Valley is the second largest community college in the state and serves a very ethnically and socio-economically diverse and largely non-traditional student body. There was a very lively discussion after the talk which was recorded and is available as a podcast at <http://ext.morainevalley.edu/librarynews/?p=824>; 5) There was an additional screening of "Education Under Fire" paired with the documentary "Iranian Taboo," also addressing the persecution of Iran's Baha'i community, held at independent movie theater Facets Cinematheque, followed by a discussion led by the Iran country specialist; 6) Finally, Amir was interviewed live on NPR's Worldview program by host Jerome McDonald on Tuesday April 10. The broadcast can be heard at <http://www.wbez.org/worldview/2012-04-10/segment/graphic-novel-portrays-extent-human-suffering-after-irans-2009>. Coincidentally (perhaps), an article about graphic novels in Iran, in which Zahra's Paradise was prominently cited as an outstanding and popular example, appeared on April 12 in the New York Times at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/world/middleeast/iranian-comic-book-artists-seek-a-unique-local-identity.html?_r=1&ref=world.

RECENT UNSETTLING NEWS REINFORCES FEARS OF FURTHER CRACKDOWN ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN IRAN

A musician sentenced to prison for a song he composed; a cartoonist sentenced to corporal punishment; an Iranian cleric issues a fatwa against an Iranian rapper for one of his songs. These are all recent causes for alarm that freedom of expression in Iran, already under siege by authorities, is being further undermined and that anyone thought to be engaging in unauthorized artistic expression can be subject to persecution.

Iranian musician [Arya Aramnejad](#) was sentenced to one year in prison in April 2012 for “acting against national security and spreading propaganda against the regime,” presumably for composing songs that are deemed critical of the government. In one song, he condemned the violent crackdown against post-2009 election protesters. He was arrested in February 2010 and sentenced to nine months in prison where he reportedly was subjected to torture and ill-treatment. He was re-arrested in November 2011.

In May Grand Ayatollahs Safi Golpaygani and Naser Makarem Shirazi issued a fatwa calling for the killing of Iranian rapper Shahin Najafi, who currently resides in Germany, in response to Mr. Najafi’s song “Naghi” – the name of Shi’a Islam’s tenth imam.

Also in May cartoonist Iranian cartoonist Mahmoud Shokraye was been sentenced to 25 lashes for drawing a caricature of a former member of the Iranian Parliament.

Among those targeted by authorities for exercising their right to peaceful artistic expression are filmmakers, actors and other members of Iran’s film industry. One of the most notable targets is acclaimed film director Jafar Panahi who was sentenced to six years in prison and a twenty-year ban on all his professional activities. Film director Mojtaba Mir Tahmasb was arrested on 17 September 2011 after making the documentary “This is Not a Film” about Jafar Panahi’s current situation. On 3 January 2012, Iran’s Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance sent the Iranian House of Cinema, Iran’s largest professional film association, a letter ordering them to cease operations within 48 hours. On 4 January 2012, Minister of Culture and Islamic Affairs Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini explained to state television, “This is not just a legal issue; religious people in our society have questioned and objected to things that have been happening in [House of Cinema’s] recent festivals. This shows these festivals are not only professional but also political.” The authorities have also refused to authorize the production of films and have banned a number of films from being screened in Iran.

The Iranian government also imposes strict censorship on musicians and musical performances and has subjected musicians who do not meet the approval of Iran’s Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to harassment and persecution, driving many of them underground as they are not permitted to perform or record openly. One of Iran’s most distinguished musicians, Mohammad Reza Shajarian, has noted that the Iranian government has rarely granted permission to hold concerts since the June 2009 post-election protests out of concern that the occasion could be used to express opposition to the government, while the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei announced that promoting and teaching music was “not compatible with the highest values of the sacred regime of the Islamic Republic.” Iran’s underground musicians and their plight were highlighted in the film “Nobody Knows About Persian Cats” by acclaimed Iranian director Bahman Ghobadi, who has been forced into exile himself. Two of the musicians highlighted in the film had just spent time in prison before the film was made.

