



The Plea for Mercy for Silva Harotonian, Imprisoned Iranian Humanitarian Worker

The story of Silva Harotonian – a young Iranian woman of Armenian descent, now held in prison in Iran – is one of good intentions and unfortunate misunderstandings.

Silva, 34 years old, was employed by International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), a U.S.-based nonpolitical and nonprofit provider of international person-to-person exchange programs. Silva's position was based in Armenia, but Silva traveled occasionally to her homeland of Iran to support the program on which she worked as an administrative staffer.

On June 26, 2008, Silva was arrested by Iranian authorities. She was thrown in jail and charged with plotting to create a “soft revolution” against the Islamic Republic of Iran, and on January 19, 2009, was sentenced to three years in jail. Since then, her initial appeal has been denied.

Silva's cousin Klara is now asking for mercy for Silva, and requesting that supporters learn more about Silva and sign a petition for her release through the Web site www.FreeSilva.org.

Summary of Silva's Situation:

- *Silva Harotonian, 34 year old Iranian citizen of Armenian descent.*
- *Administrative staffer based in Armenia for nonprofit organization IREX.*
- *Supported maternal and child health exchange program between United States and Iran.*
- *Arrested June 26, 2008, in Tehran for attempted “soft revolution” of Iranian government.*
- *Convicted on January 19, 2009, to three years in Iranian prison, with initial appeal subsequently denied.*
- *“Free Silva” effort requesting mercy for Silva launched by cousin Klara of Los Angeles.*
- *www.FreeSilva.org Web site offers more information and petition for supporters.*

About Silva Harotonian:

Silva has spent much of her life in Iran, attending University of Azad in Tehran, where she studied Armenian literature. An active member of her church (the Armenian Prelacy), Silva previously served as a translator and interpreter for the Armenian Archbishop in Tehran. She has been described by family, friends and coworkers as a kind-hearted and honorable young woman of limited life experience.

Silva has been a loyal citizen of Iran, like hundreds of thousands of Armenian-Iranians. In 2004, she received a letter of commendation from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for

her involvement in promoting the anniversary of the revolution that brought the government to power.

There is no indication that Silva has ever acted with harmful political intentions toward Iran in her professional or personal life.

Silva's Role at IREX:

Silva was hired by IREX in Yerevan, Armenia, to support the Maternal and Child Health Education Program (MCHEEP), which was designed to allow medical professionals from the United States and Iran to share healthcare best practices. Silva performed basic administrative tasks, such as managing logistics for participants, coordinating budgeting and conducting office work like filing, for this non-political program.

Silva's position at IREX provided a stable, albeit modest, salary that allowed her to afford her own apartment, and offered the opportunity to help others and benefit her homeland of Iran.

Silva's Unfortunate Detainment and Conviction:

On June 26, 2008, Silva's life was turned upside-down, when she was detained and charged with violating a provision of Iranian law that criminalizes activities undertaken as part of a "soft overthrow" of the government.

At the time of her arrest in Tehran, Silva was visiting Iran to meet with MCHEEP participants and explain travel logistics for their upcoming exchange.

Since then, Silva has been held at Iran's Evin Prison, in difficult conditions and in declining health according to some sources.

On January 19, 2009, Silva was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison. Since then, she has gone through one initial appeal process, but her request was rejected by Iranian authorities. Her family and friends still hold out hope that she will be granted her release.

How Silva's Family, IREX and Others are Helping:

On behalf of Silva, whose voice cannot be heard right now, Silva's cousin Klara, a resident of Los Angeles, Calif., has launched an effort to ask for mercy for Silva – supported through her Web site www.FreeSilva.org.

Through FreeSilva.org, thousands of supporters from around the world have signed a petition requesting clemency for Silva from the Government of Iran. Granting Silva's freedom after almost one year in prison would show a compassion for lessons learned while still respecting Iranian law.

Simultaneously, Silva's employer IREX is working hard to secure her release. In addition to assisting Silva's family's advocacy efforts, IREX continues to pursue legal and diplomatic avenues. IREX kindly asks the Government of Iran to show generosity in this unusual situation.

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