



# Campaign in Solidarity with Feminist Political Prisoners in the Middle East and North Africa

June 2019

The aim of this campaign is to demand the immediate and unconditional release of a diverse set of women political prisoners who oppose patriarchy and religious fundamentalism, defend women's rights, human rights, labor rights and the rights of oppressed minorities.

It is incumbent upon feminists and socialist feminists around the world to step forward and take a more active role in opposing the oppression, torture and murder of their sisters in the Middle East and North Africa.

The women featured in this brochure are not passive victims. They are thinkers, writers and leaders who can help expand the struggle for women's emancipation and social emancipation.

Solidarity with them is a concrete way to oppose the capitalist authoritarian and imperialist or sub-imperialist powers that are promoting exploitation, repression, misogyny, racism and war in the MENA region and around the world.

### How Can You Help?

\* Reprint this brochure on your website, weblog or facebook page.

\*Organize an event in your city to promote this campaign and to draw connections to feminist, anti-racist, and labor struggles in your country.

For more information, contact the Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists

For more information contact

**Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists**

[info@allianceofmesocialists.org](mailto:info@allianceofmesocialists.org)

[www.allianceofmesocialists.org](http://www.allianceofmesocialists.org)

## Syria



The Assad regime has been able to continue its mass executions and its brutal war against Syrian

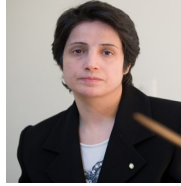
revolutionaries with impunity. Thus, the names and fates of many women political prisoners are not known. Religious fundamentalist forces have also killed revolutionaries, including Arab and Kurdish women activists and fighters. It is almost certain that Syrian socialist feminists, Samira al-Khalil and Razan Zaitouneh were killed by religious fundamentalist extremists in Ghouta after their abductions in December 2013. The fate of Tal al-Mallouhi remains uncertain. The Syrian poet and blogger was arrested in 2009 for threatening the security of the state without evidence. She has since then surpassed her sentence and yet remains detained.

Since the Syrian popular uprising began in March 2011, approximately 118,000 individuals have been arrested or forcibly disappeared, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. Over 104,000 of those, or slightly more than 85 percent, were taken prisoner by the Syrian government.

The brutality of the Assad regime seeps through all fabrics of life in Syria. Its cruelty is particularly expressed inside its prison cells. The regime has 13 "intelligence" departments, each divided into numerous prisons. The most notorious are the Adra and Saydnaya prisons. In a report surfaced in 2017 detailing the secret hanging of 13,000 prisoners, a former guard of the Saydnaya prison described it as "the end of humanity". Mass executions, daily torture and sexual abuse await both male and female political prisoners in Syria.

The physical torture comes in two forms. The first includes the use of certain techniques and specialized instruments to maximize the amount of pain inflicted on the prisoner. The German Chair, for example, is designed to stretch nerve muscles to the point of visibility and cause severe damage to the backbone and in some cases break it. The second form is the humiliation and degradation of prisoners via sexual violence. A report released last month by Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights details the use of water hoses, enforced sterilization and genital mutilation against male prisoners. Female prisoners are often electrocuted, beaten with horse hoses and raped systematically, which sometimes leads to unwanted pregnancies. An eye-witness reports the use of rats and rodents by soldiers during the sexual assault of an inmate resulting in her death.

# Iran



**Nasrin Sotudeh** is a prominent human-rights attorney who was arrested and imprisoned on June 13, 2018 and faces a 12-year prison term without the possibility of parole (out of a reduced 38-year sentence) and 148 lashes. The charges against her are “collusion against national security,” membership in a human rights organization that opposes the death penalty, “promoting corruption” and appearing in public without a headscarf. She was arrested for taking on the legal cases of the “Girls of Revolution Avenue” (women who publicly removed their head scarves) and for opposing the Iranian judiciary’s latest decree that prevents political activists and dissidents from choosing their own attorney. Sotudeh had been imprisoned for three years between 2010 and 2013 for defending political activists and feminists from the 2009 Green movement and for defending abused women and children. She has worked closely with Iranian Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi and has received various international awards for her courageous work.



