



Nowruz Action

کارزار نوروز

The Iranian holiday Nowruz نوروز (“new day”) is an ancient holiday celebrated on the first day of spring to welcome in the new year. On this Nowruz we want to remember several courageous prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Iran with Nowruz greetings. We ask you to send cards with simple Nowruz greetings such as “Nowruz mobarak” نوروز مبارک. You can say “thinking of you at Nowruz time” or “hoping you are well.” You may send a greeting in either English or Farsi (Persian) but please do not mention Amnesty International or specifics of the recipient’s case. Please also refrain from mentioning the political situation, human rights or U.S.-Iran relations. We suggest sending cards with pictures of landscapes, spring flowers or the like, in keeping with the spirit of the holiday and the message of hope and renewal. Please do not choose cards that have pictures of people, and please do not use cards that depict bottles of wine or other alcoholic beverages.

Traditional Nowruz celebrations include the preparation of a Haft Sin table which literally means the seven s’s. Seven items beginning with the Persian letter sin (equivalent to the English s) and which represent spring time are set out. To honor this tradition, this year Amnesty International has selected seven cases, prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, who have been identified by Amnesty International as “individuals at risk” and are therefore targeted for intensified campaigning. Several of them have been sentenced to long prison terms for their peaceful activism and several are in poor health.

This year we are requesting that people take pictures of their Nowruz cards, or of themselves holding up their Nowruz cards before putting them in the mail and sending the pictures to us (aiis@uchicago.edu or jheiss@aiousa.org) and posting them on their facebook pages. We will make a nice collage of the Nowruz greetings and post it.

Our previous Nowruz actions have been very successful! Last year one of our cases was that of human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. We were thrilled that she was released from prison in September 2013! Other subjects of previous Nowruz actions who have been released from prison include Mansour Ossanlu, Hengameh Shahidi, Emadeddin Baghi and brothers Kamiar and Arash Alaei have both been released and are now based in the United States. Kamiar and Arash related how they were given a brief medical furlough and went back to the their parents’ house to find hundreds of Nowruz cards sent to them by Amnesty activists and how much that cheered them up and gave them the strength to go on. This action really matters!

Please see next pages.

Seven Baha'is



Seven leaders of Iran's Baha'i community were sentenced to twenty years in prison by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran on 7 August 2010. They have done nothing more than peacefully practice their religion, they were convicted on serious, but baseless, charges including "espionage for Israel," "insulting religious sanctities" and "spreading propaganda against the system." They had also been charged with "ifsad fil arz" or "corruption on earth." All seven had been held in Section 209 of Evin Prison in Tehran, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence, but they were moved to Raja'i Shahr (Gohardasht) Prison in Karaj—used to house violent criminals and where sanitary conditions are particularly poor. The two females among the seven are now back in Evin Prison.

The seven include two women, Fariba Kamalabadi and Mahvash Sabet, and five men: Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaei, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Vahid Tizfahm. All are leading members of a group responsible for the Baha'i community's religious and administrative affairs. Mahvash Sabet who acted as the group's secretary, was arrested on 5 March 2008. The others were arrested on 14 May 2008. From their arrest until August 2010, the seven were held in Section 209 of Evin Prison in Tehran, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence. They were allowed very limited access to their lawyers while they have been in custody.

The Baha'i community in Iran (estimated to be about 300,000) has been subjected to particularly harsh persecution in the past few years and about 110 Baha'is are currently in detention in Iran, while many others have been released on bail and are awaiting trial or have charges pending against them. The Baha'i faith is not recognized as a religion in Iran's Constitution, and Baha'is are excluded from institutions of higher education in Iran. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, has condemned the persecution of the Baha'i community by Iranian authorities, including in his latest report issued in October 2013.

You can send Nowruz greetings to the seven Baha'is to:

Baha'i International Community
15 route des Morillons
1218 Grand Saconnex
Switzerland

Majid Tavakkoli



Student leader Majid Tavakkoli, a member of the Islamic Students Association, is serving a prison sentence of nine years, imposed after an unfair trial in a Revolutionary Court.

