

17 September 2021

Iran: Woman human rights defender Farzaneh Zilabi sentenced to one year in prison and a two-year travel ban

On 13 September 2021 woman human rights defender and lawyer **Farzaneh Zilabi** was sentenced by Branch 2 of the Ahvaz Revolutionary Court to one year in prison and a two-year travel ban on the charge of “propaganda activities against the state.” The woman human rights defender’s lawyer stated that they will appeal this sentence.

[Farzaneh Zilabi](#) is a human rights lawyer who has represented the [Syndicate of Workers of Haft Tappeh Cane Sugar Company](#) (SWHTCSC) in Shush, Khuzestan south Iran. The SWHTCSC is a trade union established in 1974 for the workers of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industrial Complex. The syndicate has organised a number of strikes, most recently in August 2021 against the continuous unpaid wages of employees and the corruption of the former owners. She has also represented many individual labour rights defenders and has been outspoken about torture reported by her clients.

On 13 September 2021, Farzaneh Zilabi’s lawyer announced that the woman human rights defender had been sentenced by Branch 2 of the Ahvaz Revolutionary Court to one year in prison and a two-year travel ban on the charge of “propaganda activities against the state.” It was later announced by the court that Farzaneh Zilabi had been acquitted of the charge “gathering and collusion to act against national security” and the court’s preliminary order for a six month ban from practicing law. On 16 May 2021, Farzaneh Zilabi, was summoned by Ahvaz Central and the Revolutionary courts on charges of “propaganda activities against the state” and “gathering and collusion to act against national security” and received a preliminary order for a six month ban from practicing law.

The judicial harassment and prosecution of the woman human rights defender occurs in a context of pressure and trumped-up charges against the Haft Tappeh workers. On 8 May 2021, the Supreme Audit Court of Iran ruled to deprivatize the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Company. The decision came after six years of legal struggles. According to the verdict of this supervisory body, the company has been nationalised and its ownership returned to public assets, which is considered as an achievement for this trade union and the defence team. Based on a statement published on 13 May 2021 by SWHTCSC, this achievement was only possible with the perseverance of the defence team, including Farzaneh Zilabi, and the long anti-corruption campaign, periodic strikes, and constant peaceful demonstrations organised by the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Syndicate.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the sentencing of woman human rights defender Farzaneh Zilabi as it believes this is in reprisal for her peaceful and legitimate efforts as a human rights lawyer representing labour rights defenders and promoting human rights in Iran.

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in Iran to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally quash the convictions against Farzaneh Zilabi as Front Line Defenders believes she has been targeted solely as a result of her legitimate human rights work;

2. Ensure Farzaneh Zilabi and her lawyer are allowed sufficient access to the court's deliberations in advance of the appeal for her case;
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.

Front Line Defenders Board of Directors

Denis O'Brien, Jim Conway, Maria Mulcahy, Kieran Mulvey, Mary Jane Real (Philippines), David Sykes, Arnold Tsunga (Zimbabwe), Verónica Vidal (Uruguay)

Front Line Defenders International Advisory Council

James L. Cavallaro, Maryam Elahi, Michel Forst, Hina Jilani, Mary Lawlor

Front Line, The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders trading as Front Line Defenders, is registered in Ireland as a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. Registered Office: Second Floor, Grattan House, Temple Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, A94 FA39, Ireland.

Company No. 593190; Registered Charity No. 20204494; CHY 22404