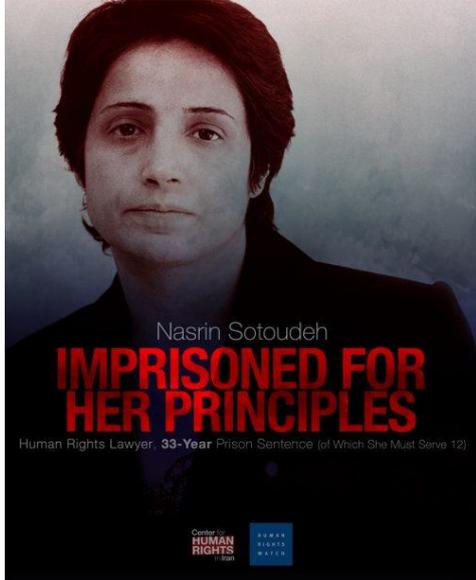


Nasrin Sotoudeh Speaks from Prison

Original: August 12, 2020

On August 11, 2020, Nasrin Sotoudeh, Iran's most prominent human rights lawyer, went on hunger strike to demand the release of political prisoners amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In a letter from Tehran's infamous Evin prison, she warned that inmates were being denied due process and access to legal representation. "It is impossible to continue their detention under these oppressive conditions," wrote Sotoudeh. Sotoudeh said that interrogators acted with impunity in extrajudicial



proceedings. Prisoners "are treated as if there are no laws and none of them have the right to any legal outlets," she added.

Born in 1963, Sotoudeh has been a vocal critic of Iran's judicial process. She has represented women's rights activists, victims of domestic abuse, minors on death row, journalists and Kurdish rights activists. In March 2019, Sotoudeh was convicted of nine crimes and [sentenced](#) to a total of 38 years in prison and 148 lashes. Among the charges, she was sentenced to 12 years for "encouraging corruption and prostitution," according to her husband, Reza Khandan, for representing a woman arrested for peacefully protesting compulsory hijab (head covering). Sotoudeh must serve 12 years out of her sentence before becoming eligible for parole. The following is the full text of Sotoudeh's letter and a profile of the lawyer.

To Human Rights Defenders:

In the midst of the Covid-19 crisis which has gripped Iran and the world, the conditions of political prisoners [in Iran] have become so difficult that it is impossible to continue their detention under these oppressive conditions. Their legal cases are made up of unbelievable charges of espionage, corruption on earth, acts against national security, corruption, prostitution, and formation of a unlawful group on the Telegram [social media platform] that can result in up to ten years of imprisonment or even execution.

Many defendants are denied access to an independent attorney or free (unchecked) communication with their own attorneys from the start of their cases through the sentencing. The Revolutionary Court judges recklessly and repeatedly tell the political defendants that they issue verdicts solely based on reports from the intelligence and security agencies and the interrogator tells them the final verdict in advance, from the moment of their arrest. Human rights attorneys are sent to prison because the Revolutionary Court judges become furious with them. Those who face unbelievably heavy charges receive maximum and even more than maximum sentences. Then, a political prisoner who has been sentenced under such unjust conditions incredulously hopes for a legal remedy.

Courts of appeals, conditional parole, sentence suspension, postponement of sentences, and a new law that insists on minimum charges have been announced, but in extrajudicial proceedings, the exercise of all these legal rights are left to interrogators who shut all doors [to freedom] for political prisoners. Many prisoners are now eligible for conditional parole and many would be released with the enforcement of the new law, but prisoners are treated as if there are no laws and none of them have the right to any legal outlets. Prisoners' correspondence to find legal ways out [of the situation] have remained unaddressed.

As all correspondences remain unanswered, I am going on a hunger strike, demanding the release of political prisoners.

Hoping for justice in my homeland, Iran.

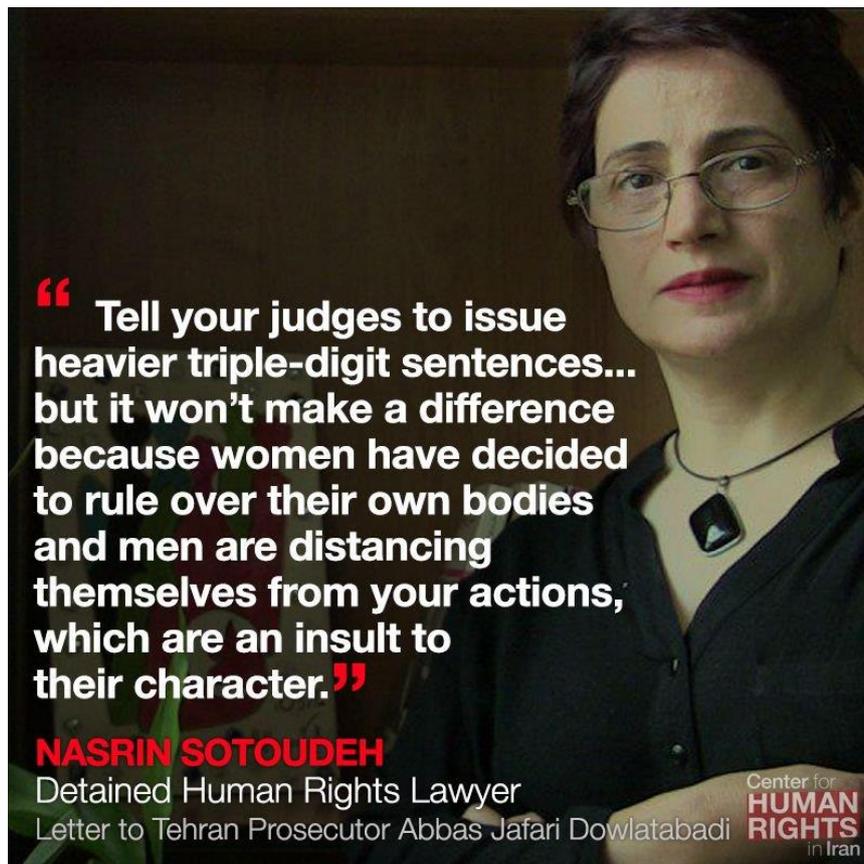
Nasrin Sotoudeh, Evin [Prison]

