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Iran: Student and human rights defender Zia Nabavi sentenced to prison for defending students' rights

On 29 June 2021, **Zia Nabavi** a student and human rights defender, was informed that he was sentenced to one year in prison for his activities in student unions, and for peacefully protesting after Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) admitted to shooting down Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, killing all 176 civilians on board in January 2020.

Zia Nabavi is a human rights defender and campaigner for students' rights. In 2008, he was denied access to graduate education due to his trade union activities and consequently established "Defend the Rights to Education Committee" (DREC) together with a group of other students, who were deprived of the right to continue higher education in Iranian universities. He is currently a graduate student of sociology at Allameh Tabataba'i University and a member of "United Students' Associations", which consists of 35 Iranian student unions. It was formed in March 2017 as "an independent, pluralistic, and democratic student association" defending student union rights and social and political rights. It has not been recognized by the Iranian authorities and its members have been targeted since October 2019.

On 29 June 2021, Zia Nabavi was informed that Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court has sentenced him and two other student union rights defenders to prison sentences, community service and a travel ban. According to this verdict, Zia Nabavi has been sentenced following conviction on a charge of "propaganda activities against the state," to one year in prison, a two year travel ban, community service at Behesht Zahra cemetery and at a center for people with disabilities from the Iran-Iraq war, and anxiety management courses in the city of Qom.

This is not the first time Zia Nabavi has been targeted for his human rights activities in conjunction with students' rights to education and freedom of speech in Iran. He was arrested in 2009 because of his activities in DREC and was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment and 74 lashes by Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court on the charge of "*Moharebeh* or waging war against God and state". On his third retrial request, in 2017 the Tehran Supreme Court overturned the charge of "*Moharebeh*" and the human rights defender was released after serving eight years and eight months in prison.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the sentencing of human rights defender Zia Nabavi, which seems to be in retaliation to his peaceful and legitimate work defending human rights in Iran.

Front Line Defenders urges the Iranian authorities to:

1. Immediately quash the conviction against Zia Nabavi and other students' rights defenders as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been targeted solely as a result of their legitimate human rights work;
2. Immediately cease the judicial harassment of all human rights defenders in Iran and ensure their indiscriminate access to justice;
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.