

URGENT ACTION

SPURIOUS CHARGES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

Iranian human rights defender Mansoureh Behkish is facing trumped-up national security charges for peacefully defending the right to truth and justice concerning the mass killings of political prisoners, including her siblings and brother-in-law, during the 1980s in Iran. If imprisoned, she would be a prisoner of conscience.

Iranian human rights defender **Mansoureh Behkish** was informed on 29 October that she had been charged with “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “spreading propaganda against the system”. She is active with a group known as the Mothers and Families of Khavaran, which is comprised of mothers and other family members of political prisoners summarily executed during the 1980s in Iran.

She was charged after being interrogated twice – on 22 and 24 October – by Ministry of Intelligence officials about her peaceful truth and justice seeking activities, including: holding commemorative gatherings at her home for political prisoners summarily executed or forcibly disappeared during the 1980s, including her sister, four brothers and brother-in-law; paying visits to the families of victims; taking flowers to Khavaran, a deserted gravesite in south Tehran where some of the thousands of political prisoners who were extrajudicially executed in the summer of 1988, including two of her brothers, are buried in unmarked mass graves; and posting her writings about Iran’s human rights violations on Facebook and other online platforms. She was denied her right to be accompanied by a lawyer during the interrogation sessions. She has since been informed that the Office of the Prosecutor has banned her two lawyers from accessing her case file.

Mansoureh Behkish has a previous suspended sentence, which she received following a 2011 conviction of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”, also related to her human rights work with the Mothers and Families of Khavaran, as well as with another group called the Mothers of Laleh Park, which is largely comprised of women whose children have been killed, disappeared or detained in Iran’s post-election violence since June 2009. If convicted of the fresh charges levelled against her, the suspended sentence may also be activated.

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

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to drop immediately the charges brought against Mansoureh Behkish for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and quash, without delay, her previous conviction and sentence;
- Urging them to stop the harassment and persecution of families of the victims of mass killings in the 1980s and respect their rights to truth, justice and reparation, including by conducting a thorough, effective and independent investigation and bringing to justice those responsible in fair proceedings without recourse to the death penalty.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 JANUARY 2017 TO:

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani

Prosecutor General of Tehran
Abbas Ja’fari Dolat Abadi

And copies to:
President
Hassan Rouhani

PLEASE SEND YOUR APPEALS FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE AUTHORITIES IN IRAN VIA THE EMBASSY 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.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 16 September 2016, the authorities prevented Mansoureh Behkish from boarding a plane headed to Ireland to visit her daughter and seized her passport. They instructed her, in writing, to go to the Office of the Prosecutor in Tehran's Evin Prison to collect her passport. Fearing detention, she did not go. A month later, she received a formal, written summons to go to the same office in order to "receive information about the charges detailed in her case". The summons provided no further information.

During mass killings and violence in Iran in the 1980s, Mansoureh Behkish lost five of her siblings. One of her brothers, Mohsen, was condemned to death and executed by a firing squad at Evin Prison in 1985. Two other brothers, Mahmoud and Mohammad Ali, were among an estimated 5,000 political prisoners who were cut off from the outside world in July 1988 and subsequently executed in secret, and without trials, and dumped into mass, unmarked graves. Another brother, Mohammad, was shot and killed in the street in March 1982. Her sister Zahra died in custody, just hours after her arrest in August 1983, allegedly as a result of injuries sustained during torture. The authorities never returned any of the bodies. They pointed the family to a gravesite in Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery, where they said Mohsen was buried. As for the other siblings, they simply told the family that they were buried in Khavaran but did not identify the precise location of their remains (see *Iran: Violations of Human Rights 1987-1990*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/021/1990/en/>).

In an open letter symbolically addressed to her deceased mother and posted on Facebook in November 2016, Mansoureh Behkish wrote, "My dear mother, this is an upside-down world [we live in] and the roles of complainant and accused have been interchanged. Instead of accounting for the hardship they have inflicted on us all these years, they [the officials] continue to harass and abuse us... In your view, can a state's national security ever be threatened by paying visits to bereaved families... What kind of a state is this that the act of some families going together to a flower market to purchase flowers for the unmarked graves of their loved ones at Khavaran is held to amount to gathering and colluding against the state." Since the 1980s, Mansoureh Behkish has been subjected to repeated harassment, arbitrary arrests and periods of detention by intelligence and security forces. These have been aimed at silencing her and stopping her from going to Khavaran with other families and placing flowers and pictures at the mass gravesite (see "Iran still seeks to erase the '1988 prison massacre' from memories, 25 years on", <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/08/iran-still-seeks-erase-prison-massacre-memories-years/>).

The 2011 conviction of Mansoureh Behkish followed her arrest on 12 June 2011 at a peaceful demonstration in Tehran which marked the second anniversary of the mass protests following the 2009 disputed presidential election. She was held for 28 days in Section 209 of Evin Prison without access to her lawyer and then released on bail. During this period, 18 days of which were in solitary confinement, she was subjected to lengthy interrogations. In December 2011, Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced her to four years in prison for "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" through establishing the Mothers of Laleh Park and six months for "spreading propaganda against the system". In June 2012, Branch 54 of the Court of Appeal in Tehran acquitted her of the latter charge, and suspended three and a half years of the four-year sentence for five years. She has never been called to serve the remaining six months (see "Iran urged to quash prison sentence for 'Mourning Mothers' activist", <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2012/04/iran-urged-quash-prison-sentence-mourning-mothers-activist/>).

The Iranian authorities opened the new case against Mansoureh Behkish in the wake of revived calls for an inquiry into the 1988 mass executions. In September 2016, an audio recording was published for the first time of a meeting in 1988 between senior officials involved in the mass executions and Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, a senior cleric who lost his status as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's successor because of his principled opposition to the executions. Those heard in the audio include: Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, the current Minister of Justice; Hossein-Ali Nayyeri, the current head of the Supreme Disciplinary Court for Judges; Morteza Eshraqi, a current attorney at law; and Ebrahim Raissi, the current head of one of Iran's most wealthy foundations, Astan Qods-e Razavi. In the audio file, Ayatollah Montazeri is heard saying: "The greatest crime committed in the Islamic Republic, for which history will condemn us, has been committed at your hands, and in the future your names will go down in history as criminals".

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