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Iran: A group of human rights defenders in Gilan province sentenced to over sixty years in prison

In late March 2024, ten women human rights defenders including **Jelveh Javaheri, Forough Samienia, Matin Yazadani, Yasaman Hashdari, Negin Rezaie, Zahra Dadres, Zohreh Dadres, Shiva Shahsiah, Sara Jahani, Azadeh Chavoshian**, and human rights defender **Houman Taheri** were notified that they have sentenced to over sixty years in prison in a common case that dates back to August 2023 by the Branch 3 of Rasht Revolutionary Court in Gilan province.

[Jelveh Javaheri](#), [Forough Samienia](#), [Matin Yazadani](#), [Yasaman Hashdari](#), [Negin Rezaie](#), [Zahra Dadres](#), [Zohreh Dadres](#), [Shiva Shahsiah](#), [Sara Jahani](#), [Azadeh Chavoshian](#), and [Houman Taheri](#) are human rights defenders based in North Iran's Gilan province. They have been advocating for various human rights issues including women's rights, children rights, and access to health and education in a healthy and enabling environment.

The court session for these human rights defenders took place on 29 February 2024, at the Branch 3 of Rasht Revolutionary Court in Gilan province presided over by Judge Mehdi Rasekhi. The verdict, issued on 12 March 2024, sentenced them on charges such as "*forming*" or "*membership in a group with the intention of acting against national security*" and "*gathering and colluding to act against national security*". Notably, one of the woman human rights defender, Zohreh Dadras received a sentence of of six years and one day in prison on the charge of "forming a group with the intention of acting against national security," and three years and six months and one day in prison on the charge of "*gathering and colluding to act against national security*".

According to the same ruling, Forough Samienia, Sara Jahani, Matin Yazadani, Yasaman Hashdari, Shiva Shahsiah, Negin Rezaie, Azadeh Chavoshian and Zahra Dadres were each sentenced to an overall sentence of six years, three months and seventeen days in prison, including three years and six months, and one day for "*gathering and colluding to act against national security*," and two years, seven months, and sixteen days in prison for "*membership in a group with the intention of acting against national security*". Additionally, Jelveh Javaheri and Houman Taheri were sentenced to one year in prison for "*propaganda activities against the state*", while Vahedeh Khoshsirah was acquitted.

The human rights defenders have until 16 April 2024 to appeal the sentences issued by Branch Three of Gilan Revolutionary Court. Additionally, a group of these human rights defenders have filed a lawsuit against the arbitrary arrest and violations of due process and fair trial in their case.

The human rights defenders had been violently [arrested](#) during raids in their homes in mid-August 2023. They were subsequently held in solidarity confinement, and their whereabouts remained unknown due to the denial of access to legal representation and restricted phone calls. They were eventually released on bail from Lakan prison on various dates between 16 September to 1 October 2024.

On 17 August 2023, a day after the arbitrary arrests, Tasnim, a state-run news agency closely associated with the intelligence services, published an article accusing the human rights defenders of planning to "*incite riots on the anniversary of the autumn 2022 riots*", "*receiving funds under the*

cover of the financial support to vulnerable families of the victims”, and “having connections with hostile media outlets”.

The arbitrary arrests and mass attacks, seemingly [aimed](#) at silencing human rights defenders, particularly women’s rights advocates, ahead of the anniversary of the September 2022 nationwide protests have been reported. During this period, human rights defenders, especially those working on women and girls’ rights in Gilan and Kurdistan provinces, were subjected to mass arrests, arbitrary detention, denial of their rights while detained, and legal actions.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the sentencing of the human rights defender Jelveh Javaheri, Forough Samienia, Matin Yazadani, Yasaman Hashdari, Negin Rezaie, Zahra Dadres, Zohreh Dadres, Shiva Shahsiah, Sara Jahani, Azadeh Chavoshian, and Houman Taheri, as it believes the judicial action is in reprisal for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders urges the Iranian authorities to:

1. Overturn the convictions against Jelveh Javaheri, Forough Samienia, Matin Yazadani, Yasaman Hashdari, Negin Rezaie, Zahra Dadres, Zohreh Dadres, Shiva Shahsiah, Sara Jahani, Azadeh Chavoshian, and Houman Taheri;
2. Conduct impartial investigations into the allegations of physical assaults against human rights defenders during arrest and detention, with the view of publishing the results and holding those responsible accountable;
3. Cease targeting human rights defenders in Iran and ensure in all circumstances that they can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

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