To:
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UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges
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Ms. Dunja Mijatović
Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of
Europe
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Ms. Roberta Metsola
Dear all,

The undersigned organizations urge you to take concrete and urgent action in the case of Nasrin Sotoudeh, prominent and well-known lawyer and human rights defender.1

On Sunday, 29 October, the media broke the news that she had been arrested while attending the funeral of Armita Garavand, the 16-year-old girl who died after 28 days in a coma following her arrest by the infamous Morality Police in the Tehran metro.2

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1 Nasrin Sotoudeh, 60, mother of two, a distinguished Iranian human rights lawyer, was arrested for a second time on June 13, 2018 after she represented a woman facing imprisonment for peacefully protesting against Iran’s compulsory hijab law by removing it in public. Sotoudeh was informed that she had been detained based on a 5 year prison sentence that was issued against her in absentia in 2015 by a Revolutionary Court judge on the charge of “espionage in hiding”.

On March 9, 2019, she received a copy of a court ruling issued after a one-day hearing held in absentia on December 30, 2018, by Branch 28 of the Islamic Revolution Court in Tehran. The Court found her guilty and sentenced her to 33 years in prison and 148 lashes on the following seven charges: “gathering and collusion against national security” (Article 510 of the Islamic Penal Code), “spreading propaganda against the system” (Article 500), “effective membership of the illegal and anti-security splinter groups Defenders of Human Rights Centre, LEGAM and National Council of Peace” (Article 498); “encouraging people to commit corruption and prostitution, and providing the means for it” (Article 639), “appearing without the sharia-sanctioned hijab at the premises of the magistrate’s office” (Article 638); “disrupting public order and calm” (Article 618) and “spreading falsehoods with intent to disturb the public opinion” (Article 698). She is currently serving her sentence although she is on medical furlough since July 2021, and continues to advocate for people’s basic human rights.

For her commitment to the defence of human rights she has been honoured internationally with many prestigious awards such as PEN America’s 2011 Freedom to Write, the Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament in 2012, the Ludovic Trarieux International Human Rights Prize in 2018, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) Human Rights Award in 2019 and the Right Livelihood Award in 2020.

She was taken along with other arrested women to the Vozara detention centre, the same one in which Mahsa Amini died last year. She was scheduled to be heard in her case on Monday, 30 October, at Evin prison, but was not brought to court because she refused to wear a veil. She was then taken to Qarchak prison, known for its poor conditions of detention, and is currently on a hunger strike in protest, refusing both essential medication for her health and visits.

The Iranian authorities must immediately and unconditionally free Nasrin Sotoudeh, drop all charges against her and stop persecuting her for her efforts to protect, inter alia, women from discrimination and humiliation to which they are subjected in contravention of the principle of civilization enshrined in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by Iran in 1948, according to which 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' where dignity comes even before rights.

Likewise, the international community, including the EU given its ongoing dialogue with Iran, must condemn all forms of violence, including executions, discrimination and persecution, recognizing the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association, as well as the right to a fair trial, as foundations of civilized living.

We Colleagues, Magistrates, NGOs and civil society are united and resolute in denouncing these violations of fundamental rights and freedoms and support human rights defenders. We no longer need martyrs to mourn, but heroes whose examples are to be followed.

We request a concrete statement from you, a decisive commitment to end the judicial harassment of Nasrin Sotoudeh, recalling the tenets of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers on the therein enshrined States’ responsibility.

If we do not defend human rights defenders, who will defend human rights?

We thank you for your attention and we look forward to your urgent and effective intervention.

Best regards,

Asociacion Libre de Abogadas y Abogados – Free Association of Lawyers

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3 Prominent Lawyer and Activists Beaten, Detained at Funeral of Teenager Armita Geravand, Center for Human Rights in Iran, 30 October 2023.
5 Resolution n. 53/144 adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998, Article 2 “1. Each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms, inter alia, by adopting such steps as may be necessary to create all conditions necessary in the social, economic, political and other fields, as well as the legal guarantees required to ensure that all persons under its jurisdiction, individually and in association with others, are able to enjoy all those rights and freedoms in practice. 2. Each State shall adopt such legislative, administrative and other steps as may be necessary to ensure that the rights and freedoms referred to in the present Declaration are effectively guaranteed.”
6 Quote from Rosemary Nelson, lawyer and human rights defender killed by a car bomb in Lurgan, Northern Ireland, in 1999.
Deutscher Anwalt Verein – The German Bar Association / Germany

European Criminal Bar Association

European Association of Lawyers for Democracy & World Human Rights

European Young Bar Association

Fédération des Barreaux d’Europe

Foundation Day of the Endangered Lawyer

Giuristi Democratici - Democratic Jurists / Italy
International Association of Lawyers, Institute for the Rule of Law

International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL), Monitoring Committee on Attacks on Lawyers

Institut des Droits de l'Homme des Avocats Européens (IDHAE)

Institut des Droits de l'Homme, Barreau de Bruxelles / Belgium

Lawyers For Lawyers / The Netherlands

Lawyers’ Rights Watch Canada

Legal Team Italia / Italy
Magistrats Européens pour la Démocratie et les Libertés

National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADEL) / South Africa

New York City Bar / The United States of America

Observatoire International des Avocats en Danger / International Observatory for Lawyers (OIAD)

Ordine degli Avvocati di Venezia / Italy

Ordre des Avocats Geneve - Geneva Bar Association / the Switzerland

Ordre des Barreaux Francophones et Germanophone (AVOCATS.BE) - Association of French- and German-speaking Bar Associations / Belgium
Özgürlük İçin Hukukçular Derneği – Association of Lawyers for Freedom / Turkey

Progressive Lawyers' Association / Turkey

Rechtsanwältinnen und Rechtsanwälte für Demokratie und Menschenrechte (RAV) / Germany

Rechtsanwaltskammer Berlin – Berlin Bar Association / Germany

Syndicat des Avocats de France - Trade Union of Lawyers / France

The Law Society of England and Wales
Union of the Italian Criminal Chambers – Endangered Lawyers Observatory and Europe Observatory/Italy

Verenigung Sociale Advocatuur Nederland - Netherlands Association of Social Advocates