

# RAHA

## Human Rights Award

The RAHA Human Rights Award recognizes Iranian human rights defenders who have made contributions to human rights in the I.R. Iran. Candidates are considered based on the significance of their contributions and their current situation.

The human rights laureates receive an award sculptures designed by the well known Iranian sculptor Behrooz Heshmat.



The six recipients were selected by a special jury comprising the Nobel Prize laureate and human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi as chairwomen, the co-founder and principal investigator of the Freedom Rights Project and former executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights Aaron Rhodes and the Südwind board member and human rights lawyer Karolina Januszewski.

## Mr. Reza Shahabi

Reza Shahabi is a worker and a founding member and the treasurer of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, an independent trade union<sup>1</sup>. He has been held in Evin Prison since 2010. Amnesty International designated Shahabi a prisoner of conscience, "convicted solely for his peaceful trade union work", and called for his immediate and unconditional release.



He has been detained in Evin Prison since June 2010. On 14 April 2012 he was sentenced to six years imprisonment by Branch 15 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Tehran— five years for “gathering and colluding against state security”, and one year for “spreading propaganda against the system”.[1] He was also been fined 70 million rial (US\$5,700) and banned from all trade unionist activities for five years. According to his lawyer, the prosecution is seeking to bring a fresh charge of Moharebeh (“enmity against God”) for alleged contact with the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI).

According to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and other human rights groups Shahabi's state of health has deteriorated in custody, but prison authorities have not granted him appropriate medical treatment. One source told the FIDH, "doctors told him after an MRI that some of the vertebra in his neck have deteriorated and are in need of surgery followed by six months of complete rest, and that without hospitalization his left side might become paralyzed . On January 31, 2012, he was transferred to hospital for surgery, but was returned to prison later without an operation, because of the high risks." On 22 November 2011 he went on a hunger strike in protest of the Evin Prison authorities' lack of medical treatment and attention to his illness. According to Amnesty International this was one of "numerous hunger strikes" in protest at the conditions in which he is held. Since around February 2012, he has complained that one side of his body was numb. However, it was not until 30 April that the prison authorities took him to hospital.

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<sup>1</sup> The Union (or Syndicate) of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Sherkat-e Vahed) was banned after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Workers resumed the union's activities in 2004, although it is not legally recognized. On 22 December 2005, police arrested 12 of the union's leaders at their homes, but quickly released four of them. Other members were arrested on 25 December 2005 after they went on strike to call for the release of their colleagues. Hundreds more were arrested during a further strike in January 2006.

## Jila Karamzadeh Makvandi

Jila Karamzadeh Makvandi is one of the mothers of Laleh Park<sup>2</sup>, an artist, a poet and human rights activist is in her 5th decade of life. She has been arrested and sentenced to prison terms solely for her peaceful human rights activities, such as her work with the "Mourning Mothers and for her assistance for political prisoner's families and victims' families. She supported them financially, visited them weekly and organized meetings with the Mothers of Laleh Park.



Karamzadeh was first arrested on 8 February 2010 at her home and transferred to Intelligence Ministry's Ward 209 at Evin Prison, where she spent 34 days before she was released on bail of \$50,000. On 9 April 2011, Karamzadeh was sentenced to four years in prison on the charge of "establishing an illegal organization with the intent to act against national security under the name of 'Mourning Mothers.'" In November 2011, an Appeals Court reduced her sentence to two years in prison and two years' suspended imprisonment for five years. On Tuesday, 27 December 2011, Karamzadeh was arrested when she appeared at passport office in Tehran to renew her passport. Karamzadeh was transferred to Evin Prison to begin serving her two-year prison term. In September Jila Karamzadeh Makvandi has been released from prison.

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<sup>2</sup> Mourning Mothers, or Mothers of Laleh Park, was established after the disputed presidential election of 2009. The group is mostly comprised of Iranian women whose family members were killed in the aftermath of the election, but also includes relatives of victims of earlier violations, including mass killings during the 1980s. The principal demand of the Mourning Mothers is government accountability for the deaths, arrests, and disappearances of their children. The Mourning Mothers often meet on Saturdays in Laleh Park, and speak out about the government's lack of investigation and accountability for the deaths of their loved ones. Several Mourning Mothers, such as Jila Karamzadeh Makvandi, have been arrested and sentenced to prison terms.

## Rasoul Bodaghi

Rasoul Bodaghi is a teacher<sup>3</sup> since 20 years and a board member of the teachers' guild and board member of the Iranian Teacher Trade Associations. Bodaghi is serving a six year prison term because of his union activities for properly funded teachers and education. Mr. Bodaghi is married with three daughters, two of them under 6 years old. After his detention, his pay was stopped and later he was fired from his job.



Rasoul Bodaghi was arrested in September 2009. Rasoul Bodaghi was sentenced to six years of imprisonment and five year of ban on all social activities by the 15th branch of the revolutionary court. According to Bamdad News, the six years imprisonment is for “propagating against the establishment” and the other five years are for “colluding and assembly with the intention to disrupt national security”. In January 2011, an Appeal Court confirmed Rasoul Bodaghi’s sentence and banned him from taking part in any civil society activities for five years. According to reports, he was severely beaten by two prison officers in May 2010.

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<sup>3</sup> Many Iranian teachers face unclear employment status which means they can be laid off and re-employed at the whim of employers and have none of the contractual rights of permanently employed teachers. Iranian authorities have detained at least 39 teachers since 2009 on various national-security-related charges. Revolutionary courts have sentenced 15 of them to prison, mostly in connection with trade union activities, including protests calling for wage raises. Several others were arrested in connection with activities unrelated to their teaching, including participation in anti-government demonstrations following the disputed 2009 presidential election and advocacy on behalf of ethnic minority rights. Members of the Iran Teachers’ Trade Associations (ITTAs), which is affiliated to Education International (EI), have been facing harassment and arrests for years.

## Majid Tavakoli

Majid Tavakoli is a prominent Iranian student leader<sup>4</sup>, human rights activist and political prisoner. He is a member of the Islamic Students' Association at Tehran's Amirkabir University of Technology. He has been arrested at least three times by the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and is currently serving a nine-year-long imprisonment because of his criticism of the Iranian regime and his fight for democracy and human rights through speeches and publications.



Tavakoli may be best known for the speeches he held on the Student Day in Iran, on December 7th, in 2008 and 2009. He advocated democratization and the student's rights and spoke sharply against the government.

Tavakoli was arrested on 7 December 2009 after addressing a crowd at Amir Kabir University of Technology on National Student. After his arrest in 2009, a picture of Tavakoli wearing hijab was published in national press. According to the Iranian authorities, he was arrested in this garment, and they asserted that he had dressed as a woman to escape from the police. His supporters, who were present at the arrest, contradict this, claiming he was dressed in these clothes after the arrest to discredit and dishonor him. This led to a massive campaign supporting Tavakoli. Many men posted pictures of themselves on social media wearing hijab, titled "We are all Majid". Following a trial which he was reportedly not allowed to attend, Tavakoli was convicted of offenses which included "participating in an illegal gathering", "propaganda against the system", and "insulting officials" and sentenced to eight and a half years in prison. From January to May 2010, he was held primarily in solitary confinement in Evin prison.

On 17 May 2010, he began a hunger strike. While on hunger strike, his health deteriorated quickly, and on the fourth day, he suffered from stomach hemorrhage and was unable to speak due to weakness and dehydration. In August 2010, he was moved to Raja'i Shahr prison to be housed with violent offenders. Tavakoli suffers from a respiratory ailment, which reportedly has worsened due to his continued imprisonment.

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<sup>4</sup> A high proportion of young people in Iran are attending higher education, which makes students a large and important social group. Students are recognized as an important part of the reform movement, but politically active students are often refused to continue their studies, or prosecuted. Therefore students' right to engage in society is a human right that students do not have in the I.R. Iran.

## Nasim Soltanbeygi

Nasim Soltanbeygi is a journalist, women's rights activist and former student rights activist. She started her social activities as a student at the Allameh Tabatabaei University (ATU) in 2004, where she served as editor of a new student magazine at the Allameh Tabatabaei University and as a member of the editorial boards of new journals at the Tehran University and Sharif University. As student rights activist from 2004 to 2007 she has attended and organized meetings and gatherings such as a protest against students' arrests at the Polytechnic University, banning students from studying or the Women's Day rallies at the Tehran and Sharif Universities.



Nasim Soltanbeygi also took part in activities for International Women's Day, for International Labor Day, for the syndicate of bus workers, for teachers or for the victims of the illegal massacre of political prisoners in the 1980s in Khavaran. She has also worked as an environmental and urban reporter for various newspapers, including Sabz Press, Shargh and Arman and served on the editorial board of a labor magazine. In 2006 Soltanbeygi<sup>5</sup> had received a two-year suspended prison sentenced, in effect for five years, for "acting against national security" by participating in peaceful demonstrations by women's rights defenders on 12 June.

Nasim Soltanbeygi was also among those 30 students arrested in a widespread crackdown on student activists in November 2007. She spent 56 days behind bars in Evin prison's notorious ward 209 before being released on bail. The appeals court had reduced the sentence to three months imprisonment and two years suspended imprisonment. While in Evin prison she was exposed to both physical and psychological torture and needed medical treatment afterwards. Following her involvement in the 2009 election protests the Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court handed the activist a 6-year prison sentence; 3 years on the charge of "acting against national security," one year for "propaganda against the regime," and a 2-year suspended term stemming from the prior arrest in 2006. In September 2012 Nasim Soltanbeygi started her prison term at Evin Prison and in April 2013 she was granted a pardon.

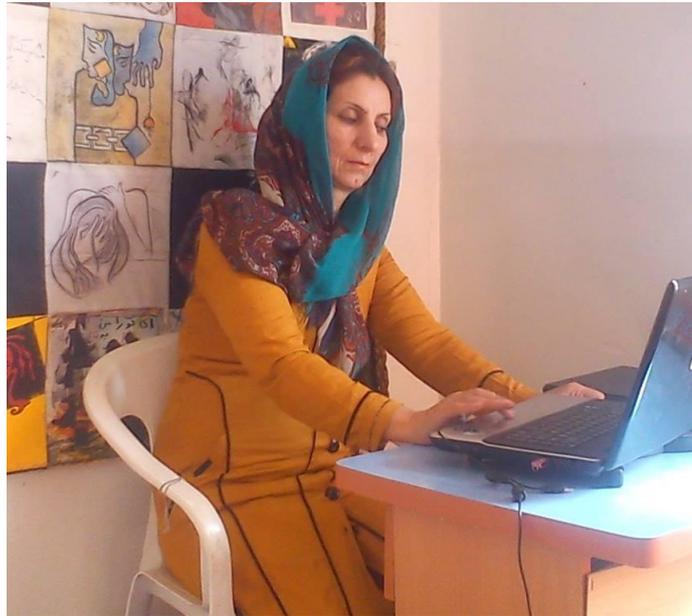
Besides her prison terms, her work as a journalist, her social activities and her two-semester suspension, she continued to study journalism and passed all her courses. But the university didn't allow her to issue her certificate after her graduation.

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<sup>5</sup> Nasim Soltan Beigi was among the nine female political prisoners, who have staged a hunger strike in 2012. The women began their hunger strike to protest the prison guards' raiding of the women's wing of Evin Prison, which was followed by a degrading and humiliating mistreatment of the inmates for hours. The maltreatment came just days after a joint statement was issued by Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi and six human rights organisations on the appalling situation of women detainees at Evin.

## Parvin Zabihi

Kurdish women's and children's rights activist Parvin Zabihi is an active member of a women's rights group based in Iran's Kurdistan and was a supporter of the One Million Signature Campaign for women's rights in Iran. Parvin Zabihi has researched about female circumcision<sup>6</sup> in the Kurdish-populated areas in Iran and is active in voicing the general demands of women and in changing laws that discriminate against women. She fights against female circumcision, honour killings or burning and stoning women. Many campaigns to stop executions were launched and managed by her. As member of the Association for the Defence of Children's Rights (ADCR) Parvin Zabihi raises concerns about the administration of criminal cases of minors and expresses opposition to the use of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment on children.



Parvin Zabihi studied at the Tarbiat Moalem of University, but she had been arrested on charges of being a member of the Organization of Iranian People's Fadaian and sentenced to 5 ½ years in prison, released after 6 years. She has endured summons, interrogation, telephone threats and harassment, apparently in connection with her human and women's rights work. She always continued her work and is also engaged in community cultural and civic activities.

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<sup>6</sup> In Iran, female circumcision is prevalent mostly in the provinces of Khuzestan, Lorestan, and Kurdistan. It is estimated that in Iranian Kurdistan the rate of the mutilated girls and women is about 60%. Azarmehr Association of the Women of Kurdistan in Iran said that female circumcision is an act of violence, a crime, and a tradition handed down from barbarism. In an interview with Radio Farda, Parvin Zabihi, who has written a book on this subject, said, "Today many young Kurdish women who receive a university education write their thesis on female circumcision. A number of them have started an association, whose mission is to fight against female circumcision. However, no permit has yet been issued for this association." The very fact that Kurdish women take it up as their cause upon entering institutions of higher education proves just how prevalent this practice is in Kurdistan.

