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Iran: Human rights defender Shahriyar Shams expelled from studies while facing two trials at revolutionary court

On 8 June 2023, the human rights defender **Shahriyar Shams** announced that he has been expelled from his undergraduate studies at the Azad University of Tehran based on a decision by the university's disciplinary committee. The human rights defender is going to appeal this decision. The decision happened in the context of him facing two trials related to his human rights work during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests since September 2022.

[Shahriyar Shams](#) is a human rights defender and student activist who has been banned from studying in Iran. He has worked as a social media campaigner for prisoners' rights and an advocate for the abolition of the death penalty in Iran. He was arrested for the first time in 2017 when he was a junior student at Azad University of Tehran, North Branch, and has been persecuted since for his advocacy for prisoners' rights, particularly the right to life of those on death row, as well as the socio-economic and cultural rights of students in Iran.

On 8 June 2023, the human rights defender Shahriyar Shams [announced](#) on his Twitter account that he has been expelled from his undergraduate studies at the Azad University of Tehran, North Branch, based on a decision made by the university's disciplinary committee, and published on the university portal without any further explanations. The human rights defender is going to appeal this decision, as he believes this decision is made because of his human rights activities in the university. He is also facing two trials related to his human rights work during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests since September 2022.

On 4 November 2022, the human rights defender was arrested for the second time during the protests. He was first arrested after a raid on his house on 29 September 2022, just a few days after the protests in Iran began, for his social media posts defending the rights of prisoners and reporting on cases of protestors facing the death penalty. The human rights defender was released on bail on 14 November 2022 and is awaiting two trials on the charges being brought against him during both arrests.

During his first arrest in September 2022, the human rights defender had a hearing on the charge of "gathering and colluding to act against national security," for facilitating book clubs and "propaganda against state" and "spreading disinformation" for the information he shared via his social media posts. The charges Shahriyar Shams faced during his second arrest entailed the same charge of "gathering and colluding to act against national security," while this time there was no further explanation given to the defender as to the rationale behind this charge. He was also charged with "disturbing the public order" for joining protests in the university where he studied. None of these cases were eligible for the pardon scheme announced by the Iranian judicial system in February 2023, which granted amnesty to thousands of prisoners, including those detained on security charges related to the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests.

The human rights defender was previously arrested for the first time in December 2017 when he was eighteen years old and was subsequently sentenced to five years in prison on the charge of "gathering and colluding to act against national security"; one year in prison on the charge of "propaganda activities against state"; and a two-year ban on membership of social groups on the

charge of “distributing public opinion”. The court of appeals reduced the sentences to three and a half years on the charge of “gathering and colluding to act against national security” and seven and a half months on the charge of “propaganda activities against state,” while upholding the two-year ban on membership of social groups on the charge of “distributing public opinion.” After the application of Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code the most severe single sentence, in his case three and half years in prison was executed. The human rights defender started serving his sentence in 2021 and, when he was granted a medical furlough in 2022 after having served one year in prison, he was released conditionally with the suspension of the rest of sentence.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the persecution of the human rights defender Shahriyar Shams, including his expulsion from university as it believes this is in reprisal for his peaceful and legitimate human rights work, particularly his work on prisoners’ rights and students’ rights and his advocacy for the abolition of death penalty in Iran. Front Line Defenders condemns the repeated prosecutions of Shahriyar Shams as part of a wider crackdown on human rights defenders in the context of the protests in Iran where, since September 2022, hundreds of human rights defenders have been arrested, charged and subjected to hefty prison sentences without adherence to due process or fair trial rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. Ensure that Shahriyar Shams and other students’ rights defenders are granted their rights to education in Iran and are reintegrated to the university;
2. Drop the legal charges against Shahriyar Shams as Front Line Defenders believes he has been targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights work;
3. 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.