**Narges Mohammadi**, B.A. in applied physics, is a journalist, women’s rights and human rights activist, and deputy director of the Center for the Defenders of Human Rights in Iran, founded by Nobel Peace Laureate, Shirin Ebadi. In 2009, after mass protests to oppose the fraudulent election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, she was arrested on charges of “assembly and collusion against national security,” and sentenced to 11 years in prison. By 2013, after developing severe health problems, she was released after posting bail. In 2015, she was rearrested on charges of sedition and for starting a campaign against the death penalty. Her opposition to the execution of innocent Sunni political prisoners was used by the courts to accuse her of “supporting ISIS.” In 2016, she received a 16-year prison sentence which she is now serving. She continues to face severe health problems.



**Zeynab Jalalian** is a Kurdish political activist who was arrested and imprisoned in 2008 for her activities with the political wing of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party. She received a death sentence which was later commuted to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Since her arrest and imprisonment, she has suffered from systematic abuse, torture and solitary confinement for refusing to “confess” to armed actions attributed to her by the state. She lost her sight due to deliberate lack of treatment by prison authorities and the state.



**Sanaz Allahyari** along with her husband Amir Hossein Mohammadi Fard, are editorial and founding members of the student journal, Gam. In January 2019, they were arrested in their home by state security forces and were sent to the ministry of intelligence prison of Ahwaz. Their online journal Gam, has offered a variety of articles and reports on labor struggles, women’s struggles, political economy, philosophy and art.



**Atena Daemi** is a women’s rights and children’s rights activist who has been imprisoned since May 2015 and serving a seven-year prison sentence since November 2016 for charges such as distributing flyers against the death penalty, meeting the families of political prisoners, criticizing the Islamic Republic of Iran on Facebook and condemning the 1988 mass executions of political prisoners in Iran. In 2018, she and Golrokh Iraee another imprisoned feminist went on a 55-day hunger strike to protest the lengthening of their sentence, beatings and the terrible conditions under which they were being held. In 2018, she wrote an open letter of solidarity to the Kurdish political prisoner, Ramin Hossein Panahi who was later executed. Recently, she and another woman political prisoner, Maryam Akbari Monfared, wrote an open letter of solidarity to striking Iranian workers.

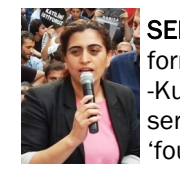


**Sepideh Gholian** is a civil rights activist, journalist and prisoner of conscience from the city of Ahvaz. On November 18, 2018, Gholian, who was working as a citizen journalist was arrested for reporting a labor protest organized by the Workers Union of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company. Following her release on bail, Gholian gave Amnesty International an account of the torture she suffered while in custody of police and ministry of intelligence officials in the cities of Shush and Ahvaz. She was arrested again on January 20, 2019.

# Turkey



**Füsün Üstel** professor of political science, signed a joint declaration for peace in Turkey in 2016 against the military operations of the government that targeted the civilian citizens in the Kurdish region of the country. She has been sentenced to prison for one year and three-month. The statement was signed by 2212 academics from over 50 universities.



**SEBAHAT TUNCEL** had served in parliament. As a former deputy of the HDP and the co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP), she is serving a 15 year sentence on charges including “founding and managing an armed terrorist group,” violating the law on assembly and demonstrations and “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization.” She has been an active member of the women’s movement and was a leader of women’s meetings and rallies. She was on hunger strike for more than 4 month and ended her strike on May 26.



**Barkın Timtik**: member of the Progressive Lawyers’ Association (ÇHD) and People’s Law Bureau (HHB), has been sentenced to prison for 18 years and 9 months on the charge of “founding and managing a terrorist organization.



**Çiçek Otlı**: A socialist and women rights’ activist Otlı is the President of the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP). She has been imprisoned for more than a year and half. She has been accused of being a member of a “terrorist” organization.

# Saudi Arabia

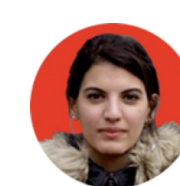
Women have been imprisoned and put on trial for opposing the discriminatory male guardianship law and defending human rights. They have been charged with committing “terrorism,” “endangering national unity” or “undermining the reputation or position of the state.” 10 women human rights defenders (Loujain Al-Hathloul, Aziza Al-Yousef, Iman Al-Nafjan, Nouf Abdelaziz, Dr. Hatoon Al-Fassi, Samar Badawi, Nassima Al-Sadah, Mohammed Al-Bajadi, Amal Al-Harbi, and Shadan Al-Anezi) are being tried separately but on similar charges for allegedly communicating with human rights organizations. Their hearings have not been public as journalists and diplomats were not allowed to attend. They have been tortured and sexually harassed or assaulted. Some have been temporarily released but await trial. In addition Israa al-Ghomgham a human rights activist from the Shi’a region of Qatif has been in detention for the past three years.



