

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi  
Head of the Judiciary  
Ministry of Justice  
Park-e Shahr  
Tehran  
**Iran**

Please forward to His Excellency Ayatollah Shahrudi

**Protest against Death Penalty: The case of Nazanin**

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the state of women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There have been reports about women being sentenced to death for murder when they were actually trying to defend their physical integrity. Women must have the right to self-defence. They must have the right to defend themselves against rape or other crimes.

Thus, I learned about the case of **Nazanin**. She tried to defend herself and her niece against rape. They were being threatened by three men. As Nazanin tried to defend herself and her niece with a knife, she accidentally killed one of the attackers.

Women who are victims of attempted rape should not be pilloried and accused as perpetrators when it was not them but the men who attacked. I am deeply concerned about the death sentence imposed on Nazanin. What is more, she was under age at the time of the deed. The Iranian government has committed itself to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that "sentence of death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age". In addition, I am calling on the Iranian authorities to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child which called on Iran in January 2005 to "immediately suspend the execution of all death penalties imposed on persons for having committed a crime before the age of 18, and to abolish the death penalty as a sentence imposed on persons for having committed crimes before the age of 18, as required by article 37 of the convention".

I would like to emphasise that I fully acknowledge a government's responsibility to bring to justice those suspected of criminal offences such as murder. On the other hand, I wish to express my unconditional opposition to the death penalty in principle and to the fact that female victims are being turned into perpetrators in particular.

The court's decision in the case of Nazanin is no isolated case. I hope that the government of Iran will advocate further progress in fair trials, uphold the provision of legal assistance for accused persons, abandon the death penalty, and take steps to counter cruel and inhumane treatment.

I am aware of the legal possibility for Nazanin to appeal against the court decision. This means that justice may still be done by Nazanin if the court acknowledges mitigating circumstances. Considering the circumstances the sentence can only one of acquittal.

I wish to emphasize that every woman has the right of physical integrity. Every woman must have the right to defend herself against rape!

Yours sincerely