

Hoodfar Family Statement

London / Montreal (25 June 2016) – More than two weeks have passed since Professor Homa Hoodfar’s arrest on 6 June 2016. Since that time, she has been held in Evin prison and denied any direct contact with her family. Her lawyer has also been prohibited from seeing her or accessing her case file. As a result, the cause of her arrest and the nature of the charges levelled against her were unclear until the Tehran Public Prosecutor announced on Friday 24 June 2016 that Professor Hoodfar is being investigated for “dabbling in feminism and security matters.”

Prior to this announcement, a number of conservative Iranian media outlets with links to the Revolutionary Guards had been circulating their own narrative about Professor Hoodfar’s case. In violation of Iran’s own laws, these outlets seem to have direct access to Professor Hoodfar’s case files, including records of her interrogation and personal documents. Their “reports” claim that Professor Hoodfar is, more specifically, being charged with attempting to foment a feminist “soft revolution” against the Islamic Republic. The articles contain numerous incorrect and unsubstantiated accusations and are embarrassing in their paranoia and misrepresentation of the most basic facts. They merely reflect the authors’ political motives and lack of journalistic integrity. The many falsehoods include names of individuals who are erroneously linked to Professor Hoodfar, groundless allegations about her scholarly research and intentions, as well as the funding sources for her research. Although the Iranian authorities have yet to confirm these charges and accusations, Professor Hoodfar’s family would like to make the following clarifications:

1. The articles suggest that Professor Hoodfar’s family members contradicted themselves when describing the purpose of her visit to Iran. This is not accurate. We have been clear throughout that Professor Hoodfar visited Iran for personal reasons, but took the opportunity to do some archival and historical research while she was there. The family is not responsible for misquotations or misrepresentations made in subsequent reports. There are sufficient live and recorded interviews to corroborate this information. Conducting academic research is not a crime under Iranian law.
2. Some statements claim that Professor Hoodfar does not suffer from an illness or neurological condition. In fact, Professor Hoodfar underwent extensive medical examinations over the last year and the results indicate that she suffers from a rare neurological condition known as Myasthenia Gravis (MG). She also suffered a mild stroke last year. Initially following her arrest, prison authorities refused to allow Professor Hoodfar access to her medication. Only after several days were her family and lawyer finally allowed to deliver her prescription medication to the prison, but with no confirmation that she has indeed received them.
3. The articles suggest that Professor Hoodfar has been planning a “soft” and possibly “disguised” feminist revolution in Iran for some time. This allegation apparently

derives from her association with Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), which is misrepresented by the same reports as a subversive organisation that, with the help of “western” support, attempts to brainwash women in Muslim countries in order to gradually undermine their religious identity. Such accusations are entirely baseless and go unsupported by any evidence. First, WLUML is a network that supports the citizenship rights of women in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. It does so lawfully, conducting its advocacy within the constitutional confines of the countries where it operates. Second, Professor Hoodfar is a well-known anthropologist who has conducted extensive research on Muslim women in various regions of the world. Most of Professor Hoodfar’s work concerns geographical areas outside of Iran, and no other country has ever considered her or her association with WLUML to be “seditious” or “subversive”.

4. Professor Hoodfar’s work can in no way be interpreted as “seditious.” Professor Hoodfar conducts her research transparently, with all of her academic work easily accessible in published form or online. Most of her work consists of detailed ethnographic research on Muslim women’s lives and struggles in countries such as Egypt and Canada. As an anthropologist, she considers the historical, social, cultural, and political conditions that shape women’s lives. Indeed, her writings contribute a valuable corrective to western stereotypes of Muslim women that reduce them to victims of their religion or culture. For instance, Professor Hoodfar’s award-winning book, *Between Marriage and the Market*, highlights the important role of religious women in the survival of low-income Egyptian households following the country’s economic liberalisation policies of the 1980s and 90s. If the Iranian media outlets had done their research properly and without bias, they would have found that Professor Hoodfar has herself been criticized in certain circles for being overly sympathetic to Iranian state policies and Islam.
5. Claims that Professor Hoodfar’s international sources of funding are proof of her collusion with foreign governments are entirely without merit. Professor Hoodfar has consistently maintained scholarly independence and integrity throughout her forty-year career. She is known among her peers for her objective and careful analysis, particularly in recognising the positive role that local initiatives can have on women’s lives.
6. The media reports list the following activities as “proof” of WLUML’s plot to undermine religion in Muslim societies: (1) a campaign to support the right of Algerian mothers to custody of their children, (2) promoting a feminist interpretation of the Quran, and (3) a global campaign to stop executions and stoning. Since when is the interpretation of the Quran considered a crime? We see how Da’esh and other reactionary forces oppress other Muslims, especially the Shi’a, by accusing them of the “sin” of interpreting the Quran outside their dogmatic view. Ironically, Professor Hoodfar’s persecutors are now blaming her and WLUML for a similar “sin”:

interpreting the Quran in order to understand how religion speaks to women's needs and rights in the contemporary world.

7. Finally, why should the Islamic Republic of Iran be so frightened that Professor Hoodfar or WLUML might undermine women's religious values? Is the Islamic Republic so weak, so insecure, that a 65-year-old university professor can effectively undermine the state by conducting a few research projects? With or without Professor Hoodfar, women in Iran have been actively working to obtain their civil rights for the past 100 years, and need not be provoked or funded by outside power to do so. Women, along with Iranian men, have always had a stake in their country's future; indeed, they participated *en masse* in the popular revolution that rejected imperialism and foreign influence. It is precisely this perseverance of Iranian women that attracts scholars such as Professor Hoodfar to study them.

Professor Hoodfar's family remain concerned about her health, safety, and wellbeing. "We do not understand why her lawyer has not been allowed to see her," says her sister Katayoon. "We merely want to know that she is all right, that she is not in pain, that she has received her medicine, and that she is not being mistreated. Not knowing the conditions of her detention is incredibly worrying."

The family asks for the immediate dismissal of these false accusations against an internationally recognised scholar whose work is respected and revered for its rigour and integrity across the world.