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13 January 2023

Iran: Lengthy Prison sentences for Reza Shahbi and Hassan Saidi for their labour rights activities at Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC)

On 12 January, **Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company** announced that the court of appeals upheld the sentences of **Reza Shahabi** and **Hassan Saidi** in absentia. According to this court's verdict, the initial sentences of both human rights defenders have been confirmed in their absence. In both cases, this pertains to a six year prison sentence, a two year travel ban, a two year ban on membership in political parties and a two year ban on using social media.

The [Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company \(SWTSBC\)](#) is a trade union comprising thousands of labourer in the Greater Tehran region; most of whom work for the United Bus Company of Tehran (Sharekat-e Vahed). Since it was established in 1958, SWTSBC's activity has been focused on labour rights. [Reza Shahabi](#) is a human rights defender and a prominent board member of SWTSBC. He has been prosecuted in the past for his labour rights advocacy, even serving up to six years in prison in April 2012. [Hassan Saidi](#) is a human rights defender and also an active member of SWTSBC.

On 12 January 2023, the court of appeals upheld the six year prison sentence, two year travel ban, two years ban on membership in political parties and a two year ban on using social media. The trial was conducted in absentia for Reza Shahabi and Hassan Saidi. The human rights defenders were convicted on charges of "gathering and collusion against the national security" and one year in prison on the charge of "propaganda against the state" by Branch 26 of Tehran Revolutionary Court in November 2022. According to Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, where multiple offences have been committed, the sentence served by the offender will correspond to the most severe penalty. In this case, both human rights defenders expect sentences of five years for their charges of "gathering and collusion".

Both human rights defenders went on hunger strike in July 2022 in protest against their arbitrary detention. Reza Shahabi was arrested in his house on 12 May 2022 and the SWTSBC published a statement on 9 June 2022 alerting to the deteriorating health of the defender during his custody in Evin's Ward 209, a detention centre run by the Iranian intelligent services. Hassan Saidi was arrested on 18 May 2022 in the context of workers protests in May 2022 in Iran.

Front Line Defenders is outraged by the hefty prison sentence for human rights defenders without adherence to due process of fair trials amid the ongoing protests in Iran. Front Line Defenders is particularly concerned by the breach of international human rights law in how human rights defenders have been treated while in detention. Furthermore, Front Line Defenders holds the Iranian government accountable for the unjust attacks on, and wrongful treatment of, human rights defenders, as it believes they are being detained as a result of their legitimate and peaceful human rights work and current unfair trials in the context of protests are to punish human rights defenders and intimidate protesters in Iran.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

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Company No. 593190; Registered Charity No. 20204494; CHY 22404

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Reza Shahabi and Hassan Saidi and quash their convictions as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been targeted solely as a result of their legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Reza Shahabi and Hassan Saidi, 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 especially in the context of ongoing protests 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.