Majid Tavakkoli was arrested on 7 December 2009 after he gave a speech at a demonstration at Amir Kabir University of Technology in Tehran, marking Student Day. He was reportedly beaten during his arrest. The day after his arrest, in an apparent attempt to humiliate him, the Fars News Agency, linked to the Iranian government, published a photo of Majid Tavakkoli wearing women's clothing, and claimed he had been wearing the clothes at the time of his arrest. However, in a massive show of solidarity, about 450 men posted photos of themselves wearing women's clothing—some holding signs saying “We are Majid” on Facebook and other sites on the internet.

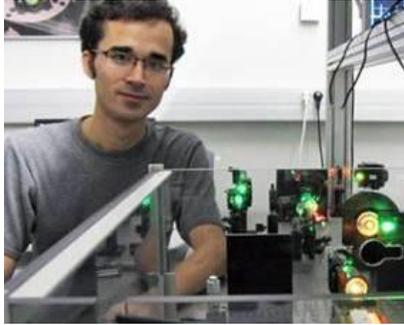
His trial was held in Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran in January 2010. His lawyer was not permitted to attend. He was convicted of several offenses and reportedly received a five year sentence for “participating in an illegal gathering,” one year for “spreading propaganda against the system,” two more years for “insulting the Supreme Leader” and six months for “insulting the president.” He was also given a five-year ban on any involvement in political activities and on leaving the country. After he and student activist Behareh Hedayat wrote a letter to student activists from prison to mark Students Day in December 2010, they were each given an additional six-month sentence, bringing Majid's total sentence up to nine years. Around the beginning of November 2011 Branch 54 of the Tehran Appeals Court upheld the additional six months sentence on the charge of “spreading propaganda against the system.” He has written a series of moving letters from prison. In their joint letter, Majid and Behareh wrote, “Our bodies may be wounded by the blade of tyranny, but our hearts are filled with love and burning flame of hope, and our heads are high for continuing the glorious path of freedom which has been carried away on the shoulders of the Iranian people all across the world.”

Majid Tavakkoli is serving his sentence at Reja'i Shahr Prison in Karaj, known for its particularly harsh and unsanitary conditions. He has suffered numerous health problems and except for one brief medical furlough, has not been given the medical attention he needs. He has carried out hunger strikes to protest his unjust sentence and harsh conditions.

You can send Nowruz greetings for Majid Tavakkoli to:

Majid Tavakkoli
Raja'i Shahr Prison
Moazzen Blvd
Karaj
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Omid Kokabee



Omid Kokabee, a promising young physicist, was pursuing doctoral studies in quantum optics at the University of Texas, Austin when he went to Iran for what was supposed to be a brief visit with his family. When he went to the airport in January 2011 to fly back to the United States, he was arrested and eventually sentenced to ten years in prison for allegedly communicating with a hostile government and receiving “illegitimate funds”—ostensibly a reference to the normal stipend given to graduate students in his department at the University of Texas.

While in detention he was held in solitary confinement, subjected to prolonged interrogations, and pressured to make a confession. His interrogators reportedly threatened that he would be tortured and that professors at Iranian universities with whom he had worked would be arrested. During questioning, he was reportedly made to write down details of individuals he had seen in embassies or at conferences, and was told by those questioning him that some of the people he had met were CIA operatives. His sentence was handed down in May 2012, after an unfair trial in a Revolutionary Court at which reportedly no evidence was presented against him. The journal *Nature* reported that Mr. Kokabee wrote in an open letter that he was being persecuted for refusing to cooperate with Iranian military projects.

Amnesty International has declared him to be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for his refusal to work on military projects in Iran and as a result of spurious charges related to his legitimate scholarly ties with academic institutions outside of Iran. AI calls for his immediate and unconditional release from prison.

His paper on the non-thermal, non-chemical, ablative removal of cancerous tissues with ultrafast lasers had been selected for presentation at a medical laser conference in Iran to be held in December 2013 (although because of his incarceration, he was not able to attend). In September 2013 Omid Kokabee was awarded the Andrei Sakharov Prize from the American Physical Society for “his courage in refusing to use his physics knowledge to work on projects that he deemed harmful to humanity, in the face of extreme physical and psychological pressure.”

You can send Nowruz greetings for Omid Kokabee to Amnesty which will forward them:

Omid Kokabee
Ward 350
Evin Prison
Chamran Highway, Shahid Katchuyi Street, Darakeh
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Sayed Ziaoddin (Zia) Nabavi



Zia Nabavi, aged 28, was an engineering student at Noshirvani University of Technology in Babol. He was a member of the Central Council of the Islamic Association of the university. He was permanently banned from further study in 2007 after receiving three “stars” for his political activities. He and other banned students formed an organization called the Council to Defend the Right to Education to defend the rights of banned students. He was arrested in June 2009 shortly after attending a post-presidential election protest. He was convicted of “gathering and colluding against national security”; “spreading propaganda against the system”; “disturbing public order”; as well as “moharebeh” (enmity against God) for his alleged links to and cooperation with the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), a banned political group, to be served in internal exile in Khuzestan province. He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison and to 74 lashes for “creating unease in the public mind.” His sentence was reduced on appeal to ten years in prison.

The Iranian authorities—specifically the Ministry of Science, Technology and Research together with the Ministry of Intelligence-- have been using a system of assigning “stars” (from one to three) to what they consider to be troublesome students. The starring system has been used to discriminate against and exclude students from higher education based solely on their political beliefs or their assumed political beliefs. Students banned from study because of their peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly are deprived of their right to education as guaranteed by Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to which Iran is a state party.

Zia Nabavi is serving his sentence in a prison far from his family, who have been subjected to harassment when they have traveled the distance to visit him. He has written a letter to Mohammad Javad Larijani, the secretary-general of Iran’s “High Council for Human Rights” detailing conditions in the prison which he says are “indescribable.” In the letter he wrote, “I feel as though my life is slowly drifting from one in which I live like a human to one in which I am being treated like an animal...”

You can send Nowruz greetings for Zia Nabavi to his family at:

Zia Nabavi
Unit #15 (or apartment #15)
3rd floor, Block 6
Nehzat Building
Nehzat Boulevard
Semnan, Islamic Republic of Iran

Hossein Ronaghi Maleki



Hossein Ronaghi Maleki was a 24-year-old blogger when he was arrested in Iran in December 2009. After spending most of the last four years behind bars as a prisoner of conscience, he is now in a deplorable condition, in dire need of medical attention that he is not receiving. After having one kidney removed because of a kidney disorder contracted in the filthy prison where he was kept, he now has a serious infection in his remaining kidney.

Hossein Ronaghi Maleki had been sentenced to 15 years in prison after an unfair trial in 2010 on charges including “membership of the [illegal] internet group ‘Iran Proxy,’” “spreading propaganda against the system” and “insulting the Leader and the President,” apparently in connection with articles he posted on his blog, *14 Tir*. When he had complained of being tortured, the judge at his trial told him that he “deserved it.”

He had been released from prison on 2 July 2012 in order to receive medical treatment but was rearrested on 22 August 2012 when police and plain-clothed security forces reportedly attacked a relief camp in East Azerbaijan province where he and others were offering supplies for earthquake victims. He was charged with “distributing unclean and non-hygienic goods” and is reported to have been tortured during questioning. He was reportedly beaten so severely in the kidney area that the wound from his recent surgery started bleeding.

