

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER TO RESUME HUNGER STRIKE

Prominent Iranian human rights lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani went on hunger strike on 21 March, after the authorities denied his request for judicial review and blocked his leave for the Iranian New Year holidays. On 26 March he temporarily halted the strike but expressed his intent to resume it on 20 April. He has a number of health conditions, including digestive and intestinal complications. He is a prisoner of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

After pleas from over 3,700 lawyers, academics, civil society activists and others, **Abdolfattah Soltani** agreed on 26 March to temporarily halt his hunger strike until 20 April. The prominent human rights defender had begun a hunger strike on 21 March, the first day of the Iranian New Year (Norooz), after he learned that the Supreme Court had denied his request for judicial review for the third time without providing a written decision and that Tehran's chief Prosecutor General had rejected his request for prison leave over the Norooz holidays without providing any written explanation and despite assurances given to his family that the request would be approved. Abdolfattah Soltani announced his hunger strike in a letter from inside prison on 20 March. The letter criticized the authorities' unjust treatment of prisoners of conscience and other marginalized prisoners, and the unlawful influence that Ministry of Intelligence officials routinely exercise over prosecution and judicial authorities in order to deny prisoners of conscience the right to fair proceedings, prison leave, and conditional release.

Abdolfattah Soltani is serving a 13-year prison sentence on spurious national security-related charges entirely connected to his professional work and defence of human rights. In his court documents, his involvement with the Centre for Human Rights Defenders in Iran, which was forcibly closed in 2008, is cited as evidence of "founding an illegal group". His vocal opposition against discrimination, torture and unfair trials and his participation in the establishment of a project to end the death penalty for minors are described as "anti-Islamic propaganda" and "psychological warfare against the system". Since his imprisonment in September 2011, Abdolfattah Soltani has been held in poor conditions and without regular access to adequate medical care. He suffers from a number of health conditions, including digestive and intestinal complications, and high blood pressure. He also has a herniated disc in his back, and has been experiencing neck pains.

Please write immediately in Persian, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Abdolfattah Soltani immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association, including his work as a defence lawyer;
- Urging them to ensure that he is immediately granted access to the adequate medical care he needs outside prison.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 MAY 2018 TO:

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public Relations Office
Number 4, Deadend of 1 Azizi
Above Pasteur Intersection
Vali Asr Street, Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

Prosecutor General of Tehran
Abbas Ja'fari Dolat Abadi
Office of the General and Revolutionary
Prosecutor
Corner (Nabsh-e) of 15 Khordad Square
Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Deputy for Human Rights and
International Affairs, Ministry of Justice
Mahmoud Abbasi
Number 1638, Below Vali Asr Square
Vali Asr Avenue, Tehran, Iran

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. H.E. Hamid Baeidinejad, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 16 PRINCES GATE LONDON SW7 1PT, Tel: 02072254208 or 02072254209 Email: iranconsulate.lon@mfa.gov.ir

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 142/16. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4280/2016/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Abdolfattah Soltani is a prominent and award-winning human rights lawyer and one of the founders of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders in Iran. He was awarded the International Bar Association's Human Rights Award in 2012 and the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award in 2009. He was first arrested on 16 June 2009, during the unrest that followed the disputed presidential election, and held in Evin prison until 26 August 2009, when he was released on bail secured by property deeds of considerable value. During this detention period, his access to his family was limited to one visit and several telephone calls. Abdolfattah Soltani was rearrested by intelligence officials on 10 September 2011 when he was in a Revolutionary Court dealing with the case of a client. The intelligence officials escorted him to his home, where they confiscated computers, documents, bank cards, family photo albums, CDs and DVDs before taking him to Evin prison and detaining him in Section 209, which is under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence.

In November 2011, the Secretary General of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, Mohammad Javad Larijani, told a press conference held at the UN in New York: "no lawyer is in prison because he is a lawyer or he is a defender of human rights, but because they are involved in activities which are against the security of the state, especially their relations with terrorist groups."

In March 2012, Abdolfattah Soltani was informed that Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran had sentenced him to 18 years' imprisonment on several charges, including "spreading propaganda against the system", "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security", and "founding an illegal group". His conviction and sentence were entirely due to his human rights work, which included being one of the founders of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders in Iran, and his peaceful activism against the death penalty in Iran. He was also convicted of "accepting an illegal prize and illegal earnings" related to his acceptance, via his wife Massoumeh Dehghan, of the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award. The court also barred him from practising law for 20 years. In June 2012, Branch 54 of the Appeal Court of Tehran reduced his sentence to 13 years' imprisonment and reduced the length of the ban on him practising law to two years.

Amnesty International's research consistently shows that Iran's judiciary lacks independence and remains particularly susceptible to pressure from security and intelligence forces to convict human rights defenders and other dissidents and impose harsh sentences. The lack of independence in the country's criminal justice system also allows intelligence and security officials to exercise unlawful influence and power over decision-making processes concerning prisoners' access to adequate medical care, prison leave and conditional release. Intelligence and security officials also regularly target prisoners for reprisal when they speak out against human rights abuses from behind bars.

In line with the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and other international standards, Amnesty International considers a human rights defender to be someone who, individually or in association with others, acts to defend and/or promote human rights at the local, national, regional or international levels, without resorting to or advocating hatred, discrimination or violence. Human rights defenders come from every walk of life; they may be journalists, lawyers, health professionals, teachers, trade unionists, whistle-blowers, farmers, victims, or relatives of victims, of human rights violations and abuses. They may conduct their human rights defence work as part of their professional role or as volunteers.

Further information on UA: 142/16 Index: MDE 13/8131/2018 Issue Date: 27 March 2018