



Nowruz Action

کارزار نوروز

The Persian 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 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, all of them prisoners of conscience 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.

Our previous Nowruz actions have been very successful! Of the seven cases featured in last year’s Nowruz action, four have been resolved in the past year: Mansour Ossanlu and Hengameh Shahidi were given medical furloughs; Emadeddin Baghi was released after serving his one-year sentence and his other six-year sentence was set aside; Kamiar and Arash Alaei have both been released and are now based in the United States. Kamiar and Arash were the subjects of a couple of previous Nowruz actions. They related how they were given a brief medical furlough and went back to 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 "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 female Baha'i prisoners of conscience 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 100 Baha'is are currently in detention in Iran.

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 “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 “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 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 his family:

Majid Tavakkoli
Faze 3, Entehaye Khiabane Yaas
Shahrak Baharestan (Miyanrood)
Shiraz 7179743355, Islamic Republic of Iran

Nasrin Sotoudeh



Prominent human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh is serving a six-year prison sentence (reduced from an original eleven years) and has been banned from practicing law and traveling for twenty years. The judge sentenced her to five years in prison on a charge of “acting against national security,” another five years for “not wearing hejab (Islamic dress for women) during a videotaped message,” and one year for "propaganda against the regime.” Nasrin Sotoudeh has been detained since her arrest on 4 September 2010 and has spent most of her time in solitary confinement with limited access to her family. She is reportedly very weak from undertaking three hunger strikes to protest the conditions of her confinement.

Ms Sotoudeh, a mother of two children, has defended Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi and other human rights activists, as well as juvenile offenders sentenced to death. Her conviction is based solely on her peaceful work representing her clients. The persecution of Nasrin Sotoudeh is just one example of the Iranian government’s pernicious 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 Mohammad Seifzadeh have been sentenced to prison terms; still others such as Abdolfattah Soltani are in detention while awaiting trial.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay expressed concern about her case on 23 November 2010, stating, “I am very concerned that Nasrin Sotoudeh’s case is part of a much broader crackdown, and that the situation of human rights defenders in Iran is growing more and more difficult.” She urged the Iranian authorities to review her case urgently and expedite her release. 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.”

You can send Nowruz greetings for Nasrin Sotoudeh to her husband:

Reza Khandan
Shahrak-e Ghods (Gharb)
Khiyaban-e Farahzad
Koocheh Baharan 2
Pelak 8, Vahed 4
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 initially charged with “gathering and colluding against national security”; “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 (eventually reduced to ten years) and to 74 lashes for “creating unease in the public mind.”

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:

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

Zeynab Jalalian



Zeynab Jalalian, age about 29, a Kurdish woman from Maku, a town in the West Azerbaijan Province in north-west Iran, is serving a life sentence. She had been originally given a death sentence after an unfair trial around January 2009 by Kermanshah Revolutionary Court. After sustained campaigning by Amnesty International and its partners, her sentence was commuted to life in prison. Prior to her trial, she had been held for eight months in a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility, during which her family had no information concerning her fate. She was convicted of “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) – a charge levelled against those accused of taking up arms against the state - in connection with her alleged membership of, support for and recruitment to a Kurdish opposition party, possibly PJAK. She is reported not to have been granted access to a lawyer during her trial which is said to have lasted only a few minutes.

She has reported that she was tortured in detention. In December 2010, a witness who was imprisoned with Zeynab Jalalian reported that Zeynab Jalalian was struck on the head with a broken bottle, causing her scalp to bleed profusely. Her eyesight is said to be failing due to blows to the head and she is in overall poor health because of the severe torture she has endured.

Iranian Kurds, who live mostly in the northwest part of Iran, are primarily Sunni Muslims whereas the majority of Iranians are Shi’a Muslims. Kurdish regions have been economically neglected, resulting in entrenched poverty. Kurds have faced increasing repression over the past several years, their rights to cultural and political expression have been violated, and many Kurdish activists have been charged with involvement in armed groups. They have been convicted and sentenced after unfair trials in Revolutionary Courts, sometimes just lasting a few short minutes. Unsubstantiated charges of *Moharebeh*– which can carry the death penalty– have increasingly been used against political activists, especially Kurds, in order to suppress legitimate dissent. Currently, at least nineteen Kurdish political prisoners await execution in Iran.

You can send Nowruz greetings to Zeynab Jalalian at:

Kermanshah Central Prison
Street Number 101, Dizel Abad
Kermanshah,
Islamic Republic of Iran

Sa'id Metinpour



Prisoner of conscience Sa'id Metinpour, a member of the Azerbaijani minority in Iran, is currently serving an eight-year prison sentence for his peaceful advocacy of the rights of the Azerbaijani community in Iran. He was convicted after an unfair trial held in Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, on charges of "contact with foreigners," and "propagating against the regime." His trial was presided over by Judge Salavati who is notorious for the harsh sentences he hands down to prisoners of conscience.

Sa'id Metinpour, who holds a degree in philosophy from Tehran University, is a journalist, and a member of the board of editors of the weekly Azerbaijani Turkic publications Yarpagh and Moje Bidari, and wrote his own blog. He is an advocate of linguistic and cultural rights for the Azerbaijani minority, including the right to be educated in the Azerbaijani Turkic language. Sa'id Metinpour has frequently travelled to Turkey to participate in human-rights related events.

Sa'id Metinpour was detained for the first time in February 2007 and held for 10 days in connection with his participation in peaceful demonstrations marking International Mother Language Day, an annual event initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on 21 February.

On 25 May 2007, he was arrested in the city of Zanjan, north western Iran, and held, mainly in solitary confinement, in Section 209 of Evin prison in Tehran, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence. He was tortured, apparently to try to force him to make a videotaped "confession." He suffers from severe back pain, has suffered from a lung infection and needs medical care.

You can send Nowruz greetings to Sa'id Metinpour at:

Sa'id Metinpour
Evin Prison
Dasht Behesht Avenue,
Chamran Highway
Next to Azadi Hotel,
Tehran,
Islamic Republic of Iran

Behareh Hedayat



Behareh Hedayat, is a 30-year-old activist with the women's rights organization The Campaign for Equality, 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