On 4 November 2013 Hossein Ronaghi Maleki was transferred to Tehran’s Hasheminejad Hospital but was taken back to Evin Prison after only three hours and without receiving the treatments he requires. Reports indicate that doctors have diagnosed him with a kidney infection in his one remaining kidney, as well as a condition called Hydronephrosis, where the kidney becomes stretched and swollen as a result of a build-up of urine inside the kidney. Hossein Ronaghi Maleki needs ongoing specialized treatment on his remaining kidney, which he cannot get in prison. Since his arrest, he has launched a number of hunger strikes in protest at the authorities’ refusal to grant him medical leave, their harsh treatment of political prisoners, and disregard for prisoners’ welfare, have resulted in further deterioration of his health. He still has not been granted the medical furlough to which he is entitled.

You can send Nowruz greetings to Hossein Ronaghi Maleki at:

Ronaghi family residence
Passage Near Public Library
Northern Boulevard

Malekan, East Azerbaijan Province
Islamic Republic of Iran

Abdolfattah Soltani



Abdolfattah Soltani, a prominent human rights lawyer, and together with Iran's Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, a founder of the Center for Human Rights Defenders, is serving a 13-year prison sentence. The Iranian government forcibly shut down the CHRD 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. On at least two occasions since his detention, he has said he had been pressured to make a televised "confession," including that the CHRD had received funding from foreign sources to encourage a "soft revolution" in Iran – which Abdolfattah Soltani denies. 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." His sentence was eventually reduced to 13 years. He was condemned to serve his sentence in a remote prison far from his family, although he has been held in Evin Prison in Tehran.

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 Abdolfattah Soltani's arrest.

In October 2012 the International Bar Association awarded its Human Rights Award to Abdolfattah Soltani. On 6 February 2013 the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that the detention of Abdolfattah Soltani is arbitrary, and requested the Iranian government to release him immediately.

Abdolfattah Soltani's wife Massoumeh Dehgan has also been targeted: Branch 15 of the Islamic Revolution Court sentenced her to one year of imprisonment, suspended for five years, and banned her from travelling abroad for five years, on charges of "propaganda against the system."

You can send Nowruz greetings to Abdolfattah Soltani at:

Pol Karim Khan Zand, aval Khiyaban-e. Mirza-ye Shirazi, Kouche sevvom (3), Tabaqe-ye Zamin
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Behareh Hedayat



Behareh Hedayat, is a 32-year-old activist with The Campaign for Equality, a grassroots initiative, and is also a member of the Central Committee of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity, a national student body which has been active in calling for political reform and opposing human rights violations in recent years. She is currently serving a ten-year prison sentence in Evin Prison.

She was arrested on 31 December 2009, shortly after mass arrests following anti-government protests on the religious festival of Ashoura. She was charged with several “offences”, including “interviews with foreign media,” “insulting the leader,” “insulting the president,” and “disrupting public order through participating in illegal gatherings.” In May 2010 she was sentenced to six months in prison for “insulting the president”, two years for “insulting the Leader” and five years for “acting against national security.” A two year suspended prison term previously imposed for her participation in the June 2006 demonstration calling for an end to discrimination against women in law was also implemented. An additional six month sentence was added as punishment for having written a letter, together with fellow imprisoned student activist Majid Tavakkoli, in December 2010, encouraging students to continue their peaceful struggle for freedom. Around the beginning of November 2011 Branch 54 of the Tehran Appeals Court upheld the additional six months sentence on the charge of “propaganda against the system.”

In her letter she wrote, “With our hearts together, we united and although disadvantaged in an unfair battle, we fought against tyranny with empty hands. Not only in the streets but also in our hearts, we chose to be calm and collected, but also when confronted with cruelty, our sorrows multiplied. Until such a day as flowers blossom far and wide and the breeze of knowledge blows from every town and village, we envisioned our universities full of colorful and scented flower arches, not prison cells.

You can send Nowruz greetings to Behareh Hedayat at:

Behareh Hedayat
Evin Prison
Chamran Highway, Shahid Katchuyi Street, Darakeh
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

