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Shirin Ebadi & 4 human rights organisations call for end to impunity and visit of Special Rapporteur to Iran

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On the eve of the second anniversary of the widespread crackdown on public protests in Iran, Shirin Ebadi, 2003 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and four human rights organizations called on the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council to take a more serious stance in protecting the security and human rights of the Iranian people. The four human rights organizations are: Reporters without Borders, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and its affiliate, the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI).

"The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Iran should be named as soon as possible and his mission to Iran expedited. The country's situation is deteriorating day by day. Arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of citizens, systematic torture and executions with no legal basis continue. People are not only denied the right to peaceful assembly, but government forces and "plain-clothed agents" even prevent them from holding private mourning ceremonies and violently attack them," said Nobel Peace Laureate and human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi.

On 1 June 2011, political prisoner and women's rights activist Haleh Sahabi was attacked during the funeral procession of her father, Ezzatollah Sahabi, a prominent Iranian politician, who had died of natural causes two days earlier. According to credible eyewitnesses, Haleh Sahabi died as a direct result of this physical assault. So far, the Islamic Republic authorities have not taken any steps to investigate the circumstances surrounding her death. Some officials have announced the reason for her death as "heart attack" in government media. Under pressure from security officials, Haleh Sahabi's body was buried at night without any investigation into the cause of her death.

Ever since the disputed 12 June 2009 presidential election and the onset of public protests, thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested and tried in unfair trials without access to their basic legal rights, and received long sentences. According to testimonies by prisoners and their families, many of them were subjected to torture and cruel, inhuman treatment, and insulting abuse during their interrogation and while serving prison terms. Some of these prisoners have published collective letters formally filing complaints against the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the Intelligence Ministry, and judicial authorities for psychological and physical torture.

The Iranian Judiciary lacks independence. According to Article 110 of the Iranian Constitution, the Head of the Judiciary is appointed by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although Article 156 of the Iranian Constitution stipulates the head of the Judiciary's responsibilities to include "ensuring the rights of all, and promotion of justice and legitimate liberties," Ayatollah Amoli Larijani, the incumbent head of the Judiciary, not only fails to

adhere to those provisions, but by failing to prosecute violators of the rights of the people and the officials who carry out and order the commission of torture and serious crimes, he further encourages them in their violent acts of violence in the society at large and against prisoners in particular.

Shirin Ebadi said: "Considering the deteriorating state of the Iranian judicial system, the Iranian citizens have grown hopeless about the implementation of justice. They are no longer prepared to file their complaints with the courts. Political prisoners and their families have boycotted the Tehran Prosecutor to protest the Judiciary's negligence. They have declared that henceforth they would not make any requests to the judicial authorities. The international community is obligated to help the Iranian people have access to justice."

Haleh Sahabi is not the only woman who has fallen victim to violence and impunity of those who commit violence. During the past three decades, hundreds of women have been murdered on the streets or inside the prisons. For instance, in July 2003, an Iranian-Canadian journalist, Zahra Kazemi, was beaten by the judicial authorities inside Evin prison, and died shortly thereafter as a result of head injury. The body of Zahra Kazemi was hurriedly buried in Shiraz against the wishes of her son, Stephan Hachemi, who lives in Canada. Zahra Kazemi's mother has said in an interview that she was under immense pressure from the Iranian authorities to agree to her daughter's burial in Iran. Zahra Kazemi's family lawyers repeatedly criticised the pertaining judicial proceedings. During the lower court and appeals court proceedings, the lawyers were not allowed to call witnesses to trial, some of whom were high-level judicial officials, including Saeed Mortazavi, then Tehran General and Revolutionary Courts Prosecutor, who was personally involved in Zahra Kazemi's interrogation and, according to several witnesses, was directly involved in beating her.

The limitations imposed on independent lawyers who defend prisoners of conscience are in part the outcome of their relentless pursuit of the institutionalised impunity within the Iranian judicial system. Mohammad Seifzadeh, a prominent Iranian lawyer and a member of the Human Rights Defenders Centre, who also represented Zahra Kazemi, has been arbitrarily and illegally arrested and imprisoned. He was sentenced by Branch 15 of Tehran Revolutionary Court to nine years imprisonment and a 10-year ban on legal practice on charge of "cooperating to establish the Human Rights Defenders Centre." Nasrin Sotoudeh, lawyer to Haleh Sahabi, was arrested on 4 September 2010, and was later sentenced to 11 years imprisonment. A witness to the Iranian Judiciary's injustice, Sotoudeh has forfeited her right to appeal the court's decision.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur for human rights must investigate all cases of gross and systematic human rights violations in Iran. We, the signatory human rights organisations, believe that the institutionalised impunity is one of the main reasons for the increased violence and commitment of tragic crimes such as the murder of Haleh Sahabi, continued practice of systematic torture, and the cruel and inhuman treatment inside prisons and arbitrary arrests in Iran. We urge that the UN Special Rapporteur be appointed and visit Iran as soon as possible. We are committed to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur in providing documents and introducing eyewitnesses to gross human rights violations in Iran.

<http://www.fidh.org/Iran-Impunity-continues-to-claim-victims>