

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 233 8695

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Iran: Human rights defender Mohammad Najafi disbarred during the seventh year of his imprisonment

On 15 April 2025, **Mohammad Najafi's** lawyer announced that the human rights defender has been disbarred permanently, following a verdict by Branch 1 of the High Court of Judges. The permanent disbarment was issued while the human rights defender is facing multiple sentences. He is currently facing sentencing which would keep him in prison until 2033.

[Mohammad Najafi](#) is a human rights defender and lawyer, who has represented many political prisoners and conducted investigations into the deaths of individuals in police custody. He has been unjustly imprisoned in Iran since 2018 on multiple convictions for his defense of basic civil and political liberties. In November 2019, he won the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe's Human Rights Prize alongside three other Iranian lawyers, including Nasrin Sotoudeh.

On 15 April 2025, Mohammad Najafi's lawyer announced the decision from Branch 1 of the High Court of Judges, overseeing the conduct of justices and lawyers, for the permanent disbarment of the human rights defender. The disbarment verdict was issued on 21 December 2024, however it was only recently handed down to Mohammad Najafi in Evin Prison.

Mohammad Najafi has been unjustly imprisoned since 2018 and has developed serious health issues while detained. In early November 2024, the human rights defender was hospitalised after reporting severe chest pains and dizziness, only to be handcuffed and shackled while being transferred and undergoing medical treatment. Despite his extreme health concerns, the human rights defender has only been given access to medical furlough on very limited occasions, including on 31 March 2020 and from 22 February to 15 March 2021. This lack of adequate consideration for his urgent medical care has caused his health to significantly deteriorate.

On 2 July 2021, Mohammad Najafi was charged with “propaganda against the state” for publicly issuing a call to boycott the presidential elections, change the constitution and remove the Supreme Leader. In February 2020, Branch 23 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced the human rights defender to six further months in prison due to a speech he made in 2012 at the funeral of a blogger who was killed under the custody of Iranian authorities. In January 2019, he was sentenced to two additional years in prison after being charged with “disturbing the public opinions” by Branch 102 of the Arak Criminal Court for criticising the Supreme Leader while under custody.

On 11 December 2018, Branch 1 of the Arak Revolutionary Court sentenced Mohammad Najafi to ten further years in prison on the charge of “collaborating with a hostile state”, and three years for “insulting the Supreme Leader” and “propaganda against state.” The prison sentence on the charge of “collaborating with a hostile state” was reduced to four and a half years and after an appeal was made. On 15 December 2018, Branch 102 of the Arak Criminal Court sentenced him to one-year imprisonment for “publishing online disinformation with the intention of disturbing the public opinion.”

In late July 2018, Mohammad Najafi was sentenced to three years in prison and 78 lashes for “slander with intent to disturb public opinion” in relation to the investigation he undertook in January 2018. His sentence was upheld on appeal and he was re-arrested on 28 October 2018 and taken to Arak Central prison.

The human rights defender was arrested in January 2018 after sharing the results of an investigation he undertook into the death of an individual in police custody. Contrary to the official narrative, which claimed that the man was arrested for a drug offence and committed suicide, Mohammad Najafi alleged that the man was arrested at a protest in December 2017, and may have died from injuries sustained from torture. He was released two months later on bail.

Mohammad Najafi is facing over 20 years in combined prison sentences. Should Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code apply, which stipulates that “in cases of multiple crimes of different types, the maximum punishment will be issued for all of them, but only the most severe punishment will be carried out,” the prison sentence of four and a half years on the charge of “collaborating with a hostile state” will be the executable part his sentence. However, when Mohammad Najafi's lawyers have followed up on his situation, both in the Arak and Tehran revolutionary courts, they have been told that the application of Article 134 is not foreseen in his case, and that his date of release is due in 2033, based on current convictions. Furthermore, Mohammad Najafi has already been arbitrarily detained since 2018 for the exercise of his work as a lawyer and his freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders expresses its deep concern regarding the continued judicial harassment of Mohammad Najafi and his disbarment, as it believes the human rights defender is being targeted for his peaceful human rights activities as a lawyer, particularly for his advocacy for the victims of torture in Iran.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Mohammad Najafi and quash his convictions as Front Line Defenders believes he has been targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Mohammad Najafi, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Iran and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

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