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LETTER # 8

Honorable Mr. Miguel De La Lama  
Secretary of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

For your attention:

My client, Ms. Haleh Esfandiari is Director of the Department of Middle East Studies at the Woodrow Wilson Center located in Washington DC. In December 2006, she traveled to Tehran to visit her mother. She had been in Iran for ten days when on December 30, while on route to the airport to catch a flight to Washington DC, she was accosted by two assailants. They stole her purse, which contained her passport. The following day, she went to the police department to file a complaint. At the police department, they informed her that she is wanted by the Ministry of Information for questioning. After answering their questions, she was told by the Ministry that if she does not notify the media of her interrogation or raise a fuss she will immediately receive a new passport. Unfortunately, this form of illegal interrogation was repeated several times over a period of more than two months. In an effort to prove her good intentions, Ms. Esfandiari answered all their questions and only discussed the matter with her family.

On May 8, my client received a phone call summoning her to the Ministry for further interrogation. Without observing the proper legal protocol, they arrested her and took her to Evin Prison. From May 8 until today, she has been held in solitary confinement. She is allowed no contact with the outside world, and is being denied all the rights afforded to prisoners under Iranian law.

I have demanded to see my client several times, but still have not attained any access. In addition, I have not been given access to Ms. Esfandiari's file.

On July 18, government television in Iran ran a special on my client. In that special, she made self-incrimination statements, and confessed that she intended to implement regime change in Iran by organizing conferences to which experts and pundits were invited. Both Iranian officials and the state-aligned press continue to charge my client with undermining the Iranian government and promoting regime change in Iran.

Given the fact that the theft of Ms. Esfandiari's passport, the interrogations she underwent by the Ministry, and most importantly her arrest are not only in contradiction to

international human rights standards, but also illegal under Iranian law, her case is a clear example of arbitrary detention.

Notably, Ms. Esfandiari has been in solitary confinement since May 8 and has been denied all her individual rights such as family contact, right to attorney, etc.

In order to secure my client's rights, I have attempted multiple visits and sent many letters to no avail. Thus, it is my duty to notify the director and dear members of the Human Rights Commission Working Group on Arbitrary Detainment that because Ms. Esfandiari is 68 years old and in poor health, the conditions of her imprisonment are putting her in grave danger. Consequently, if it is possible, please give special priority to this file so that my client can be freed and receive a fair and public trial.

Sincerely,

Shirin Ebadi  
2003 Nobel Peace Prize Winner  
Attorney at Law