Campaign in Solidarity with Feminist Political Prisoners in the Middle East and North Africa

June 2019

The aim of this campaign is to demand the immediate and unconditional release of a diverse set of women political prisoners who oppose patriarchy and religious fundamentalism, defend women’s rights, human rights, labor rights and the rights of oppressed minorities.

It is incumbent upon feminists and socialist feminists around the world to step forward and take a more active role in opposing the oppression, torture and murder of their sisters in the Middle East and North Africa.

The women featured in this brochure are not passive victims. They are thinkers, writers and leaders who can help expand the struggle for women’s emancipation and social emancipation.

Solidarity with them is a concrete way to oppose the capitalist authoritarian and imperialist or sub-imperialist powers that are promoting exploitation, repression, misogyny, racism and war in the MENA region and around the world.

How Can You Help?

* Reprint this brochure on your website, weblog or facebook page.
* Organize an event in your city to promote this campaign and to draw connections to feminist, anti-racist, and labor struggles in your country.

For more information, contact the Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists

Syria

The Assad regime has been able to continue its mass executions and its brutal war against Syrian revolutionaries with impunity. Thus, the names and fates of many women political prisoners are not known. Religious fundamentalist forces have also killed revolutionaries, including Arab and Kurdish women activists and fighters. Syrian socialist feminists, Samira al-Khalil and Razan Zaitouneh were abducted by religious fundamentalist extremists Jaysh al Islam in Ghouta in December 2013. Current update on their status since then has yet to be established. The fate of Tal al-Mallouhi remains similarly uncertain. The Syrian poet and blogger was arrested in 2009 for threatening the security of the state without evidence. She has since then surpassed her sentence and yet remains detained.

Since the Syrian popular uprising began in March 2011, approximately 118,000 individuals have been arrested or forcibly disappeared, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. Over 104,000 of those, or slightly more than 85 percent, were taken prisoner by the Syrian government.

The brutality of the Assad regime seeps through all fabrics of life in Syria. Its cruelty is particularly expressed inside its prison cells. The regime has 13 “intelligence” departments, each divided into numerous prisons. The most notorious are the Adra and Saydnaya prisons. In a report surfaced in 2017 detailing the secret hanging of 13,000 prisoners, a former guard of the Saydnaya prison described it as “the end of humanity”. Mass executions, daily torture and sexual abuse await both male and female political prisoners in Syria.

The physical torture comes in two forms. The first includes the use of certain techniques and specialized instruments to maximize the amount of pain inflicted on the prisoner. The German Chair, for example, is designed to stretch nerve muscles to the point of visibility and cause severe damage to the backbone and in some cases break it. The second form is the humiliation and degradation of prisoners via sexual violence. A report released last month by Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights details the use of water hoses, enforced sterilization and genital mutilation against male prisoners. Female prisoners are often electrocuted, beaten with horse hoses and raped systematically, which sometimes leads to unwanted pregnancies. An eye-witness reports the use of rats and rodents by soldiers during the sexual assault of an inmate resulting in her death.
Iran

Nasrin Sotoudeh is a prominent human rights attorney who was arrested and imprisoned on June 13, 2018 and faces a 12-year prison term without the possibility of parole (out of a reduced sentence of 13 years and 6 months) due to deliberate lack of treatment by prison authorities and the state. Their online journal Gam, has offered a variety of artistic work and is closed. Their case is due to armed actions attributed to her by the state.

Women have been imprisoned and put on trial for opposing the discriminatory male guardianship law and defending human rights. They have been charged with committing “terrorism,” “endangering national unity” or “undermining the reputation or prestige of the state.” 10 women human rights defenders (Loujain Al-Hathloul, Aizaa Al-Yousef, Iman Al-Nafjan, Nouf Abdelaziz, Dr. Hatton Al-Fassi, Samar Badawi, Nasseria Al-Nafjan, Aisha Al-Shaikh and Shadad Al-Anezi) are being tried separately but on similar charges for allegedly communicating with human rights organizations. Their hearings have not been public as journalists and diplomats were not allowed to attend. They have been tortured and sexually harassed or assaulted. Some have been temporarily released but await trial.

Loujain Al-Hathloul is known both for her role in the women to drive movement and in opposing the Saudi male guardian- ship system. On 1 December 2014, she was arrested and detained for 73 days after an attempt to cross the border in her car from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Saudi Arabia on charges related to defying the female driving ban in the kingdom. In September 2016, along with 14,000 others, al-Hathloul signed a petition to King Salman asking for the male guardianship system to be abolished. On 4 June 2017, she was arrested, detained and later released on bail. In May 2018, the Saudi Supreme Court convicted her and several prominent women’s rights activists, on the charge of attempting to destabilize the kingdom. She has also been severely tortured.

Saudi Arabia

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Palestine

Shireen Issawi is a human rights lawyer and prominent advocate for Palestinian prisoner rights from occupied East Jerusalem who has been on hunger strike for more than a year and half. She was arrested by Israeli authorities on June 6 2014 and detained until October 2017. In January 2019, Israeli occupation authorities handed her an order which prevents her from practicing law for the rest of her life.

Algeria

Lulaa Hanoune is an Algerian politician, political activist, feminist and a lawyer by profession. She is the head of Algeria’s Workers’ Party (Parti des Travailleurs Algériens). She was a member of the National People’s Congress of Algeria. She was born in 1955. She became the first female candidate for presi- dent in the Arab world. In the context of the revolutionary pro- cess taking place in Algeria, she has been arrested and accused of “conspiring against the authority of the state and the army”.

She has been in jail since May 9th 1989. It was in the 1970s at the university where she first be- came politically involved in the struggle for women’s rights and equality in Algeria. She was imprisoned by the government sever- al times for her political activism prior to the legalization of politi- cal parties in 1988. In 2004, she became the first woman to run for President of Algeria and the first female candidate for presi- dent in the Arab world. She was arrested and accused of “conspiring against the authority of the state and the army.”

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