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that, “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”

FREE PROMINENT HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS ABDOLFATTAH SOLTANI AND MOHAMMAD ALI DADKHAH SENTENCED TO LONG PRISON TERMS



Abdolfattah Soltani



Mohammad Ali Dadkhah

Abdolfattah Soltani and Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, two of Iran's most esteemed human rights attorneys, have been sentenced to shocking harsh prison sentences of eighteen years and nine years respectively, solely for carrying out their professional duties. Mr. Soltani and Mr. Dadkhah, along with Iranian Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, co-founded the Center for Human Rights Defenders (CHRD), which was forcibly shut down by the Iranian authorities in December 2008.

Abdolfattah Soltani was arrested on 10 September, 2011. He had been previously detained on other occasions for his devoted service to his clients, including well-known prisoners of conscience, as well as his tenacious advocacy on behalf of human rights in Iran. In early March 2012 he was sentenced to 18 years in prison for "spreading propaganda against the system", "forming an illegal opposition group [the CHRD]" and "gathering and colluding with intent to harm national security." Currently held in Tehran's Evin Prison, he was condemned to serve his sentence in a remote prison far from his family.

He had been the lawyer for seven leaders of Iran's persecuted Baha'i community who are currently serving twenty-year prison sentences, as well as for a number of individuals who had been charged in connection with their peaceful involvement with the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education, founded to provide educational opportunities for Baha'i students who are systematically excluded from Iran's universities; several of them were sentenced to prison after Mr. Soltani's arrest.

Mohammad Ali Dadkhah was sentenced to prison in July 2011 after his conviction of charges including "membership of an association [the CHRD] seeking the soft overthrow of the government" and "spreading propaganda against the system through interviews with foreign media." While in court planning to represent a client, Mohammad Ali Dadkhah was informed by a judge on 28 April 2012 that an appeals court had upheld both his nine-year sentence and a ten-year ban on legal practice and teaching. He had received no prior notification of the appeal court ruling. He has represented a number of prominent clients such as prisoner of conscience Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, facing a possible death sentence for alleged "apostasy from Islam."

The persecution of Abdolfattah Soltani and Mohammad Ali Dadkhah is just one more example of the Iranian government's campaign against human rights attorneys who struggle to carry out their work in a deeply flawed legal system. Several prominent human rights lawyers such as Shirin Ebadi, Shadi Sadr and Mohammad Mostafaei have been hounded into exile, while others such as Nasrin Sotoudeh and Mohammad Seifzadeh have been sentenced to prison terms. The Iranian authorities have implemented a

series of measures intended to prevent Iranians –particularly those critical of the authorities – from being able to access appropriate, competent legal representation, a basic right and important fair trial guarantee. The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provide that lawyers must be allowed to carry out their work “without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference.” In addition, it affirms the right of lawyers to freedom of expression, also provided for in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which includes “the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights.” Principle 16 of the U.N. Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provides that lawyers must be allowed to carry out their work “without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference.” Principle 18 states that lawyers “shall not be identified with their clients or their clients’ causes a result of discharging their functions.” In addition, Principle 25 affirms the right of lawyers to freedom of expression.

Take Action:

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public relations Office
Number 4, 2 Azizi Street
Vali Asr Ave., above Pasteur Street intersection
Tehran, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
Email: bia.judi@yahoo.com
Salutation: Your Excellency

I am writing to you to express my concern over the harsh prison sentences imposed on prominent human rights lawyers Abdolfattah Soltani and Mohammad Ali Dadkhah. Mr. Soltani was sentenced to eighteen years in prison and a twenty year ban on his professional activities in early March 2011. He is supposed to be transferred to a remote prison far from his family. Mr. Dadkhah’s sentence of nine years in prison was confirmed in late April 2012. Both have been persecuted solely for peacefully carrying out their professional duties.

I am concerned that the sentences against Abdolfattah Soltani and Mohammad Ali Dadkhah are part of a concerted campaign to persecute attorneys who represent clients in human rights cases. The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provide that lawyers must be allowed to carry out their work “without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference.”

I urge you to ensure that Abdolfattah Soltani is treated humanely in detention, and that he be granted access to his family and to his lawyers. He is a prisoner of conscience and I also urge that he be immediately and unconditionally released. I also urge that the sentence imposed against Mohammad Ali Dadkhah be overturned. I finally urge you to release other human rights attorneys detained solely for carrying out their professional responsibilities, including Nasrin Sotoudeh and Mohammad Seifzadeh.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.