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November 24, 2010

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei  
The Office of the Supreme Leader  
Tehran  
Islamic Republic of Iran

Re: Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh

Your Excellency:

The American Bar Association (ABA) is an independent, voluntary, non-governmental organization of nearly 400,000 lawyers and judges worldwide. It regards human rights and the rule of law as cornerstones of a free and just society and has committed to strengthening them in the United States and internationally.

The ABA is deeply concerned about the Government of Iran's treatment of human rights lawyer and advocate, Nasrin Sotoudeh. Ms. Sotoudeh has been detained since September in Evin prison on charges of "acting against national security," "congregation and collusion with intent to disrupt national security," and "cooperation with the Center for Human Rights Defenders." According to numerous reliable reports, she has acted only in legal defense of human rights defenders, as she repeatedly has asserted while detained, and she just recently ended a weeks-long hunger strike to protest her unwarranted detention and trial. According to these reports, she has been denied access to her lawyer to prepare her defense, and although her health had deteriorated significantly while in prison, she received no medical attention.

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders calls upon states to ". . . take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of [human rights defenders] against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary actions" as a consequence of their legitimate effort to promote human rights. Further, the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers state that lawyers must be allowed to carry out their work "without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference" and affirm the right of lawyers to freedom of expression. "The right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights" also is provided for in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party.

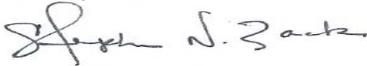
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The charges against Ms. Sotoudeh appear to constitute harassment for work that is recognized and safeguarded specifically under international law. The ABA therefore respectfully urges the Government of Iran, consistent with its obligations under international law, to release Ms. Sotoudeh from state custody and to refrain from further interference with her work as a human rights defender. If her trial proceeds to the next phase, the ABA urges that it be conducted in accordance with all the fair trial and due process protections set forth under international law, including prompt and unfettered access to legal counsel of her choice and access by independent observers.

Sincerely,



Stephen N. Zack

cc: Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani  
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