



IRAN

NARGES MOHAMMADI

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST UNDER CONSTANT PERSECUTION

Narges Mohammadi is a human rights activist who has been sentenced several times for her non-violent activism. She was in prison from 22 April to 31 July 2012, but was granted parole for health reasons. She was imprisoned again from 5 May 2015 to 8 October 2020, first in Evin Prison in Tehran, then in Zanjan. On 23 May 2021, she was again sentenced to 2½ years in prison and 80 lashes and then imprisoned in November 2021. In a further trial on 15 January 2022, she was sentenced to a further 8 years and 2 months in prison and 74 lashes. According to her relatives, she was given a further 15 months in prison on 15 January 2024 for alleged "propaganda against the system". She is now in Evin Prison in Tehran. Even in prison, she continues her human rights work and reports on her fellow prisoners and their fate.

A LONG-STANDING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

Narges Mohammadi is a journalist and physicist and was the executive director and deputy director of the Center for Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) in Tehran. The CHRD office was closed by the Iranian authorities in 2008, members of the center were harassed, intimidated and some were arrested.

Narges Mohammadi was also a co-founder of the "End the Execution of Youth" initiative and of the National Peace Committee and the Committee for Free and Fair Elections. Narges Mohammadi was also a founding member of the organization "Legam - Stopping the Death Penalty Step by Step".

She was born on 21 April 1972, is married to Taghi Ramani and is the mother of twins, Ali and Kiana, born in 2005. Her husband (who himself was imprisoned in Iran for political reasons) went into exile in France, and her children were able to join their father on 17 July 2015.

Even the multiple convictions and prison sentences did not stop the human rights activist. Among other things, she organized protests in prison against the prison conditions and smuggled out reports about the fate of fellow prisoners. In 2021, when she was briefly free, she took part in the documentary film "White Torture", in which former prisoners talk about their time behind bars.

On 6 October 2023, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

FIRST CONVICTIONS AND POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT

In 2015, Narges Mohammadi was already serving the remainder of a 6-year prison sentence from 2011.

She was sentenced again on 17 May 2016. Her "offence": "founding an illegal group" - meaning the anti-death penalty campaign "Legam". She received 10 years in prison for this offence. In addition, she was sentenced to five years for "assembly and conspiracy against national security" and one year for "spreading propaganda against the system". She therefore had to remain in prison for the duration of her longest single sentence (10 years). The sentence was based in part on the fact that she had met EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton in Tehran with a group of women's rights activists on International Women's Day 2014.

HARASSMENT IN PRISON AND STATE OF HEALTH

In detention, she protested against the many harassments she and her fellow prisoners had to endure, such as restrictions on their ability to call their children or receive visits from relatives. She was also repeatedly denied appropriate medical treatment.

Narges Mohammadi had to be hospitalized several times for seizures, heavy bleeding in her uterus, severe pain and an operation on her gall bladder. In 2023, she was initially refused hospitalization because she refused to wear a headscarf.

TRANSFER TO ZANJAN PRISON

On 24 December 2019, Narges Mohammadi was forcibly transferred to Zanjan prison. She was held together with women serving time for serious crimes and is said to have received death threats from a fellow prisoner. She and other prisoners in Zanjan prison also suffered from overcrowding, poor ventilation, dirty bathrooms and a lack of sanitary facilities and products.

In April 2020, she had severe coughing fits and chest pains for several weeks after the authorities sprayed high doses of insecticide to combat a bed flea infestation. She was in particular danger due to a pre-existing lung condition. Narges Mohammadi and eleven other women in Zanjan prison began showing symptoms of Covid-19 on 29 June 2020.

RELEASED, BUT FURTHER ARRESTS

On 8 October 2020, Narges Mohammadi was released from prison after serving her sentence. Her sentence had been shortened by the 36th Chamber of the Tehran Court of Appeal.

After her release, she continued to campaign for human rights. She was arrested five times for this. Once on 12 June 2021, when she and other human rights defenders tried to protest against the imprisonment and torture of Vahid and Habib Afkari (the brothers of an executed wrestler) in front of Adelabad Prison in Shiraz. She was beaten and dragged by her hair, taken into a car, driven away and later abandoned at the side of a road.

RENEWED CONVICTIONS AND IMPRISONMENT

On February 22, 2020, the authorities informed her that another criminal case had been opened against her for "rioting in prison" and "insulting the head of Evin Prison". The first charge related to a sit-in with other prisoners to protest against the killing of protesters in November 2019. The second charge was based on her accusing the head of Evin prison and other prison staff of insulting her, threatening her with death and beating her during transportation to Zanjan prison. On May 23, 2021, the Tehran Criminal Court sentenced her to 2½ years in prison, 80 lashes and two fines.

On 16 November 2021, she was arrested while attending a memorial service for Ebrahim Ketabdar. He had been killed by security forces two years earlier during the nationwide protests. According to her husband, she was brutally beaten during her arrest. The following day, she called from prison to say that she would now have to serve her 2½-year prison sentence.

On 12 January 2022, another trial against Narges Mohammadi took place at the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. It lasted only 5 minutes and she was not allowed to have a lawyer. On 15 January 2022, the court sentenced her to 8 years and 2 months in prison, 74 lashes and a 2-year ban on living in Tehran, using social media and engaging in political activities for "assembly and conspiracy to commit offences against national security" and "disturbing public order". She later announced that even her nomination for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize served as a charge. On 19 January, she was transferred to Shahr-e-Rey Prison (also known as Gharchak Prison) in Varamin near Tehran.

On 22 February, she was granted furlough for medical reasons. On 11 April, she stated in a radio interview that she was ready to return to prison. One day later, however, security forces stormed her house and arrested her there, together with Alieh Motalebzadeh, another journalist and human rights defender who was visiting her.

She was given a further 15 months in prison on 15 January 2024 for "propaganda against the system".

She is now back in Evin prison. On November 14, 2024, she underwent surgery at a hospital to remove a tumor in her leg, which turned out to be benign. Just two days later, she was taken back to prison against medical advice to allow her 3 months recovery time. On December 4, 2024, she was at least granted a 3 weeks' leave.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST EVEN UNDER PRISON CONDITIONS

Even in prison Narges Mohammadi is continuing her human rights work, compiling a list of her fellow prisoners and reporting on the prison conditions in the women's wing there: solitary confinement, denied medical treatment and sexualized attacks. On 27 December 2023, she and her fellow prisoners even organized a loud protest during a visit by a delegation of revolutionary judges and high-ranking representatives of the judicial authorities.

In a telephone interview in the summer of 2023, she told the New York Times:

"The more they punish me, the more they take away from me, the more I will fight until we achieve democracy and freedom."