

PROPAGANDA CHARGES

Iran orders closed trial for filmmakerALAN FREEMAN
NOVEMBER 3, 2007

OTTAWA -- Mehrnoushe Solouki, the Montreal-based documentary filmmaker who was arrested in February in her native Iran, has been told she will face trial behind closed doors this month on charges of intending to spread propaganda.

In a telephone interview from her parents' home in Tehran, the 38-year-old doctoral student at the University of Quebec in Montreal said she finds the charges "very bizarre" because her film has never been completed, let alone shown publicly. She has been told that the trial on Nov. 17 will be closed to the public and that even her father will not be allowed to attend.

"They had to find something against me," said Ms. Solouki, a French citizen who moved to Montreal in 2003 and has Canadian landed-immigrant status. She declined to answer questions on some subjects, concerned that her telephone was being tapped by Iranian authorities.

Ms. Solouki was arrested while working on a film about repression during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, and her videotapes and other material were seized. She was held for a month in Tehran's notorious Evin prison, where Zahra Kazemi, an Iranian-Canadian photographer, was beaten to death in 2004.

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Friends in Montreal have been publicizing her case through a website, and *Reporters sans Frontières* (Reporters Without Borders), the Paris-based journalist-rights organization, has taken up her cause.

Ms. Solouki is anxious to return to Canada, but her French passport was taken from her last month when she attempted to get permission to leave the country.

The French embassy has been applying pressure for her release and has allowed her to stay occasionally at the embassy, particularly after she was struck and injured in July by a motorcycle in what she said was a suspicious hit-and-run accident. She sustained facial injuries and has had to undergo several operations.

Ms. Solouki expressed frustration that the French government had not been more outspoken in her defence.

"Her feeling is that the French aren't pushing too hard because they want to keep good relations with the Iranians," said Denis McCready, the Montreal filmmaker who has organized the online campaign to free her. He noted that four Iranian Americans arrested on security-related charges earlier this year were released and all but one had left the country.

Asked how she is holding up emotionally, Mr. McCready responds, "Sometimes it's okay, sometimes not." He said that his friend "is under tremendous psychological stress. On a bad day, she's on the verge of crying all the time."

He said that with her trial to be held behind closed doors, there will not be even the appearance of justice.

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Phillip Crawley, Publisher