

# URGENT ACTION

## JAILED KURDISH WOMAN AT RISK OF GOING BLIND

**Iranian Kurdish woman Zeynab Jalalian, who is serving a life sentence imposed after a grossly unfair trial, is at risk of losing her eyesight in prison. The authorities have continued to deny her the specialized medical treatment she needs for a worsening eye condition, including urgent surgery.**

Iranian Kurdish woman **Zeynab Jalalian**, 34, is at risk of losing her eyesight due to being denied specialized medical care for a worsening eye condition. She also suffers from a yeast infection in her mouth, intestinal and kidney infections, and abnormal uterine bleeding. The authorities have refused to give her access to an eye specialist and to authorize her transfer to a hospital for urgently needed eye surgery and have only given her eye drops. They have also refused her repeated requests for medical leave. According to her lawyer, some of her requests have been rejected outright while others have been accepted on condition that she makes videotaped "confessions". On one occasion, she says prison authorities told her that she had to have a virginity test before they would allow her to receive medical treatment. Withholding medical treatment resulting in severe pain or suffering in order to force a "confession" amounts to torture under international law.

Zeynab Jalalian is serving a life sentence in Khoy Prison, West Azerbaijan Province, north-west Iran. She was arrested in March 2008 for her social and political activities in support of Kurdish self-determination and her association with the political wing of the Party for Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), a Kurdish opposition group which also has an armed wing. She was held in solitary confinement for eight months without access to a lawyer. She says intelligence officials tortured her including flogging her on the soles of her feet, punching her in the stomach, hitting her head against a wall, and threatening her with rape. She was subsequently sentenced to death on the charge of "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*). Her trial was unfair and lasted no more than a few minutes. The Revolutionary Court in Kermanshah Province found her guilty of "taking up arms against the state" despite the total absence of any evidence linking her to the armed activities of PJAK. Noting her "alleged membership in the political wing of PJAK" and her movement between Iran and Iraq, the court speculated that "she may have been involved in terrorist operations but is refraining from telling the truth." Her death sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. In April 2016, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion, calling on the authorities to release Zeynab Jalalian immediately and accord her an enforceable right to compensation.

### **Please write immediately in English, Persian, Arabic, French and Spanish or your own language:**

- Urging the Iranian authorities to immediately provide Zeynab Jalalian with the specialized medical care she needs outside prison, including eye surgery, and protect her from further torture and other ill-treatment, including through the denial of adequate medical care;
- Calling on them to implement the opinion of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which calls for Zeynab Jalalian to be released immediately and accorded an enforceable right to compensation;
- Urging them to order a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into her allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, bringing to justice anyone found responsible, including those with superior responsibility, in fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 NOVEMBER 2016 TO:**

Head of the Judiciary  
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Prosecutor General of Khoy  
Hojatolislam Alizadeh  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**  
President  
Hassan Rouhani

**PLEASE SEND YOUR APPEALS FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE AUTHORITIES IN IRAN VIA THE EMBASSY** E. Mohammad Hassan Habibollahzadeh, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 16 PRINCES GATE LONDON SW7 1PT, Tel: 02072254208 or 02072254209 Email: [iranemb.lon@mfa.gov.ir](mailto:iranemb.lon@mfa.gov.ir)

**Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.** This is the first update of UA 151/14. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE13/033/2014/en/>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zeynab Jalalian had become engaged in social and political activities when she moved from Iran to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 2000. She was active in social and political networks associated with the political wing of PJAK, and focused on, among other things, activities aimed at the empowerment of women belonging to Iran's Kurdish minority. She occasionally travelled to Iran to carry out her activities and was travelling from the Iranian city of Kermanshah in Kermanshah Province to the city of Sanandaj in Kordestan Province at the time of her arrest in March 2008. In December 2008, Zeynab Jalalian appeared before Branch One of the Revolutionary Court in Kermanshah Province on the charge of "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*), based on her alleged connection with the political wing of PJAK. The court verdict found her guilty of "taking up arms against the state" based on a speculative argument that "she may have been involved in terrorist operations but is refraining from telling the truth." This is a serious violation of the right to presumption of innocence, which requires that everyone charged with a criminal offence is presumed and treated as innocent until and unless a court has judged after a fair trial that the charge has been proved beyond reasonable doubt by the prosecution. Her lawyer, whom she had only been allowed to appoint a few weeks prior to the trial, was denied the opportunity to represent her at the trial as he had not been informed of the date for which it had been scheduled. Her death sentence was upheld on appeal in May 2009 but was commuted to life imprisonment in December 2011 after she was granted clemency by Iran's Supreme Leader.

Since her arrest, Zeynab Jalalian has consistently been under pressure from the authorities to make videotaped "confessions". In May 2016, she was featured in a state television programme called "The Shadow of Terrorism", which denounced PJAK as a "deadly terrorist group" bent on "brainwashing" and recruiting gullible youths and children and killing women and children. The programme referred to reports about Zeynab Jalalian's denial of access to medical care as "a typical propaganda tactic by the terrorist PJAK to take advantage of a victim". Zeynab Jalalian was shown in the programme saying, "The reports about me having lost my sight, my life being at risk or that I am sick are not true. I have had some medical problems but they have been minor." This account was reinforced with lengthier interviews with the head of Khoy Prison, a prison social worker, and a woman introduced as Zeynab Jalalian's cell mate whose face was blurred. They claimed that Zeynab Jalalian has had full access to medical care and her eye pain has been resolved with the use of eye drops. The section of the "documentary" concerning Zeynab Jalalian ended with a short interview with her brother, who said that he had visited her and had been "happy to find that she was healthy." Her sister has since told Amnesty International that Zeynab Jalalian has retracted the "confessions" in this programme. Due to heavy surveillance, her sister said that Zeynab Jalalian had not yet been able to describe to her family the conditions under which she was coerced into giving the video-recorded statement. According to her sister, their brother has also said that the "documentary" distorted the context of his statement, which he had been asked to make while held in detention in early 2016. Following the broadcast, Zeynab Jalalian's lawyer stated in an interview that both her eye condition and her mouth infection were worsening and the basic treatment provided in the prison clinic was insufficient, as she required specialist treatment in a hospital outside prison.

During its 75th Session in April 2016, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted an opinion on the case of Zeynab Jalalian, in which it stated that she had been detained as a direct result of the exercise of her rights and freedoms under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party, namely the right to freedom of expression and association, "for her activities as a social and political activist for the rights of Kurdish women" and "her involvement in political activism... with the non-militant wing of the PJAK". The statement also said that she had been denied the right to a fair trial under the ICCPR. The Working Group expressed grave concerns about her physical and mental wellbeing and stated that her treatment violated the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Further information on UA: 151/14 Index: MDE 13/4931/2016 Issue Date: 19 October 2016