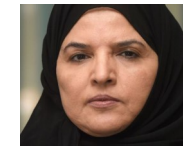
**Loujain Al-Hathloul** is known both for her role in the women to drive movement and in opposing the Saudi male guardianship system. On 1 December 2014, she was arrested and detained for 73 days after an attempt to cross the border in her car from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Saudi Arabia on charges related to defying the female driving ban in the kingdom. In September 2016, along with 14,000 others, al-Hathloul signed a petition to King Salman asking for the male guardianship system to be abolished. On 4 June 2017, she was arrested, detained and later released. In May 2018, she was arrested with several prominent women's rights activists, on the charge of attempting to destabilize the kingdom. She has also been severely tortured.



**Nassima Al-Sadah**, is a human rights writer and activist from the Shi’a majority eastern province Qatif, Saudi Arabia.<sup>[2]</sup> She has “campaigned for civil and political rights, women's rights and the rights of the Shi'a minority for many years. She ran as a candidate in the 2015 Saudi Arabian municipal elections but was disqualified.<sup>[2][4]</sup> Sadah and another prominent activist, Samar Badawi, were arrested on July 30, 2018 <sup>[3]</sup> were arrested by Saudi authorities in a broader "government crackdown" on "activists, clerics and journalists."<sup>[1]</sup> Al Sada was placed in solitary confinement in early February 2019 in al-Mabahith Prison in Dammam.



**Israa al-Ghomgham**, a human right defender from the region of Qatif, an eastern coastal city with a Shi’a majority, has been in detention for the past 3 years for documenting and denouncing government human rights violations during peaceful democracy demonstrations. Earlier she faced the death penalty. Now she and 5 other defendants are being prosecuted for “illegal protsts” before a criminal court.



**Aziza Al-Yousef**, a women's rights activist and professor of computer science, was arrested along with fellow activist Eman al-Nafjan in 2013 for driving through Riyadh by themselves. They were forced to sign a pledge that they would not drive again. That year, al-Youssef launched a global awareness campaign following the rape of 5-year girl by her father, a Saudi cleric. In 2016, she helped to lead a campaign against the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia. She "attempted to deliver to the Royal Advisory Council a 14,700-signature petition seeking to abolish the guardianship regulations but she was rebuffed and told to mail it." In May 2018, al-Yousef was detained by Saudi authorities, along with Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan, Aisha Almane, Madeha al-Ajroush and two men involved in women's rights campaigning. Saudi authorities accused the arrested activists of having "suspicious contact with foreign parties", providing financial support to "hostile elements abroad" and recruiting government workers. As of November, 2018, she was being held in the Dhahban Central Prison. In late March 2019, she and other feminist prisoners presented their defence and described physical and sexual abuse they had endured in captivity.

# Palestine



**Shireen Issawi** is a human rights lawyer and prominent advocate for Palestinian prisoner rights from occupied East Jerusalem who has participated in monitoring, documenting and advocacy on human rights violations committed by Israeli authorities against Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons. Ms Issawi was arrested by Israeli authorities on 6 March 2014 and detained until October 2017. In January 2019, Israeli occupation authorities handed her an order which prevents her from practicing law for the rest of her life.

# Algeria



**Luisa Hanoune**, is an Algerian politician, political activist, feminist and a lawyer by profession. She is the head of Algeria's Workers' Party (Parti des Travailleurs, PT), which she co-founded in 1989. It was in the 1970s at the university where she first became politically involved in the struggle for women's rights and equality in Algeria. She was imprisoned by the government several times for her political activism prior to the legalization of political parties in 1988. In 2004, she became the first woman to run for President of Algeria and the first female candidate for president in the Arab world. In the context of the revolutionary process taking place in Algeria, she has been arrested and accused of “conspiring against the authority of the state and the army”. She has been in jail since May 9<sup>th</sup>.