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Venice, 18/12/2024

Re: Urgent request for intervention in favour of renowned Iranian human rights defender Reza Khandan

Dear All,

The undersigned organizations urge you to take urgent, concrete action in the case of Reza Khandan[1], renowned Iranian human rights activist and husband of the iconic human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh[2]. Khandan, Sotoudeh, and their family have been the objects of a sustained, protracted campaign of abuse at the hands of the Islamic Republic of Iran ("IR").

Khandan was once again arrested last Friday, 13 December 2024, after IR security forces raided his home[3].

Khandan was arrested for the first time in September 2018, and was charged with "*spreading propaganda against the system*" and "*colluding to commit crimes against national security*," after posting several online updates about his wife's June 2018 arrest and protesting against the IR's mandatory hijab law by producing and distributing pins that read: *'I stand against the compulsory hijab*'[4].

Khandan was released on bail in December 2018[5], but in January 2019 was sentenced to six years in prison with another activist, Farhad Meysami[6].

On 13 February 2023, Khandan was summoned to appear within 30 days in prison for the execution of this sentence[7], just a few short weeks after his wife Nasrin Sotoudeh appeared on CNN to call for the release of

[1] See PEN America, "*PEN America Condemns Arrest of Reza Khandan amid Crackdown on Women's Rights in Iran*"; IAPL Monitoring Committee on Attacks on Lawyers, "*Iran: Reza Khandan, Husband of Prominent Activist lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, Arrested*"

[2] Nasrin Sotoudeh, 61, distinguished Iranian human rights lawyer and mother of two, was arrested on 13 June 2018, after she represented a woman facing imprisonment for removing her hijab in public, peacefully protesting against the IR's compulsory hijab law. Sotoudeh was informed that she had been detained based on a five-year prison sentence that was imposed on her *in absentia* in 2015 by a Revolutionary Court judge on the charge of "*espionage in hiding*".
On 9 March 2019, Sotoudeh received a copy of a court ruling issued after a one-day hearing held *in absentia* on 30 December 2018, by Branch 28 of the Islamic Revolution Court in Tehran. The Court found Sotoudeh guilty and sentenced her to 33 years in prison and 148 lashes on seven charges – "*gathering and collusion against national security*" (Article 610 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).
Sotoudeh is currently serving her sentence, although she has been on medical furlough since July 2021. She continues to advocate for the basic human rights of the people of Iran.
For her commitment to the defence of human rights, Sotoudeh has been honoured internationally with prestigious awards such as PEN America's 2011 Freedom to Write, the Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament in 2012, the International Human Rights Prize "Ludovic Trarieux" in 2018, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) Human Rights Award in 2019, the Right Livelihood Award in 2020 and, in 2021, the American Bar Association's Eleanor Roosevelt Prize for the Advancement of Global Human Rights.

[3] Iranwire, **"***Reza Khandan, Husband of Prominent Activist Nasrin Sotoudeh, Arrested*"; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Radio Farda, "*Husband of Iranian Rights Lawyer Arrested in Tehran*".

[4] GC4HR, "*Iran: Human rights defender Reza Khandan arrested and Nasrin Sotoudeh remains on hunger strike*".

[5] FIDH, "*Iran: Release on bail of Reza Khandan*".

[6] Radio Farda, "*Two Prominent Rights Activists Sentenced to Six Year Each".*

[7] A. Moshtaghian, "*Husband of prominent Iranian human rights lawyer summoned by judiciary*", CNN.

Meysami. At the time of Sotoudeh's TV appearance, Meysami's life was in grave danger after a lengthy hunger strike[8]. Meysami was freed from the infamous, overcrowded Evin Prison soon thereafter, on 10 February 2023[9].

The summons issued to Khandan was not enforced at the time after 22 organisations of jurists from around the world, including many of the signatories here, called for your intervention[10].

Significantly, Khandan's most recent arrest occurred on the very same day that the IR's even more onerous new law on "Protecting the Family through the Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab" was scheduled to come into force[11].

Khandan's wife, Nasrin Sotoudeh, was herself one of many women who denounced the new law earlier this month, emphasizing that the law increases the punishment for women and girls aged 12 and older who do not wear hijab. In addition, it applies to online activities, resulting in large fines and lengthy prison sentences (up to 15 years), and even possible death sentences[12]. UN experts have demanded that the new law be repealed[13].

