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Európsky parlament Evropski parlament Euroopan parlamentti Europaparlamentet

H.E. Hassan Rouhani
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Brussels, 25 February 2019

Dear President Rouhani,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, are writing to express our strong concerns over the prolonged detention of eight environmental human rights defenders and serious violations of their due process and fair trial rights and to urge their immediate and unconditional release.

Houman Jokar, Sepideh Kashani, Niloufar Bayani, Amirhossein Khaleghi, Sam Rajabi, Taher Ghadirian, Morad Tahbaz, and Abdolreza Kouhpayeh, all members of a local environmental group, the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, were arrested in January and February 2018 and have been detained without access to a lawyer of their own choosing. On February 10, the family of Seyed Emami, an Iranian-Canadian university professor who was also detained with others, reported that he had died in detention in unknown circumstances. Iranian authorities claimed that he committed suicide, but they have not conducted an impartial investigation into his death and have placed a travel ban on his wife, Maryam Mombeini. We understand that the Iranian judiciary has accused the activists of using environmental projects as a cover to collect classified strategic information while a committee established under your authority has found no evidence into these allegations. In a worrisome development, in November, the judiciary elevated the charge for four individuals to “corruption on earth”, which can carry the death penalty.

We are concerned that the trial of eight activists, that has begun behind closed doors on 30 January 2019, falls seriously short of fair trial standards. Judge Abdolghassem Salavati at Branch 15 of Tehran’s revolutionary court reportedly prevented a defendant from appearing in court with a lawyer of his own choosing, and after one of the defendants told the court she has been absent from the past two sessions of the trial, that she had been tortured in detention.

As stressed during a February 2016 debate in our Foreign Affairs Committee with Foreign Minister Zarif, and repeatedly in urgency resolutions adopted by this House, we believe that respect for international human rights standards should be at the core of EU-Iran bilateral relations, and it is cases like these that serve as a litmus test for your government’s commitment to make progress in its human rights record.

We therefore call on you to use the authority of your office, as the President and Head of the national security, to secure the release of these environmental defenders and, pending their release, to ensure a fair and open trial based on Iran’s human rights obligations and constitutional protections.



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Yours sincerely,

Ana Gomes (S&D)
Elmar Brok (EPP)
Marietje Schaake (ALDE)
Barbara Lochbihler (Greens/EFA)
Theresa Griffin (S&D)
Ernest Urtasun (Greens/EFA)
Jiří Pospíšil (EPP)
Bodil Valero (Greens/EFA)
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