

Nasrin Sotoudeh: Iranian lawyer, women's rights activist on hunger strike

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The imprisoned Iranian lawyer and women's rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh has begun a hunger strike since October 17 in Evin prison. This in protest against the violation of the rights of her children visiting the prison and to make the Iranian authorities stop harassing her kids and leave her family alone.

Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested in September 2010 and sentenced to six years in prison because of false accusations such as 'compromising national security', 'propaganda against the state', and for her membership of Iranian Advocates for Human Rights.

For 800 days, she shared a prison unit with human and women's rights activists, some of them her former clients. A further 43 female political prisoners and prisoners of conscience are kept in the Iranian regime's prisons. Sotoudeh's own lawyer, Abdol Fatah Soltani, was arrested in 2011 and has been sentenced to 13 years in prison. He is in the men's section in the same prison in Tehran.

The reason for Sotoudeh's hunger strike this time is that the regime continues to harass her husband and the couple's two minor children. The children are, despite regulations that give them a right to it, not allowed see their mother in person and have physical contact with her, but only allowed to communicate with her through a glass-enclosed booth. Prison authorities have also moved the family's visitor's day from Sundays to Wednesdays. This is to extend control of the family's visit, according to her spouse Reza Khandan. In addition, the couple's oldest child, the 12-year-old daughter, received a travel ban. This was discovered when she and her father planned a trip abroad. Now, the daughter and the father have been summoned to court. All this has upset Nasrin Sotoudeh who decided to protest and defend her family's rights, said Khandan.

On November 6th, prison authorities shifted her to a women's groupcell in Section 209 where she is, according to her husband Khandan, kept in isolation. On November 7, he wrote on his Facebook: *A couple of months ago, the chief of the Iranian jail said that there were no isolation cells. Yesterday I saw that Nasrin's cell is just behind the official offices. They share the walls now. The jail chief should know, therefore, that she is in an isolation cell where she is even denied her glasses so that she could not read what the previous prisoners in that cell had written on the walls'.*

Meantime, Nasrin's health condition is worsening day by day. She has also been subjected to a character assassination campaign by the state media. She has been accused as state's 'enemy no 1'.

Her pictures have been published where she is shown taking part in various meetings and women's demonstrations. She has been declared a prostitute and a bad mother. The text in the press is aggressive, vulgar and threatening. She is being painted as a western agent.

Nasrin Sotoudeh has been awarded this year's Sakharov Prize . It seems this prize has annoyed the regime and her life is in danger.

Since she won the price in October and EU representatives asked Iranian authorities to let them meet her, the campaign against her has intensified. EU's request was refused and the visit was postponed.

By harassing her children and spouse, the regime in Iran is trying to force Sotoudeh and other lawyers that defended dissidents, children and religious minorities for many years, to make a public apology. She has been under pressure to admit the accusations and compromise with the regime.

Nasrin Sotoudeh refuses to make any compromise with the regime and had declared her determination once and for all in one of her early statements: *"I am a woman from Gilan (a province of the Caspian Sea, famous for it's outspoken women), I fear only God and no other"*. Sotoudeh's hunger strike has attracted considerable international attention and support from women's rights group as well as human rights groups.

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P.S.

* From Viewpoint Online, Thursday, 15 November 2012 21:20:

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/nasrin-sotoudeh-iranian-lawyer-womens-rights-activist-on-hunger-strike.html>

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