



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 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.

Our previous Nowruz actions have been very successful! Of the seven cases featured in the 2011 Nowruz action, four were resolved: 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 "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 as of January 2013 about 110 Baha'is were 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 on 28 February 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 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 ten years.. She was convicted on charges including “acting against national security” and "spreading propaganda against the regime.” Nasrin Sotoudeh has been held since her arrest on 4 September 2010 (except for two very brief furloughs) and has spent most of her time in solitary confinement with limited access to her family. She has undertaken several hunger strikes to protest the conditions of her confinement. In October 2012 Nasrin Sotoudeh was awarded the Sakharov Prize, established in 1988 by the European Parliament to honor individuals or organizations who have dedicated their lives to the defense of human rights and freedom of thought.

Nasrin Sotoudeh, a mother of two, 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 since 2009, while others such as Abdolfattah Soltani, Mohammad Seifzadeh and Mohammad Ali Dadkhah have been sentenced to prison terms.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay expressed concern about her case in 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 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:

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. 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

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

Shiva Nazar Ahari



Shiva Nazar Ahari is a journalist, human rights activist and a member of the Committee of Human Rights Reporters. She is currently serving a four-year prison sentence in Evin Prison for her peaceful human rights activities.

Shiva Nazar Ahari was arrested immediately after the disputed presidential election of 2009 and held for some three months. She was arrested again in December 2009 along with two other CHRR members while on their way to the funeral of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, a senior cleric critical of the Iranian government and detained until September 2010. In February 2010 she reported that she had been detained most of the time in a “cage-like” solitary confinement cell, with no room to stretch her arms and legs. In September 2010 she was sentenced to 74 lashes, converted to a fine, and six years in prison after conviction of “enmity against God,” “gathering and colluding to commit a crime against national security” and “spreading propaganda against the system.” Her sentence was reduced on appeal to four years’ imprisonment after her conviction for “gathering and colluding” was overturned. She began serving yjod sentence on 8 September 2012. She and other female prisoners went on a hunger strike in October 2012 to protest against the abusive treatment they were subjected to in Evin Prison.

The Committee of Human Rights Reporters (CHRR) is an organization which campaigns against human rights violations in Iran but is banned by the Iranian authorities, who have accused the CHRR of having links with the banned opposition group, the Mojahedin-e Khalq or People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI). The CHRR vehemently deny any such links. In January 2010, Abbas Ja’fari Dowlatabadi, the Tehran Prosecutor, told Shiva Nazar Ahari’s family in a meeting: “Experts of the case have reported that the website for the Committee is linked to ‘hypocrites’ (the Iranian authorities’ name for the PMOI), and any collaboration with the Committee is considered a crime.”

You can send Nowruz greetings to Shiva Nazar Ahari at:

Shiva Nazar Ahari
Shahid Madani street (Nezam Abaad) - Mehran Tayebi Alley,
First floor from right - No 54 ,
Postal Code 1617785511
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran