

BY AIRMAIL

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Amsterdam, 16 January 2009

Subject: Shirin Ebadi and Nasrin Sotoudeh

Your Excellency,

The Dutch Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation (*Stichting Advocaten voor Advocaten*) is committed to helping lawyers around the world who are prevented from exercising their profession without any improper interference. Our Foundation would like to express its grave concern about the safety of our colleague Shirin Ebadi, a former judge, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003.

We were informed of a violent demonstration outside her home and office on January 1, 2009. Mrs Ebadi reported to the media that 150 people demonstrated outside her building, chanting slogans against her. They tore down the sign to her law office, which is in the same building, and marked the building with graffiti.

On December 29, 2008, at 5.30 p.m. the law firm of Mrs Ebadi was raided by government agents. According to Mrs Ebadi's statement, the agents left with two computers and 70 boxes filled with personal and professional files and documents of her clients.

This search and seizure follows the unlawful search and closure by the police on December 21, 2008 of the headquarters of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC) in Tehran. Mrs Ebadi is one of the founding member of the Centre.

We were also informed that human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was prevented from travelling abroad. On 10 December 2008, Iranian security authorities prevented Mrs. Sotoudeh from travelling from Iran to Italy where she was to receive an international human rights award. When she was at the Imam Khomeini Airport her passport was taken without any explanation. Mrs Sotoudeh was due to be presented with an award by Human Rights International, an Italian human rights organization in Bolzano, Italy, on 12 December 2008.

Lawyers for Lawyers call upon the Iranian government to lift the travel bans on Mrs. Sotoudeh and allow her to travel wherever she needs to travel in pursuit of her human rights work. We urge the Iranian government to recognize the valuable role played by human rights lawyers and to promote and support their work in line with the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in 1990, provide for a number of rights and responsibilities for lawyers acting in their professional capacity.

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In particular paragraphs 16 and 17 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, state that the government is under an obligation *"to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference"*.

Further: *"Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities"*.

According to paragraph 23,

"Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action of their membership in a lawful organization."

These principles are universally applicable. Therefore, your government is under an obligation to adequately protect and support its lawyers.


In view of the above, we strongly urge your government to honour its international human rights obligations and to immediately lift the travel bans on Mrs. Sotoudeh and to put an end to any acts of harassment against Mrs. Ebadi.

We thank you for your attention to this very important matter. We are confident of your good will and sense of justice and will continue to monitor this case closely.

On behalf of the President of **Lawyers for Lawyers**, Phon van den Biesen,

sincerely,

Foundation Lawyers for Lawyers



Mrs Adrie van de Streek
Executive director