
Le Président
The President

Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street
End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Brussels, 5 March 2012

Re: Concerns regarding the sentencing of human rights lawyer, Mr Abdolfattah Soltani

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it has also observer representatives from a further eleven European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

My predecessor wrote to you with concerns about Mr Abdolfattah Soltani, a prominent human rights lawyer working for the Centre for Human Rights Defenders, on 22 June 2009. Now it has been brought to our attention that he has been sentenced to 18 years in prison, and also banned from exercising his profession for 20 years, along with being transferred to a remote prison in the city of Borazjan. Mr Soltani is reported to have faced charges of "propaganda against the regime", "establishing the Defenders of Human Rights Centre", "assembly and collusion against national security" and "accepting an unlawful prize", apparently referring to the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award, which Mr Soltani received in 2009.

The CCBE believes that these charges are a result of Mr Soltani's activities as a human rights lawyer, following his giving devoted services to his clients, including well-known prisoners of conscience and leaders of Iran's persecuted Baha'i community.

The CCBE is alarmed by these facts, which indicate a repressive environment for human rights lawyers in Iran.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention the following Articles of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

Article 16 states that:

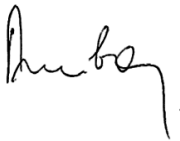
Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economics or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Furthermore, Article 23 states that:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the rights 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 organisations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organisation. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognised standards and ethics of the legal profession.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to take immediate and effective steps to release Mr Abdolfattah Soltani, drop all charges brought against him and guarantee in all circumstances that lawyers in Iran are able to conduct their professional duties without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in order to preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice and ensure that all attempts to discredit lawyers for the legitimate exercise of their professional duties are promptly and effectively stopped.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Prunbauer-Glaser', with a small dot at the end of the line.

Marcella PRUNBAUER-GLASER

President