

## **Letter from Sharifeh Mohammadi to Her Son Aidin**

Letter from Sharifeh Mohammadi, Labor Activist Sentenced to Death and Imprisoned in Lakan Prison, Rasht, to Her Son Aidin

With love for life and in honor of all those who have cherished and continue to uphold human dignity and the values of humanity.

Spring arrives like a noble green army - graceful and vibrant - and you greet it at the height of its bloom, full of vitality and freshness. You dance and rejoice in harmony with it, rejecting all that is dark, ugly, and impure. This is the very essence of life.

My dearest ones,

Since December 5, 2023 (14 Azar 1402)-an ordinary autumn day-when I was arrested on the street, inside a car, while returning home like any other day, more than 15 months have passed. Now we find ourselves at the beginning of the new year, 1404.

I always believed I could never bear the separation from my beloved Aidin. But now I see that, like many mothers, not only have I endured the pain of separation, but I have also withstood all the additional suffering and hardship that has been unjustly imposed on me-based on false and fabricated reports by certain individuals. These same false claims now seek to strip me of my very life.

Sometimes, when I reflect on the events I endured after countless hours and days of interrogation, I am left in shock: how could individuals, who claim to be experts from a vast and powerful ministry, impose such a fate on me so ignorantly and superficially-ignoring the compelling evidence refuting their claims, yet continuing to insist unjustly?

Repeated interrogations-long, monotonous, exhausting-in Rasht. A small, windowless cell with no

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ventilation, barely two meters wide. Each minute dragged by like an hour. It was a time of severe psychological torment. The goal was to force me, through pressure and coercion, into falsely confessing to actions I had never committed and to associations that were entirely untrue.

During those days, time lost its meaning. Day and night became indistinguishable. I would daydream about each special occasion. I imagined being with you during Yalda Night. But what a Yalda it was-without Aidin... Alone in solitary confinement, with a small plate of snacks sent by my cellmates and the sweetness of a spoonful of pumpkin dessert, my tears mixed with it as I swallowed. And so, Yalda passed, and morning came.

I often sang "Delightful Spring" in my solitary cell-loudly-imagining your music practice sessions, Aidin, picturing myself beside you, watching your fingers move with grace over the keys.

I worried that, in my absence, during the anniversary of your aunt and Grandma Fathi's passing, you would be alone and grieving. But thankfully, despite the difficulties, you and Siros were there for Grandma and remembered a woman who embodied strength and defiance.

The days went on. I held onto hope that I would be released and return home.

But to my disbelief, I found myself one night on the Bijar road, accompanied by three male guards in a vehicle. It was the dark night of January 4 (14 Dey), and no one said a word-except for breaks when I was writhing in back pain or during meals.

Siros, you cannot imagine what I endured before I was handed over to Sanandaj Prison. For a woman-no matter how strong-the uncertainty of not knowing what will happen from one moment to the next, surrounded by darkness and silence, is a torment in itself. Reaching Sanandaj Prison felt like stepping into a sanctuary, though it, too, was solitary confinement.

The next day, interrogations resumed. On what grounds? What crime had I committed? Again, the same repetitive and baseless questions. The same shallow accusations, as if intended to crush me entirely and then shape me to their will.

But they didn't realize-I am the daughter of a laborer. Since childhood, I have seen the calloused

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hands of my father. A man who searched for bread among stones with a hammer. A man who worked his entire life without a single day of social insurance, who carved stone in the harshest conditions, hoping his children could study and live with dignity.

He raised us to endure life's challenges with strength, to reject humiliation, and to never accept guilt for crimes we did not commit-no matter who tried to impose it.

He used to tell us how he carved stones for the mansions in Shemiranat-placing one stone on top of another with his skilled hands-so the wealthy could enjoy their palaces. Yet he, in return, received only the stone chips that sometimes flew into his eyes. At night, Grandma would sit by his bed, rinsing his eyes with traditional remedies or fresh tea, preparing him for yet another day of labor.

A life of toil. A life of work-sometimes tired, sometimes ill, sometimes unemployed...

And in the end, he passed away-strong and proud, in his final bed.

Aidin, growing up beside Grandpa and Grandma gave me the strength to endure life's hardships. Like them, I am filled with vitality-even behind prison bars. I will never submit to this unfair and utterly unjust situation. Be proud of them, my son. They were honorable, hardworking, respectable people. From them, I learned to be kind, generous, and strong.

