



H.E. Mr. Andreas Ignatiou

Ambassador of Cyprus
Local Presidency of the European Union
328 Shahid Karimi (ex. Bou Ali)
Dezashib, Tajrish
1834844681, Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

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Dear Ambassador,

We are writing to call your urgent attention to the case of **Maryam Bahreman, an Iranian women's rights activist**, who was arrested in Shiraz on 11 May 2011 when she returned to Iran after participating at the 55th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). She spent 126 days in detention and was finally released on bail on 14 September 2011. It was reported that the focus of her interrogations was her participation in the 55th session of the Commission.

Maryam Bahreman is the former Secretary General of the Pars Women's Organization, a women's rights organization in Iran's southern city of Shiraz. The organization was closed in 2007. She is a member of the "One Million Signatures" campaign (also known as the "Campaign for Equality") and took part in its gathering of signatures of Iranians calling on the government to repeal laws that discriminate against women, in accordance with international human rights treaties ratified by the Iranian government.

Arbitrarily arrested on vaguely-worded accusations of 'acting against national security', five charges were brought against Maryam Bahreman. She was initially only charged with "spreading propaganda against the system through relationships abroad" – a charge which appears to be linked to her participation in the 55th session of the Commission. Three of the charges - "insulting the Supreme Leader", "insulting the Revolutionary Guards and Basij", and "insulting the holy values of the country and Islam" are believed to stem from writings on her blog. The fifth charge - "causing unease in the public mind" is believed to be linked to her signing of public statements advocating women's rights in Iran. The four latter charges are reportedly linked to Maryam Bahreman's previous activities to promote women's rights in Iran and date back to before 2009.

While in custody, Maryam Bahreman was a prisoner of conscience. The charges against her do not meet minimum international standards for what constitute recognizable criminal offences. If she returns to prison, she will once again be a prisoner of conscience and we will call for her immediate and unconditional release if this occurs.

It is unacceptable that women's rights activists be persecuted for their participation in the CSW and for protecting and promoting women's rights. Longstanding mechanisms allow for civil society involvement in UN activities, including those that promote women's status.

We fear that imprisoning women's rights activists is part of an attempt by the Iranian government to clampdown on women's rights, including placing restrictions on women's access to higher education on an equal basis with men.

The recent announcement by 36 universities that women are now barred from pursuing 77 fields of study including engineering, education, and chemistry shows more than ever that now is the time to stand in solidarity with Iranian women's rights defenders in their mission to gain equality in law and practice for women.

UN Human Rights Council resolution 12/2 adopted by consensus in October 2009 calls on states to provide adequate protection from "intimidation and reprisals against individuals and groups who seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights".

Further, Article 5 (c) of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders also states that "For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels...to communicate with non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations".

In addition, Article 9 (4) of the Declaration states that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to unhindered access to and communication with international bodies with general or special competence to receive and consider communications on matters of human rights and fundamental freedoms".

We believe that the expression of international concern over Iran's treatment of women's rights activists and Maryam Bahreman, made by you and other governments to your Iranian counterparts both before and after her trial in Shiraz on 15 September 2012, will play a powerful role at this important time.

We urge you to support the following specific calls to Iranian authorities:

- raise concerns about the trial of Maryam Bahreman with the relevant Iranian authorities;
- drop all charges against Maryam Bahreman, as well as those against other women's rights defenders and promoters of the "One Million Signatures" campaign, which are solely related to their work on behalf of women's rights;
- end all forms of intimidation and harassment of women's rights defenders such as dismissal from employment, threatening phone calls and raids on peaceful meetings in private houses;

- ensure the Iranian government respects the advocacy activities of women human rights defenders as provided in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- immediately and unconditionally release any woman who has not used or advocated violence or hatred who is detained, imprisoned or placed under other physical restriction (for example, house arrest) solely because of her political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth, sexual orientation or other status;
- permit the holding of peaceful demonstrations calling for legislative change, as provided for under the Constitution of Iran;
- review as a matter of urgency all legislation in Iran in order to identify and remedy all laws that discriminate directly against women or have a discriminatory impact on women, including the new Penal Code which is awaiting signature.

We trust in your support.

Sincerely Yours,

Amnesty International (AI)

Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS)

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)

Equality Now

Front Line Defenders

Hivos

International Alliance of Women

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific)

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF)

Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)