Reza Khandan and his family have been, and continue to be, victims of extreme judicial persecution. IR authorities must immediately and unconditionally rescind the summons and suspend the execution of the sentence against Khandan, drop all the charges against him and his wife Nasrin Sotoudeh, and cease the longstanding campaign of persecution of them and their family for their efforts to protect, *inter alia*, women from discrimination and humiliation to which they are subject in contravention of the principle of civilisation 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, recognizing the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association, as well as the right to a fair trial, all of which are foundations of civilised existence, the international community, including the EU (given its ongoing dialogue with Iran), must condemn all forms of discrimination, persecution, and violence on the part of the IR – including the use of barbaric, often gratuitous and lethal force against peaceful protesters, brutal beatings, torture, and sexual violence, baseless arrests, meritless prosecutions, and sham trials and convictions, with draconian sentencing to flogging and long years of imprisonment in the most primitive, crowded conditions – and, of course, executions.

We – the undersigned Colleagues, Magistrates, NGOs and civil society – stand united and resolute in denouncing the IR's violations of fundamental rights and freedoms, and in supporting Iran's courageous human rights defenders. We ask you, once again, for a firm, definitive, and incisive commitment to end the judicial harassment of Reza Khandan and Nasrin Sotoudeh, recalling the tenets of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, and States' responsibilities enshrined therein[14].

If we do not defend human rights defenders, who will defend human rights?[15]

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[8] S. Noor Haq, "'*They still want a regime change.' Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh says the anger behind Iran's protests remains*", CNN.
[9] J. Hallam, A. Moshtaghian, N. Kennedy, "*Iran frees dissident Farhad Meysami after photos of his emaciated condition cause outrage online*", CNN.
[10] See MEDEL, Magistrats Européens pour la Democratie et les libertés, "*MEDEL supports the joint call to International and European Institutions to take action for the Iranian human rights activist Reza Khandan and his wife Nasrin Sotoudeh, prominent lawyer and human rights defender*"; see also, International Bar Association, "*Iran: IBAHRI condemns prison sentence against Reza Khandan and calls for charges to be dropped*"; PEN America, "*PEN America Condemns Prison Summons Issued to Reza Khandan, Husband to Prominent Iranian Human Rights Lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh*"; New York City Bar Association, "*Joint Letter Requesting Intervention on Reza Khandan's Arrest*", https://www.nycbar.org/reports/letter-requesting-intervention-on-reza-khandans-arrest/.
[11] NCRI Women's Committee, "*New Mandatory Hijab Law Suspended Following Intervention by Supreme National Security Council*".
[12] Amnesty International, "*Iran: New compulsory veiling law intensifies oppression of women and girls*"
[13] OHCHR, "*Iran: UN experts call for Hijab and Chastity law to be repealed*".
[14] Resolution n. 53/144 adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 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.*"
[15] Quote from Rosemary Nelson, lawyer and human rights defender killed by a car bomb in Lurgan, Northern Ireland, in 1999.

We thank you for your attention and we rely on your prompt and effective intervention.

Best regards,

Avocats Européens Democrats / European Democratic Lawyers

Ordre des avocats francophones et germanophone de Belgique / Belgium

Barreau de Bordeaux – Bordeaux Bar Association / France

Barreau Pénal International – International Criminal Bar (BP

Consiglio Nazionale Forense - Italian National Bar Council / Italy

Defense Commission of the Barcelona Bar Association / Spain

Défense Sans Frontière - Avocats Solidaires / France

Deutscher Anwaltverein - German Bar Association / Germany

European Criminal Bar Association

European Association of Lawyers for Democracy & World Human Rights

Foundation Day of the Endangered Lawyer

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

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

Institut des Droits de l'Homme du Barreau de Bordeaux / France

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

Institut des Droits de l'Homme du Barraeau de Paris / France

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

Magistrats Européens pour la Démocratie et les Libertés

New York City Bar Association / United States of America

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

Progressive Lawyers' Association / Turkey

Rechtsanwaltskammer Berlin / Germany

Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers (UIA-IROL)

Unione delle Camere Penali Italiane - Union of the Italian Criminal Chambers / Italy