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## Iran sentences two journalists to long prison terms

New York, December 3, 2009—The Committee to Protect Journalists is deeply concerned by the sentencing of Hengameh Shahidi and Saeed Laylaz, two prominent journalists, to extended prison terms. Shahidi was sentenced on Monday to six years and three months in prison, while Laylaz was sentenced to a prison sentence of no fewer than nine years, according to local and international news reports.

Shahidi, who is an adviser to defeated presidential candidate Mehdi Karoubi, a blogger and contributor to reformist newspapers such as *Etemad e Melli*, was arrested on June 30, according to local news reports. The Committee of Human Rights Reporters, a local watchdog group, reported that Shahidi spent 50 days in solitary confinement and that she underwent “extreme mental anguish during her interrogation,” according to released detainees who had been held with her.

Laylaz, the editor of the now-banned daily business journal *Sarmayeh* and a vocal critic of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's economic policies, was arrested at home on June 17, his wife, Sepharnaz Panahi, told the BBC Persian service. He was among more than 100 opposition figures and journalists who faced a mass televised judicial proceeding in August on vague antistate accusations, according to local and international news reports.

“The prison terms for Saeed Laylaz and Hengameh Shahidi are highly politicized and unjustified,” said CPJ Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator Mohamed Abdel Dayem. “We urge the Iranian judiciary to overturn them on appeal. Secrecy and procedural irregularities have marred both cases. Authorities have not even officially disclosed Laylaz's sentence.”

Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court charged Shahidi with mutiny through attending riots, activities against the Islamic Republic of Iran through conducting interviews with the “anti-revolutionary” BBC, insulting the president, and disruption of public order, Reuters reported. Shahidi rejected these charges, saying that she attended two demonstrations in June as a journalist and as an advisor to Karroubi and Etemad Melli Party, the BBC Persian service reported. Her lawyer, Mohammad Mostafaie, called the sentence “unfair,” and said that he would appeal, according to the BBC Persian service. Shahidi is currently out on bail.

Laylaz spent more than three months in solitary confinement before being moved to a group cell and has been denied newspapers as well as pen and paper, according to his wife, who was interviewed by the Committee of Human Rights Reporters Web site. Laylaz's trial began on November 18. He was charged with “congregation and mutiny against national security, propagation against the regime, disrupting public order, and keeping classified documents,” according to local and international news sources. His wife told news Web site *Kalameh* that the trial lasted only two hours.

Laylaz's wife said most of the evidence against her husband pertained to his interviews he'd done for *Sarmayeh*. She also stated that a centerpiece of the case against him, a so-called “classified document,” was a published investigation into the Iranian judiciary, which is widely available online. It is unclear when Laylaz was sentenced or what his exact sentence is. The semi-official Fars News Agency quoted his lawyer, Mahmoud Alizadeh Tabatabaie, as saying that he was verbally informed that the sentence was nine years but has not received the official verdict in writing. Other local Iranian news sources have reported that Laylaz received a prison term of up to 15 years.

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