In the freezing winter days of Sanandaj Prison, I ran in the snow and cold, wearing only slippers, during brief moments of outdoor time. I don't know why-I only knew I had to stay strong and healthy to be with you again. I stood on my toes, climbing the wall, hoping to glimpse the snow-covered mountains. I had asked the driver who took me to interrogations what they were-he told me they were the Abidar Mountains. I missed every moment with my hiking companions, singing "Join Us, Dear Friend" hand in hand upon reaching the summit.

Then came your birthday-February 14, 2024 (25 Bahman). I imagined it, planned for it. But I remained far from you. I only got to hear your voice. My beautiful boy, happy birthday... I covered my eyes, faced the wall, and imagined us blowing out your candle together. I know what you wished for, and I'm so sorry that I couldn't fulfill it-not last year, not this one.

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Two months in solitary. Just before my transfer to Rasht, an intelligence officer placed a mirror before me-I hadn't seen my reflection in three months. I didn't recognize the face staring back. I pushed the mirror away. He said he just wanted to show me that the bruises were gone.

He was right. The visible bruises were gone. But the bruises inside me-on my heart and soul-will never fade.

After three months of solitary confinement, 14 kilos of weight lost, and a blow to my face that left half of it black and blue-so much so that the prison guards initially refused to admit me-I no longer recognized myself.

But with renewed hope, I went to Rasht. A few days later, on a snowy day, I saw you and Siros through the cabin window. That moment felt like the whole world was handed to me. Then came the wait for the trial. Then the verdict. I was sure I would be acquitted. I had committed no crime. Nothing that deserved such a severe and unjust punishment. All I had done was live-and love life-for myself and for every hardworking, dignified human being who strives for a better life for all.

And then, the result of the trial came like this:

"Hello, Siros dear. Has the verdict been announced yet?"

He sounded more distraught than ever. I insisted. "Siros, tell me. Don't hold back. We promised never to lie to each other."

And with a voice full of sorrow, he finally said: "The maximum punishment."

"What does that mean? How many years?"

"Sharifeh... you've been sentenced to death. By hanging."

What?! What crime did I commit to deserve this cruel, unbelievable sentence? Is injustice really so deep? Silence engulfed the entire cellblock.

My limbs began to freeze. I lay down on the bed. Memories of my father's final moments filled my mind-how his limbs went cold, and I tried to warm him. I felt the same.

Only when little Shayan, the toddler in our ward, pulled my blanket and laughed-reminding me of

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life-did I come back to myself. I told myself, get up. Hold him. Life goes on.

Maria said, "Sharifeh, get up... Shayan is calling you..."

I lifted him on my shoulders and began singing the same songs I once sang to you in childhood: "Oh people, be kind in life... in every creed and tongue, be united..."

While my appeal went to and returned from the Supreme Court, the hardest part was that you and Grandma didn't know I'd been sentenced to death. But what gave me strength was knowing I was innocent-my only "crime" was standing in solidarity with my fellow workers, women and men bent under the burden of inequality. Like thousands of others who speak out. Should that be punishable by death?

Only through fabricating and forcing falsehoods could they justify such an unjust ruling. But I know in my heart-I have done nothing to deserve this.

Autumn passed in a blink. December has arrived. A full year since my arrest-and still no resolution.

Winter came. February again. And once more, I couldn't be with you on your birthday. But I found joy in knitting a blanket for you-stitch by stitch, past midnight, filled with hope. I even made a small cake from the prison store.

But one hour before our visit, I was told-again-I had been sentenced to death.

They had two months to inform me. But they waited until your birthday. Was it negligence-or was it deliberate cruelty? If it was planned, what kind of hatred could drive such an act?

Then the prison official asked me to sign the verdict. Barely able to stand, I rose, gift and cake in hand, determined to face them with strength.

When you held my cold hands and asked, "Why are Mama's hands so cold?"-I will never forget that moment.

You opened your gift happily, laid it on our laps to warm me. I held your hands and said: "My case is back in Tehran. It may take time. Promise me you'll stay strong."

Your trembling lips made my heart tremble. You climbed into my lap. We both cried silently.

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Then we placed our hands together-swearing our love, our pride, our resilience. We reminded each other how much we love one another. And how proud we are of you, Aidin.

My beloved, spring has returned once again. And that means no winter will last forever.

Did you know? In prison, the only sign of spring is the swallows, building nests between the broken panes under the roof.

And I, like those birds, have kept busy-preparing small gardens in fruit baskets, planting greens and garlic, sprouting sabzeh, setting a Haft-Seen table. All of it a reminder that we must not sit idly in despair. We must live. And we must hope.

Siros and Aidin, my dear ones: life continues.

April 2, 2025 (14 Farvardin 1404)