

24 September 2020

Iran: Nasrin Sotoudeh transferred from hospital back to Evin prison

On 23 September 2020, woman human rights defender Nasrin Sotoudeh was returned to the quarantine ward of the Evin prison after spending five days in Taleghani hospital. Reza Kahandan, the defender's husband, described Sotoudeh's health condition as being even worse than when she was admitted to hospital.

Nasrin Sotoudeh is a woman human rights defender and a lawyer who has legally represented many imprisoned Iranian 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 in prison and 148 lashes after being convicted of eight different offences, including "espionage" and "membership of an illegal group". The latter offence refers to her membership of Legam, an organisation that campaigns to abolish the death penalty in Iran. According to Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code she will serve only the longest of her sentences, which is 12 years.

On 23 September 2020, after spending five days in the coronary care unit (CCU) of Taleghani hospital, Nasrin Sotoudeh was transferred back to Evin prison, where she will be held in a quarantine ward. The woman human rights defender, who has been on hunger strike since 10 August 2020, was hospitalised on 19 September due to her deteriorating health condition. She showed no signs of recovery prior to her transfer back to prison.

On 22 September 2020 Nasrin Sotoudeh's husband wrote that her family had to wait eight hours a day in the hospital in the hope that they could see her pass in the hallway as she was being transferred between rooms. The family had been repeatedly denied permission to speak with her.

On 20 September 2020, the defender's husband managed to have a brief conversation with her as she was brought in a wheelchair back from cardiac tests to another area of the hospital. He reported that she was almost entirely unable to move and struggled to speak because she had difficulty breathing. The family has been denied permission to make telephone calls to the CCU and the doctors were reportedly forbidden to report to the family on her situation. There was heavy security throughout the hospital.

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

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about Nasrin Sotoudeh's deteriorating medical condition while on hunger strike. Front Line Defenders is furthermore concerned that the woman human rights defender's family have not been allowed appropriate access to visit her and have not been fully informed of her medical condition. It believes that, in her current state, Nasrin Sotoudeh is at serious risk in Evin prison, where she will have reduced access to medical facilities, despite her condition having worsened.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. 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;
2. 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;
3. Provide the necessary medical treatment for Nasrin Sotoudeh and provide her family with full, factual information on her health condition, including by allowing them to decide on, and give consent to any medical intervention;
4. 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.