August 11, 2020

Nasrin Sotoudeh

Nasrin Sotoudeh, who was [born](#) in 1963, is one of the most prominent human rights lawyers in Iran and a vocal critic of its judicial [process](#), treatment of [women](#) and [death penalty](#). She has [represented](#) Nobel Prize winner [Shirin Ebadi](#) as well as women's rights activists, victims of domestic [abuse](#), [minors on death row](#), journalists and Kurdish rights activists.

Before the 2009 presidential election, Sotoudeh was an active [member](#) of the Iranian Women's Coalition, which [demanded](#) gender equality in the law. After the post-election [protests](#), Sotoudeh [represented](#) the families of demonstrators killed by government forces. She was [arrested](#) after a raid on her home in September 2010. She was [charged](#) with "propaganda against the system" as well as "acting against national security." In January 2011, she [received](#) an 11-year prison sentence that was later reduced to six years after [international outcry](#) from the United Nations and international human rights [groups](#). Sotoudeh was given early [release](#) in September 2013.



In 2013, Sotoudeh [co-founded](#) the Campaign for Step By Step Abolition of the Death Penalty, known by the Farsi acronym [LEGAM](#). LEGAM was established to advocate legislation that would [abolish](#) capital punishment. In early 2018, she took the case of [Narges Hosseini](#), an activist arrested for [protesting](#) the law requiring hijab, or head covering, who refused to attend her own trial. Hosseini “objects to the forced hijab and considers it her legal right to express her protest,” Sotoudeh [said](#). “She is not prepared to say she is sorry.”

On June 4, 2018, Sotoudeh [criticized](#) Iran's Criminal Procedures Regulations, which forces defendants facing security charges to select a lawyer from a list pre-approved by the judiciary. “A number of lawyers have said they are ready to hold a protest sit-in if necessary,” Sotoudeh [said](#). On June 13, 2018, she was again [arrested](#). According to Sotoudeh's [husband](#), government agents did not explain the charges but informed her that she had been sentenced to five years in prison. In August 2018, Payam Derafshan, Sotoudeh's lawyer, [reported](#) that the five-year sentence was [based](#) on a charge of “espionage in hiding” issued in absentia in 2015. The subsequent charges against her included “membership in the Defenders of Human Rights Center, the LEGAM

group (against capital punishment), and the National Peace Council,” as well as “encouraging people to corruption and prostitution.” The “corruption and prostitution” charge may have been [connected](#) to Sotoudeh’s defense of Hosseini.

Sotoudeh [refused](#) to appear at her trial in December 2018 to [protest](#) the state’s refusal to let her use her own attorney. On March 11, 2019, she was convicted of seven offenses and [sentenced](#) to 148 lashes and 33 years in addition to the earlier five-year sentence. Under [Article 134](#) of Iran’s penal code, a person convicted of multiple offenses can serve the maximum sentence for the biggest offense. Sotoudeh later [claimed](#) that the longest sentence was twelve years for “encouraging... corruption and prostitution.”

The United States, United Nations, European Union and international human rights groups [condemned](#) Sotoudeh’s sentence, but she [refused](#) to appeal the case on grounds that she did not accept the legitimacy of the verdict or the judicial system. In November 2019, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) [dedicated](#) its 2019 Human Rights Award to Sotoudeh as well as to Mohammad Najafi, Amir Salar Davoudi and Abdolfatah Soltani, all Iranian human rights lawyers.

In March 2020, Sotoudeh wrote an open [letter](#) for International Women’s Day. She [called](#) for an end to the “systematic” violation of women’s rights in Iran and appealed to the Iranian and U.S. governments to set aside their rivalries for the sake of their female citizens. Ten days later, Sotoudeh began a [hunger strike](#) to demand [freedom](#) for all political prisoners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three activists imprisoned in Evin [joined](#) her protest. Nasrin [claimed](#) that she understood the medical risks of beginning a hunger strike during the Coronavirus outbreak and that she resorted to the protest as a “last resort.”