

PRESS RELEASE

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center Condemns Women's Convictions for Gathering Signatures

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT - The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) condemns the conviction by the appeals court in Qom of two women's rights activists, Fatemeh Masjedi and Maryam Bidgoli. Their lawyer, Shadi Sadr, reports that they have each been sentenced to six months imprisonment and payment of fines for merely gathering signatures on behalf of the One Million Signatures Campaign. Both women have been ordered to report to prison on Saturday.

This is the first time a person has been convicted by the Islamic Republic for merely gathering signatures for the Campaign. The ruling is also alarming because both the lower and appellate courts considered the One Million Signatures Campaign - a group formed in 2006 to collect one million signatures of men and women in support of reform of Iran's discriminatory laws against women - to be a group aimed at overthrowing the Islamic Republic.

Masjedi and Bidgoli were arrested on May 7, 2009, a month before the disputed June presidential election, while they were reportedly investigating an honor killing in Qom. They were held for twelve days before being released upon payment of a high bond. At trial in the Revolutionary Court they were charged with activity against national security, attempting to overthrow the state, publication of lies, and propaganda against the state through membership in the Campaign.

Masjedi and Bidgoli's arrests and convictions are part of the Islamic Republic's concerted attempt to dismantle the women's rights movement. Beginning in the months leading up to the June 2009 presidential election, the authorities arrested activists during demonstrations, in their homes and in public, often without warrants. They searched homes and seized belongings. They detained activists and their defenders without charge and denied them access to their lawyers or families. Prison authorities have subjected activists to lengthy periods of solitary confinement, and lengthy and often violent interrogations. They released some women but only after they and their families posted high bail amounts or produced financial guarantees. Many have fled the country.

For in-depth analysis of the Islamic Republic's targeting of women's rights activists, see IHRDC's report *Silencing the Women's Rights Movement in Iran* that is available in English and Persian on IHRDC's website at www.iranhrdc.org.

IHRDC is a nonprofit organization based in New Haven, Connecticut that was founded in 2004 by a group of human rights scholars, activists, and historians. Its staff of human rights lawyers and researchers produce comprehensive and detailed reports on the human rights situation in Iran since the 1979 revolution. The Center's goal is to encourage an informed dialogue among scholars and the general public in both Iran and abroad. The human rights reports and a database of documents relating to human rights in Iran are available to the public for research and educational purposes on the Center's website.