

11 November 2021

Iran: Woman human rights defender Sepideh Gholian facing new charges while in detention

On 4 November 2021, **Sepideh Gholian** was transferred to the public ward of Evin prison in Tehran following interrogations based on new charges brought against the woman human rights defender in Bushehr prison in early October. The woman human rights defender was held in 209 Ward of Evin prison run by the IIRG intelligence service under interrogation from 14 October 2021 to 4 November 2021.

[Sepideh Gholian](#) is a woman human rights defender and a freelance journalist, with her human rights work focusing primarily on labour rights. She has worked closely with the [Syndicate of Workers of Haft Tappeh Cane Sugar Company](#), a trade union established in 1974 to represent the workers of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industrial Complex. Leaders of the union have long been prosecuted and harassed by Iranian authorities, with several members of the Board of Directors being tried with “propaganda against the State” and “acting against national security” since 2009.

On 20 September 2021, the woman human rights defender was summoned to appear before the Branch 2 of Bushehr Public and Revolutionary Courts on charges of “spreading virtual disinformation” and “propaganda activity against the state.” On 11 October 2021, the house of Sepideh Gholian’s sister in Ahvaz was raided by over 30 security agents who reportedly confiscated the mobile devices of the whole family and arrested Sepideh Gholian. The woman human rights defender had been on medical leave since the 19 August 2021 while serving a five-year prison sentence for reporting on workers’ protests at the Haft-Tappeh Sugar Factory, Khuzestan in 2018.

During her medical leave Sepideh Gholian had published social media posts about the poor conditions and abuse of female inmates at Bushehr Prison and new charges were brought against her as a consequence. The woman human rights defender published these posts on her personal Twitter account, where she had called the prison “a place near the end of the world” where women are treated inhumanely and forced to do dishonourable things. In response to these posts, the head of the Prisons Organisation of Iran called Sepideh Gholian’s statements “strange”, claiming that some prison guards, prisoners and their families have filed a lawsuit against the woman human rights defender.

Concerns about the situation of the detained women human rights defenders are further heightened as confidential documents, communications and video footage allegedly shows episodes of torture, abuse and ill-treatment of the inmates at Evin prison in a series of leaked videos from the prison’s closed-circuit television system by a self-described hacking group called Edalat e Ali (Ali’s Justice) in August 2021.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the continued detention and judicial harassment against Sepideh Gholian. Of particular concern are the latest charges brought against the woman human rights defender, seemingly in reprisal for her attempts to hold the prison’s authorities accountable for the mistreatment of the prisoners. Front Line Defenders believes that Sepideh Gholian has been targeted solely as a result of her peaceful and legitimate human rights work and in reprisal for her defence of prisoners’ rights in Iran.

Front Line Defenders urges the Iranian authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally quash the convictions against Sepideh Gholian;

2. Ensure that the treatment of Sepideh Gholian while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Iran are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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