

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
Second Floor, Grattan House
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 FA39, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Iran: Environmental rights defender Sam Rajabi returned to prison despite testing positive for COVID-19

On 22 April 2020, environmental rights defender **Sam Rajabi** was returned to Evin Prison, despite having tested positive for COVID-19. He is currently in the prison's clinic with reportedly scarce access to appropriate medical facilities and provisions.

[Sam Rajabi](#) is an environmental rights defender and member of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation (PWHF), a non-profit environmental organisation. PWHF carries out ecological fieldwork, promotes local community involvement in conservation, and raises awareness about environmental issues. The organisation had previously been managed by Kavous Seyed-Emami, the Iranian sociologist who died on 8 February 2018 in Evin Prison under suspicious circumstances.

On 22 April 2020, Sam Rajabi was admitted to hospital for a check-up on his chronic condition but whilst there was diagnosed with COVID-19, with symptoms of a high fever, difficulty breathing and loss of taste and smell. Despite having complained of such symptoms since March 2020, he had been sharing a cell with 15 other prisoners until 22 April 2020. Later on the same day, he was discharged from hospital and returned to Evin Prison. He remains in the prison's clinic with reportedly scarce access to appropriate medical facilities and provisions. According to Sam Rajabi's family members, he suffers from asthma which makes him more vulnerable to the severe form of COVID-19. On 23 April 2020, the defender sent a letter to the prison's administration warning that if he was not admitted to hospital by 25 April 2020, he would begin a hunger strike.

Sam Rajabi was arrested at his home in Tehran on 25 January 2018. Following his arrest, he was subjected to prolonged incommunicado detention. On 23 November 2019, the environmental rights defender was [found guilty](#) of 'espionage' and 'cooperation with a hostile state', and sentenced to six years imprisonment by the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. On 18 February 2020, the Appeals Court in Tehran upheld the prison sentence against him and he has remained in Evin Prison since.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned for the health and well-being of environmental rights defender Sam Rajabi, given his positive diagnosis for COVID-19 and his existing respiratory illness, and fears his condition will deteriorate if not promptly given adequate medical assistance. It is also concerned for the health and well-being of the inmates with whom he shared his cell before going to hospital, some of whom are also environmental rights defenders. Front Line Defenders further reiterates its [concerns](#) about the continued imprisonment of Iranian human rights defenders despite their exposure to and high risk of contracting COVID-19 while being held in poor, unhygienic conditions.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. Urgently provide the necessary medical treatment for Sam Rajabi as well as for the 15 prisoners with whom he shared a cell and who are at risk of being infected by COVID-19;

2. Immediately and unconditionally release Sam Rajabi and quash his conviction 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 Sam Rajabi, 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.

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