

Background information

Abdolfattah Soltani

Abdolfattah Soltani, born on November 2nd, 1953, has been fighting for the recognition of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with admirable courage. As a prominent lawyer and member of the “Defenders of Human Rights Centre“ (DHRC) founded by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, he has represented nonviolent political prisoners in court, under extremely difficult conditions. In 2008, the DHRC was forcibly closed by state authorities.



In 2009 the City of Nuremberg awarded the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award to Abdolfattah Soltani. The jury, consisting of high functionaries of the UN-System and Nobel Peace Prize laureates, wished to honor his exemplary work for the recognition of those rights. **The jury gave the following reasons for its decision:** Abdolfattah Soltani has been fighting for the recognition of human rights in the „Islamic Republic of Iran“ with admirable courage and at high personal risk. As a lawyer and member of the „Defenders of Human Rights Centre“ founded by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, he has represented nonviolent political prisoners in court, in extremely difficult conditions, and has undauntedly made every effort to uncover and publicly denounce serious human rights violations by Iranian authorities. Neither threats and harassment by state authorities nor arbitrary arrests, several prison sentences and temporary bans from his profession, succeeded in preventing him from following his commitment to the struggle for the recognition of human rights in his home country. The Iranian state’s measures against Abdolfattah Soltani are obviously politically motivated and aimed at rendering his work as a lawyer impossible and at intimidating other defenders of human rights.

Factual circumstances of Soltani's arrest

In **2004**, Abdolfattah Soltani was arrested for four months after asserting that some of his clients – imprisoned opposition leaders – **had been tortured in prison**. On **July 30th, 2005**, he was arrested while protesting against a warrant for his arrest and a search warrant for his home. Soltani spent **219 days in Tehran’s Evin-prison, 43 of them in solitary confinement**. On **March 6th, 2006**, he was released after having deposited a bail of 100,000 Euro, which his family was only able to pay with the support of a solidarity movement. On **July 16th, 2006**, he was sentenced to five years in prison for the alleged transfer of confidential information, but he appealed. On **May 26th, 2007**, the court of appeal had **acquitted him of all charges**.

On **June 16th, 2009**, Abdolfattah Soltani was arrested in his office in Teheran. The arrest occurred **without a warrant and without indication of reason**. The Jury of the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award appealed to the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran to immediate release of Soltani from custody. In its letter the jury made reference to the

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran has ratified. After 72 days, two weeks out of which he had to spend **in solitary confinement**, Abdolfattah Soltani was released from detention by the end of August, 2009. Nevertheless, on **October 2nd, 2009**, the Iranian authorities **refused Soltani to leave the country** in order to attend the award ceremony in Nuremberg. The prize was awarded in absence of the prizewinner for the first time since its foundation in 1995.

On **September 10th, 2011**, Abdolfattah Soltani was again arrested. The charges included “spreading propaganda against the system”, “setting up an illegal opposition group” and “gathering and colluding with intent to harm national security.” By the **end of September** a new indictment was raised: “accepting an illegal prize” relating to the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award in 2009. On **January 1th, 2012**, Soltani was allowed to **see his file for the first time**, 3 hours per day. He claimed the following procedural errors:

- illegal extension of imprisonment (period of pre-trial detention expired)
- no granting of release on bail (as it is usually the case)
- no access records and no access to law books
- no meeting with the judge

On **March 4th, 2012**, Abdolfattah Soltani was sentenced to 18 years in prison. In addition to the prison term, he was handed a 20-year ban from practicing law. The sentence consists of:

- 10 years in prison for founding the DHRC
- 5 years in prison for gathering and colluding with intent to harm national security
- 2 years for accepting an illegal award
- 1 year for spreading propaganda against the system

In **June 2012** on the appeal process the sentence was reduced to 13 years imprisonment. However, the subsequent occupational ban remains in force.

In **March 2013**, after his one-month-long hospital stay Abdolfattah Soltani would have been released on bail in amount of EUR 300.000. However, he refused to pay this amount of money, since such a high bailment is illegally disproportionate.

On **2 November 2013**, his 60th birthday, Soltani joined with three other political prisoners in a hunger strike for nine days to protest against the inadequate health care for political prisoners in Evin Prison.

(as of November, 2013 – Human Rights Office of the City of Nuremberg)