Iranian Lawyers Condemn Tehran's Jailing of Colleague, Demand Release

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A group of Iranian lawyers has condemned Iran's government for imprisoning a fellow lawyer convicted of slandering a former official and demanded that their colleague be released.

In an open letter to the Iranian people dated Monday and shared with VOA Persian by lawyer Hossein Ahmadiniaz, he and 18 other lawyers said Sunday's jailing of their counterpart, Mostafa Tork Hamedani, at Tehran's Evin Prison violates Iran's international commitments to the principles of a fair trial.

An Iranian appeals court sentenced Hamedani last month to six months in prison with lashes, according to state-controlled news agency ISNA. Hamedani's own lawyer, Peyman Haj Mahmoud Attar, told ISNA that his client had been convicted of slandering Saeed Mortazavi, a former Iranian prosecutor and former head of Iran's Social Security Organization (SSO).

Hamedani is the latest Iranian lawyer to be jailed by Iranian authorities after having taken on politically sensitive cases. He represented several SSO workers in a 2016 trial in which they accused Mortazavi of corruption while he led the state body from 2011 to 2013. Mortazavi was convicted in that trial and sentenced to 135 lashes for wasting public funds.

Reuters reported that Hamedani, in remarks to Iranian state television, criticized Mortazavi's sentence as too light for the charges. Mortazavi later sued Hamedani, accusing him of making public statements that unduly influenced the trial while it was under way.

Mortazavi began serving a two-year prison term in April 2018 for a separate conviction of involvement in the death of a man tortured at Kahrizak Detention Center in 2009, while Mortazavi was working as a senior Iranian prosecutor and rounding up activists involved in anti-government protests that year.

In a Monday interview with VOA Persian, Ahmadiniaz praised Hamedani as a respected lawyer who also represented defendants in political and national security-related cases.

"A lawyer's place is not in jail, it is in a courtroom defending the rights of the people," Ahmadiniaz said. "We ask for Hamedani to be released unconditionally and immediately."

There was no comment on the jailing of Hamedani in Iranian state media.

In a Jan. 19 report, the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran said Iranian authorities imprisoned at least seven lawyers in 2018, including prominent human rights defender Nasrin Sotoudeh. It said those lawyers had defended political prisoners or rejected a state requirement that only lawyers on a judiciary-approved list can represent detainees held on national security charges.

In an [Instagram post](https://www.instagram.com/p/BtakR82HElx/) Sunday, prior to his incarceration, Hamedani said he exhausted all legal channels to avoid prison and accepted his sentence.

Last month, Hamedani posted an Instagram photo with his daughters along with a caption saying he was not upset about the court's verdict. "This is nothing compared to the courageous people who have given their lives for their country," he wrote.