

Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadi Nejad
President, Islamic Republic of Iran
Pasteur Avenue
Tehran, Iran 13168-43311

21 January 2010

To President Ahmadi Nejad:

We are deeply distressed to learn of the recent actions taken against our sister Nobel Peace Laureate Dr. Shirin Ebadi. We urge the Islamic Republic of Iran to immediately release all funds belonging to Dr. Ebadi and her husband and stop the harassment of Dr. Ebadi and her family.

Dr. Ebadi has been the target of a long campaign of intimidation. In the past, her home has been vandalized, her offices have been searched and shut down and her documents and computer seized. Dr. Ebadi has been denied access to her bank accounts and denied her pension payments. She has received death threats and her family members have been threatened as well. Her husband has also had assets frozen and confiscated and has been assaulted and detained. Most recently, her sister Dr. Nooshin Ebadi was arrested and detained.

Although the foreign ministry has implied that the assets have been frozen because of a tax dispute, Dr. Ebadi has stated that the confiscation of her property is in breach of the law of the Islamic republic. The claim from the government for taxes on the Nobel Peace Prize money has been presented only recently, many years after her receipt of the funds. The fact that Dr. Ebadi's assets were frozen by an order from the Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office, rather than tax authorities, and the blocking of her husband's assets and accounts, further undermines the credibility of the claim that this is a tax dispute. Any genuine dispute about taxes should be resolved by the proper procedures and authorities, not by security forces through such unlawful and extrajudicial methods.

In 2003, Dr. Ebadi was the first Iranian to win the Nobel Peace Prize and her honor brought honor to the Iranian people. Dr. Ebadi advocates on behalf of Iranian political activists, religious and ethnic minorities, and women and children through peaceful means. The continued attempts to intimidate her and stop her work are not only futile, they color your regime as unjust and unreasonable.

These recent actions against Dr. Ebadi appear to be part of an intensifying strategy to silence civil society and human-rights defenders. This has included the harassment, arrest, imprisonment, torture and execution of human rights activists, violent reactions to peaceful protests and a crackdown on Internet access and press freedom. We have recently learned of the arrest of more than sixteen women human rights activists and the imposition of the death sentence on five other human rights activists.

We know this strategy will not succeed. Thousands of Iranians will continue to express their ideas about how they want to live and what they believe Iran should look like and we, along with the rest of the world, will continue to support them. We urge you to halt the policies of intimidation and harassment of Iranian citizens exercising their rights. It is long past time to listen to and work with the people of Iran instead of violently suppressing them.

We respectfully await a response to our concerns and requests.

Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize (1976)

Betty Williams, Nobel Peace Prize (1976)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize (1984)

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize (1986)

His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Nobel Peace Prize (1989)

Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Nobel Peace Prize (1992)

F.W. de Klerk, Nobel Peace Prize (1993)

President José Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Prize (1996)

Jody Williams, Nobel Peace Prize (1997)

John Hume, Nobel Peace Prize (1998)

David Trimble, Nobel Peace Prize (1998)

Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize (2003)

Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize (2004)