

Iran Cannot Hide the Truth Behind Sakineh

December 10, 2010

On the occasion of the International Human Rights Day, Iran's judicial authorities have surpassed their own cruelty and cynicism in an effort to distract public opinion from their dismal human rights record in particular when it comes to due process of law and the right to defense. Flouting rules and procedures (and common sense), they have dragged in front of the cameras a woman, Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, they have held between life and death for years and whose son they hold hostage. The breaking news here is that she admits to her own guilt in an alleged crime for which she was tried and sentenced years ago and for which she was given the maximum punishment allowed in the law.

Photos of Sakineh and her son Sajjad in their own home circulated yesterday on the web giving some of us a strong and [premature sensation of relief](#). Unfortunately, these were not photos celebrating their release. This was yet another desperate attempt by the Islamic Republic authorities to justify a death sentence that cannot be justified based on Iranian law and international standards. Anyone with knowledge of legal procedures, of the minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners, or plain common sense, will not be fooled by this show of strength from a powerful and brutal state that can and does coerce citizens into confessing to crimes they may or may not have committed.

Sakineh is a woman who is at Iran's mercy. Her lawyers have been forced into exile or incarcerated, and her son's life is in the judiciary's hands. So let's not waste any time on this pathetic televised show and remind the Iranian government that Sakineh's confessions have no legal value, will not deter us from empathizing with her and all those who are in her case, and, most importantly, that they will not distract us from the truth.

Human rights violators in Iran fear the truth, and the job of the international community is to remind Iran that it knows and will not forget. The truth is that due process of law is systematically violated in Iran. The truth is that Iranian leaders use the justice system for furthering their political goals; that the judiciary is infringing on the independence of lawyers by introducing laws allowing it to revoke lawyers' licenses; that those very brave lawyers who try to defend their clients or the right to defense are imprisoned.

So on the occasion of International Human Rights Day, let us remember all those human rights defenders who are arbitrarily arrested, denied a right to proper defense, and are spending this important day in Iranian prisons. Let us have a particular thought for all the attorneys who are in prison

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including Nasrin Sotoudeh, a lawyer and women's rights activist who is on a hunger strike protesting her arbitrary arrest, and Houtan Kian, Sakineh's lawyer who is detained for trying to give visibility to Sakineh's case.

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