
Amnesty International

MONTHLY ACTION

ACTIVISM TEAM, Amnesty International UK
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November 2015

Iran: Forced Virginity Test

Individuals at Risk: Atena Farghadani

Atena Farghadani is a 29-year-old artist is in prison for her art and peaceful activism. She was found guilty of charges including 'insulting members of parliament through paintings. Since being imprisoned she has also faced further charges, her male lawyer visited her in prison and she shook his hand. Guards arrested him and it is believed that she is now facing charges of 'illicit sexual relations falling short of adultery'. Recently, as a result of this charge, the Iranian authorities have forced her to undergo a 'virginity and pregnancy test'.

In a note written by Atena Farghadani leaked from prison, which has been seen by Amnesty International, she says the judicial authorities took her to a medical center outside the prison on 12 August 2015 and forced her to submit to the tests, purportedly with the purpose of investigating the charge against her.

Coerced "virginity testing" is internationally recognised as a form of violence and discrimination against women and girls. It also violates the absolute prohibition of torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment under international law, including article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Iran has ratified.

Atena has also complained that prison officials and guards have made lewd gestures, sexual slurs and other insults to her. She went on a three-day "dry" hunger strike in September 2015 in protest at this ill-treatment; however the harassment has continued.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

1) Please write letters of solidarity to Atena to the address below:

We have received mixed feedback on how many solidarity messages are actually given to individuals in Evin Prison, but we believe it sends a strong message to the Iranian authorities at the prison when they see the solidarity messages coming in for a person.

Atena Farghadani
Evin Prison,
Chamran Highway,
Shahid Katchuyi Street,
Darakeh Tehran,
Islamic Republic of Iran.

If you have any queries about this action and for updates please contact:
iar@amnesty.org.uk / 020 7033 1675

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WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

2) As Atena is an artist we are encouraging people to Draw for Atena in solidarity. You can see some example of drawing already received below, please visit <http://draw4atena.tumblr.com/> where you can upload your pictures directly or you can email pictures to us at activism@amnesty.org.uk.

Also if you haven't done so already you can sign and promote our Atena petition at www.amnesty.org.uk/atena

3) Please write to, tweet at and email the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran calling

- Iranian authorities to drop all charges, including any charges she faces for shaking her lawyers hand – such as “illicit sexual relations falling short of adultery”.
- For Atena Farghadani to be released immediately and unconditionally, because she is a prisoner of conscience who has been held solely for her peaceful exercise of her rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly;
- Prior to release urging them to allow her regular visits from her family and lawyer.;
- To ensure she is protected from torture and other ill-treatment and receives any medical care she may require;
- For an independent and impartial investigation to be urgently conducted into the alleged torture and ill-treatment suffered by Atena Farghadani and those responsible brought to justice.

You can send your appeals to:

Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

The Office of the Supreme Leader

Islamic Republic Street - End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: (via website) <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter>

Salutation: Your Excellency

Email: (via website) <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter>

Twitter: @khamenei_ir (English), @Khamenei_ar (Arabic), @Khamenei_es (Spanish).

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Background Information

Individuals at Risk: Atena Farghadani

Background

Atena Farghadani is a prisoner of conscience. She has committed no internationally recognisable crime, and has been punished simply for exercising her rights to freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

Held in prison since January 2015, Atena Farghadani was sentenced in June 2015 to 12 years and nine months in prison for her peaceful activism, including meeting with families of political prisoners, and for drawing a satirical cartoon depicting legislators as monkeys, cows, and other animals. The cartoon was in protest at a bill that seeks to criminalise voluntary sterilisation and restrict access to contraception and family planning services.

In December 2014, when she was out on bail she released a video message on YouTube protesting at how female prison guards at Evin prison had beaten her, verbally abused her and forced her to strip naked for a body search. Instead of investigating these allegations the Iranian authorities rearrested her in January 2015, possibly in reprisal for the video.

Forced virginity testing committed in detention is a serious violation of international law. It violates women and girls human rights to physical integrity, dignity, privacy and right to be free from torture and cruel and inhuman and degrading treatment. Such tests are discriminatory in purpose and in effect and there is absolutely no legitimate justification for such violence and abuse.

Atena Farghadani and all women prisoners who come forward to report gender-based violence should be commended for their bravery and granted full reparations, including guarantees that it will not happen again.

Instead of exploiting the taboos around sexual violence to scare women from engaging in political activism, the Iranian authorities must urgently take steps to put an end to violence and discrimination against women and guarantee women's access to legal procedures that will bring justice in cases of gender-based violence.

Examples of images people have already contributed to the Draw4Atena action

