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Iran: Concerns about the health condition of woman human rights defender Nasrin Sotoudeh and judicial harassment of her daughter Mehraveh Khandan

On 17 August 2020, **Mehraveh Khandan**, the daughter of woman human rights defender **Nasrin Sotoudeh**, was arbitrarily arrested by five security officers at her home in Tehran, and transferred to the court in Evin prison. No reason was given for her arrest at the time, however her family later reported that the 20 year-old is being accused of physically assaulting a female security officer who had warned Mehraveh Khandan about wearing a hijab in Evin prison a year ago. She was held at the court for a few hours, before being released with a guarantor's bail. The family denounced this accusation and believes the arbitrary arrest of Mehraveh Khandan is part of a strategy of increasing pressure on Nasrin Sotoudeh while she is on hunger strike.

[Nasrin Sotoudeh](#) is a woman human rights defender and a lawyer who has legally represented many imprisoned Iranian activists and human rights defenders, as well as prisoners sentenced to death for crimes committed when they were minors. In recent years, she has also represented women arrested for appearing in public without a hijab, a punishable offence in Iran. Nasrin Sotoudeh has been imprisoned multiple times as a result of her human rights work, most recently on 13 June 2018, when she was arrested and sentenced in two different trials to 38 years and 6 months in prison in addition to 148 lashes on eight charges, including "espionage". One of the charges against her was "membership in an illegal group", referring to her membership of Legam, a campaign to abolish the death penalty in Iran. According to Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, and given the high number of charges against her, only the most severe punishment will be enforced. However, given the high number of charges against her, it is unclear how much of the sentence she will have to serve.

Mehraveh Khandan has previously been targeted as a result of her mother's work, in what can be seen as an attempt to indirectly target Nasrin Sotoudeh, by targeting members of her family. In 2012, Mehraveh Khandan was prevented from travelling, when she was just 12 years-old, and again in 2016. Both instances can be viewed as reprisal against Nasrin Sotoudeh for her work in defense of human rights, as in neither instances did her daughter have any judicial record or reason to be subject to travel restrictions.

This is not the first time that Nasrin Sotoudeh's family have been targeted as a result of her work in defense of human rights in Iran. On 27 July 2020, woman human rights defender Nasrin Sotoudeh's husband, Reza Khandan, reported that his wife's bank accounts had been blocked by the Tehran Prosecutor's Office. Reza Khandan believes this to be the beginning of the seizure of the family's assets. He, along with Nasrin Sotoudeh's lawyer, have repeatedly appealed to the legal department of Pasargad Bank, the Evin Prosecutor's Office and the Prosecutor's Office in Tehran, however their efforts have been unsuccessful. Nor have they received any explanation as to why the bank account has been frozen.

On 10 August 2020, Nasrin Sotoudeh began a hunger strike to protest the continued imprisonment of human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience in Iran. In a letter outlining her reasons, she highlighted that COVID-19 has only served to exacerbate the already poor conditions for prisoners in Iran.

On 16 August, Reza Khandan visited his wife in Evin prison. He reported that she has lost 4 kilograms in the first six days of the hunger strike and now weighs just 49 kg. The family is extremely concerned about her health condition, as he also stated that on 13 August, Nasrin Sotoudeh experienced convulsions, however, she refused to go to the clinic of Evin prison due to the lack of COVID-19 protection and preventive measures in place in the clinic.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the intensified harassment of Nasrin Sotoudeh while in detention and whilst on hunger strike, through the use of judicial harassment against her daughter Mehraveh Khandan, the illegal seizure of the defender's bank accounts, and denying her temporary release during the pandemic. Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about Nasrin Sotoudeh's well being, given the vulnerable health condition of the defender and the poor living conditions in Evin prison, exposing her to further risk. Front Line Defenders further believes that the increased harassment of Nasrin Sotoudeh is an attempt to silence her criticism of the Evin prison authorities, and that she is being imprisoned solely as a result of her legitimate and peaceful human rights work in Iran.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally cease the judicial harassment against Nasrin Sotoudeh's daughter Mehraveh Khandan and cease blocking the bank accounts of the woman human rights defender and her family;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Nasrin Sotoudeh and quash her convictions as Front Line Defenders believes she has been targeted solely as a result of her legitimate human rights work;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Nasrin Sotoudeh, 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;
4. Ensure protection and hygienic provisions for Nasrin Sotoudeh and all detained human rights defenders while on hunger strikes, and grant non-discriminatory access to temporary release and furlough during the pandemic;
5. 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.