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Iran: Continued detention of Iranian blogger Soheil Arabi and judicial harassment of his mother

On 7 November 2020, exactly seven years since his imprisonment, blogger and human rights defender **Soheil Arabi** was informed that he would be transferred from Evin prison to another detention centre. The defender, who has been in detention since 2013 for blasphemy, has suffered repeated ill-treatment from prison authorities. His mother who advocates on behalf of her son has also faced criminalisation.

[Soheil Arabi](#) is a blogger and photojournalist, who won the Reporters Without Borders prize for Press Freedom in 2017. He was sentenced to death for blasphemy by Branch 76 of the Criminal Court of Tehran on 30 August 2014 on charges of "insulting the Prophet of Islam" on Facebook. Since his arrest and detention in 2013, Arabi has become a vocal defender of prisoner's rights and raises awareness from inside prison about unfit conditions that detainees are forced to endure.

On 3 September 2014, in addition to his death sentence, Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court found the human rights defender guilty of "insulting the supreme leader" and "propagandising against the regime" and sentenced him to a total of three years imprisonment, for his work defending prisoner rights.

After a lengthy appeals process his death sentence was commuted on 27 June 2015 by Branch 34 of the Supreme Court. Arabi was subsequently retried by Branch 81 of the Tehran Provincial Court and sentenced initially to seven and a half years of prison, two years of Shi'ism studies as well as the hand copying of thirteen Shi'a textbooks. In late November 2015, the sentence was reduced to six and a half years imprisonment.

Soheil Arabi has faced retaliation for sending out messages from prison in defence of prisoners' rights. In June and September 2018 the human rights defender was found guilty of "insulting the religious beliefs", "propaganda against the state" and "insulting the Supreme Leader" among other charges in two separate cases at Branch 28 Tehran Revolutionary Court and Branch 26 of Revolutionary Court respectively. According to Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, Soheil Arabi must serve seven and a half years in prison for the convictions. The convictions relate to his sending of audio files from prison, and in particular, for likening the Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary to a "torture chamber".

On 22 July 2019, Farangis Mazloun, the mother of Soheil Arabi, was arrested by Ministry of Intelligence and Security agents and sent to Evin Prison on charges of "gathering and colluding against national security" and "propagandising against the state". She was held until 8 October 2019 when she was released on bail of 2,500 million IRR.

On 18 September 2020, Soheil Arabi was summoned by the head of the Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary. He was interrogated about further audio recordings he made which had been published by BBC Persian, in which he described the dire conditions in the prison during the

COVID-19 pandemic. The head of the prison threatened to send him to solitary confinement and file new charges against him. The following day, by falsely claiming that they were taking Arabi to the prison's health clinic, the prison's security guards transferred him to Rajaie Shahr prison, where he was placed in a cell, known as a "suite", normally reserved for death row prisoners. In addition to the psychological impact of being held in such a cell for 31 days, Soheil Arabi was denied access to phone calls and medication he requires for his underlying health conditions. The defender has been suffering from a painful inflammatory condition since April 2019.

On 20 October 2020 Soheil Arabi was transferred to ward 2A of Evin prison, which is run by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) intelligence service. Here, his family were allowed to visit him for the first time in over a month. Also on 20 October, his mother Farangis Mazloum, who suffers from heart problems, was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment by Branch 29 of Tehran Revolutionary Court, of which one year is executable, on charges of "gathering and colluding against national security" for continuing to speak out against the conditions in which her son is being held. She has yet to receive a summons to be sent to prison to serve her sentence.

On 7 November 2020, Soheil Arabi was told that he would be transferred out of prison ward 2A of Evin prison. At the time of writing, he has not been informed where he is due to be transferred, or for what purpose.

Soheil Arabi has been intermittently denied access to medical treatment while in detention, and pressured to pay for any medical expenses that he does receive. Contrary to the prison rules, he was told that he had to pay 600 million IRR for surgery he was required to undergo. On 1 March 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the human rights defender reported that prison authorities prevented him from being sent to a hospital for treatment, despite suffering from severe coughing and an infection.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the seven-year detention and ill-treatment of Soheil Arabi as well as the judicial harassment of him and his mother. It is particularly concerned for the health of the human rights defender, who has been repeatedly denied access to treatment for his pre-existing condition, and his severe cough and infection. Front Line Defenders believes that Iranian authorities are targeting Arabi and his mother in reprisal for their peaceful and legitimate work defending prisoner's rights and freedom of expression in Iran.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. Immediately release Soheil Arabi and overturn the conviction against him and his mother, as it is believed to be solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Prior to his release, ensure that the treatment of Soheil Arabi, 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. Provide the necessary medical treatment for Soheil Arabi;
4. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into allegations of psychological torture of Soheil Arabi with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;

5. 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.

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