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Iran: Women’s rights defender Saba Kord Afshari sentenced to 15 years in prison

On 1 June 2020, the lawyer of Saba Kord Afshari was informed that the verdict of the appeals court had been changed and that the woman human rights defender had now received a 15-year prison sentence. Previously, an acquittal had been issued in writing on March 17 2020 by the Evin Prosecutor’s Office. She had faced the charge of “promoting corruption and prostitution through appearing without a headscarf in public”. Her lawyer has expressed concerns regarding the acquittal, which was communicated to her in prison, emphasizing the unlawful proceedings in her case. Kord Afshari, who is currently serving a nine-year sentence, can face up to 24 years of imprisonment in total.

Saba Kord Afshari is a young (22 year old) women’s rights defender, who has been campaigning against the mandatory veil in Iran. She took part in White Wednesday- My stealthy Freedom campaign which encourages women to appear in public without headscarf and post their photos/videos on social media to raise awareness in opposition to forced veiling laws. In reaction to the growing number of women peacefully joining this campaign, Iranian police warned on 23 February 2018 that those joining this campaign will be facing charges on “inciting and facilitating corruption and prostitution” which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years of prison.

Despite the maximum of 10 years imprisonment foreseen in Islamic Penal Code, on August 27, 2019, Saba Kord Afshari was initially sentenced to a total of 24 years in prison, following a trial that took place on August 19, 2019. Branch 26 of the Islamic Revolution Court of Tehran sentenced Saba to 15 years in prison for “encouraging people to commit immorality and/or prostitution” seven years and six months for “gathering and collusion against internal or external security” and one year and six months for “spreading propaganda against the system”. She was also sentenced to a ban on social activities. The court issued the maximum sentence stipulated by the Islamic Penal Code for each charge and increased it by half, based on the multiplicity of charges against her and Kord Afshari’s previous conviction in 2018.

Saba Kord Afshari was arrested for the first time on August 2, 2018, alongside many others, during a series of protests that occurred July-August 2018 against the deterioration of Iran’s economy as well as the corruption within government. She was first transferred to Qarchak Prison in Varamin and later, in October 2018, to Evin prison’s women’s ward. In August 2018, she was sentenced to one year in prison on the charge of “disrupting the public order” at Branch 28 of Tehran’s Revolutionary Court. She was released along with a large number of prisoners on 14 February 2019 as a part of general pardon coinciding with the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Saba Kord-Afshari was rearrested on June 1, 2019 in her house and the following day, she was charged with “encouraging people to commit immorality and/or prostitution” for removing her hijab and walking without hijab, as well as the two other charges. On June 11, 2019, she was sent to Qarchak prison near Tehran. She was denied contact with a lawyer and pressured by the authorities to incriminate herself in a televised appearance. Saba was eventually transferred to the women’s ward of Evin on August 13, 2019. The authorities detained her mother, Raheleh Ahmadi, from July 10 to 14, 2019 to harass Kard Afshari further, and the 26 Branch of Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced Raheleh to 31 months in prison on 16 December 2019. Raheleh is currently serving her

sentence in Evin prison alongside her daughter. Neither Saba, nor her mother have been granted temporary release during the COVID19 outbreak.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Saba Kord Afshari and her mother, Raheleh Ahmadi and quash their convictions as Front Line Defenders believes they have been targeted solely as a result of her legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Saba Kord Afshari and Raheleh Ahmadi, 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. 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.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 6 (3): "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others to study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters" and to Article 2 (1): "Each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms, inter alia, by adopting such steps as may be necessary to create all conditions necessary in the social, economic, political and other fields, as well as the legal guarantees required to ensure that all persons under its jurisdiction, individually and in association with others, are able to enjoy all those rights and freedoms in practice."

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director

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Front Line Defenders International Advisory Council

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