

Statement by Mehrangiz Kar

Press Conference of PEN Canada and PEN American Center, Toronto, June 25, 2002

I spent the spring of 2000 in prison. My accusation was: why were you critical of the legal system of Iran in an international conference with the foreign correspondents present, saying their legal system was intolerant of freedom? Why did you rip through the heavy veil of centuries, and why were you unfettered in expressing your thoughts?

I had said in that meeting: "Iran cannot be able to make itself compatible with the world requirement in the third millennium within the framework of the present constitution and under the domination of misogynous lifestyles." I had further added: "After 21 years of violations of human rights, Iran has no choice other than accepting reforms."

Those in Iran today "passing judgment" on others could not tolerate this forthrightness in a woman who had been writing for 33 years. They called my peaceful talk an obvious case of criminal behavior. It was according to the verdict of these judges that I stepped into the solitary confinement. When the door of the cell was closed behind me, I thought I had lost my contact forever with a world that stood at the threshold of the third millennium.

I underwent inquisition for hours on end in the spring of 2000. I was tried at the age of 57 for an article I had written when I was 24, when I had criticized gender limitations and prejudices imposed on women. I was released on heavy bail.

Sick and tired, I returned to my family and my professional life. I soon realized that those "passing judgment" in Iran today were not ready to tolerate my feminine consciousness in the realm of thinking, and they were determined to break the female conscience, which had achieved even better awareness through the experience of prison and inquisition. This is what they did. When they could not stand world pressure, the struggle of all PEN Centers, the press and other media, and when they were forced into permitting me to leave Iran to continue treatment abroad, they outwitted themselves by another trick. They didn't want that female conscience that had slipped through their grips and once more could write and speak of freedom, to return to her natural and cultural life, resuming activity in her own country.

When I was hospitalized in the United States, I heard the news that my seventy-one year old husband had been abducted and taken to an unknown prison. This was eight months ago. His legal case is shrouded in ambiguity. However, one thing is quite clear:

"Siamak Pourzand is physically and spiritually in a bad shape. He has been tortured and confessions have been extracted from him against his will. He is under physical and psychological pressure now to agree to a television interview, making allegations against himself and against others. They have destroyed his identity.

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Consequently, they have destroyed my chances of returning to Iran and resuming cultural activities which are my natural rights. They have opened these two cases, with one aim in mind: the silencing of a family in which the wife has tried to defend the rights of women living under oppression, by using every opportunity to break the silence of these women, and by writing and reporting about their conditions. And she has done this for 33 years as a writer and journalist, and for 20 years as attorney of law. To silence me, they have trapped my husband, the father of my children. But they have made a mistake. The struggle for the promotion of the situation of women to the human standard they deserve more than ever, will go on. Women will no longer tolerate silence and oppression.

Mehrangiz Kar, June 25, 2002

writers *in* prison *committee*

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Please cut and paste this letter onto your personal or institutional letterhead requesting that Siamak Pourzand be released and mail to His Excellency Hojjatoleslam Sayed Mohammad Khatami (postage \$1.25).

Urgent Appeal: Siamak Pourzand

_____ Date

His Excellency Hojjatoleslam Sayed Mohammad Khatami
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o The Presidency
Palestine Avenue
Azerbaijan Intersection,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Excellency,

PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of the worldwide writers' organisation, International PEN, calls for the immediate release of 72 year-old journalist, film critic and PEN Canada honorary member **Siamak Pourzand**, who is serving eleven years in prison.

Pourzand was sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment on charges of "undermining state security through his links with monarchists and counter-revolutionaries" on May 3 2002 by the Tehran Press Court. It is widely believed that the charges against him are based on 'confessions' which are thought to have been exacted under duress. In May his family reported that he had suffered a heart attack in prison. Pourzand has been dependent on medication for a serious heart complaint and has reportedly not been allowed to receive this medication from his family throughout his imprisonment.

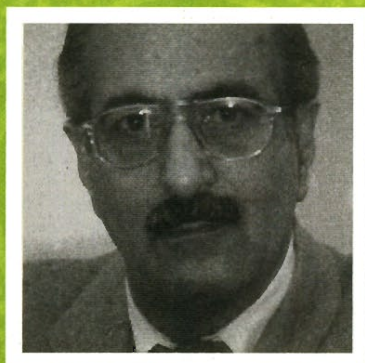
PEN Canada considers the charges against Siamak Pourzand to be in violation of his right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran has ratified. We are extremely concerned about reports that Pourzand may be under intense pressure to confess to the charges against him. We are also gravely concerned for Pourzand's health and urge that he receive all necessary medical treatment immediately. We urge the authorities to release him from prison immediately and unconditionally on humanitarian

treatment he requires, including transfer to a hospital if needed.

We urge the authorities to respond to these concerns.

Your Name
PEN Canada member

IRAN



Siamak Pourzand

JOURNALIST AND FILM CRITIC

Arrested on November 24, 2001 and held for more than three months without charges and without any information about his whereabouts being released. Later charged with espionage and threatening national security. Sentenced on May 3, 2002 to 11 years in prison. Pourzand may have been coerced into confessing to the charges against him. The 73-year-old journalist is the husband of Honorary Member Mehrangiz Kar, and suffers from diabetes and heart problems.