

10 July 2020

## Iran: Concern for the health of Narges Mohammadi after displaying symptoms of COVID-19

Woman human rights defender **Narges Mohammadi**, who is currently serving a 16 year sentence in Zanjan prison, is displaying symptoms of COVID-19, according to her husband Taghi Rahmani. The defender's health condition places her in a high risk category regarding COVID-19, which, combined with the overcrowding in the prison, is cause for concern.

[Narges Mohammadi](#) is Deputy Director of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC). She was elected as President of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Peace in Iran, a broad coalition against war and for the promotion of human rights. She has campaigned for the abolition of the death penalty in Iran, and was awarded the Per Anger Prize by the Swedish government for her human rights work in 2011.

On 7 July 2020, Taghi Rahmani reported that his wife had developed COVID-19 symptoms, including extreme fatigue, pain and losing her sense of smell, along with six other prisoners in Zanjan prison. On 5 July, she had been granted permission to see a doctor after 15 suspected cases of COVID-19 were reported in the prison. Although some prisoners were granted leave with a curfew due to the precarious situation in the prison, Narges Mohammadi was informed she will be tested for COVID-19, and has been returned to prison in the meantime, despite displaying symptoms. She also has not received any medication, which is critical given her health condition which already places her at risk.

The human rights defender is currently serving a 16 year prison sentence which was issued by the 36 Branch of Tehran Court of Appeals on 28 September 2016. The verdict comprises of a 10 year prison sentence for “membership in the Step by Step to Stop the Death Penalty” group (also known as LEGAM). Founded by Narges Mohammadi, LEGAM campaigns against the use of the death penalty in Iran. In addition to her 10 year sentence, she received five years for alleged “collusion and assembly against national security” and one year for “spreading propaganda against the system.”

After being [physically assaulted](#) and exiled to Zanjan prison in December 2019, the defender's liberties were even further restricted and she was denied access to books, newspapers, and phone calls. The security agent who is supervising Narges Mohammadi's case has told her more than once that she “won't leave the prison alive”. She has also been denied permission to see a specialist regarding her health condition, whilst the medical support in Zanjan prison is inadequate.

There have been reports of positive cases of COVID-19 in prisons throughout Iran and prisoners are at increased risk of infection due to overcrowding and the failure by prison authorities to implement sufficient prevention and protection measures.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the failure of prison authorities in Zanjan prison to respond efficiently and effectively to the display of COVID-19 symptoms by Narges Mohammadi and other prisoners. It is particularly concerned, given the vulnerable health condition of the defender and the living conditions within the prison. Front Line Defenders believes that the treatment of Narges Mohammadi in Zanjan prison, including the threats made against her and the curtailing of her personal liberties and denying her access to healthcare and necessary medication, is solely due to her peaceful and legitimate work in defense of human rights in Iran.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:**

1. Urgently provide the necessary medical treatment for Narges Mohammadi as well as for the other prisoners who are at risk of being infected by COVID-19;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Narges Mohammadi and quash her convictions as Front Line Defenders believes that he has been targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights work;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Narges Mohammadi, 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;
4. Ensure protection and hygienic provisions for all detained human rights defenders, and grant non-discriminatory access to temporary release and furlough during the pandemic;
5. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Iran and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.