**“Why Did I Go to Prison for Four Years, Mr. Zarif?”**

May 5, 2015

Iran Human Rights

http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/05/journalists-react-to-zarif-remarks/

Astonished reactions to recent statements made by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif during a television interview with PBS’ Charlie Rose, in which he defended his government’s human rights record, continue to pour in.

Siamak Ghaderi, a journalist who was dismissed from his job at the Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency (IRNA) and imprisoned for four years in 2010 for publishing posts critical of the government on his blogs, told the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, “Currently, there are some 50 journalists and bloggers inside Iranian prisons for what they wrote…. I, along with many other journalists, was accused of ‘propaganda against the state,’ and ‘assembly and collusion against national security,’ for writings following the 2009 [disputed presidential election].”

“I spent weeks under duress inside Ward 209 of Evin Prison, [where I was pressured] to take responsibility for the news articles and reports I had written. What was all this pressure and the sentence I received for, then? Had I climbed up someone’s wall? Had I embezzled government funds? It was for my journalism profession and my beliefs. Why I did I go to prison for four years, Mr. Zarif?” asked Siamak Ghaderi.

In the April 28 [interview with Charlie Rose](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzlbBZq-XoA), when Zarif was asked about journalists imprisoned in Iran, he asserted, “We do not jail people for their opinions. The government has a plan to improve, enhance human rights in the country. As every government should. And I believe we have an obligation as a government to our own people to do that. But people who commit crimes, who violate the laws of the country, cannot hide by being a journalist, being a political activist. People have to observe the law.”

In response to Zarif’s remarks, Siamak Ghaderi, who currently lives in the US, told the Campaign, “First, as a minister of a government elected by the people, he lied publicly and falsified the facts, and second, in his explanation the following day, he said that he was only addressing the topic of [imprisoned Washington Post reporter] Jason Rezaian, and that’s an even worse excuse. Is he the spokesperson for the Iranian Judiciary to talk about Jason? Mr. Zarif is the minister of an elected government, a government that received its votes through Hassan Rouhani’s slogans and pledges; therefore it is only natural that people react to the smallest lies or falsifications of this administration. He should have been a lot more careful in choosing his sentences.”

Following the public outcry about his April 28 remarks, Zarif published a post on [his Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/jzarif/posts/996905656987549)on May 1, in which he wrote, “A group of fellow countrymen inside and outside the country have used my specific, exact, and necessary response to a question about a reporter, whose situation has been used as an excuse for several amendments in the Senate to confront the nuclear agreement, as an excuse for long articles on the subject, and some have also chosen to criticize me without hearing the question or the answer!”

By “a reporter,” Javad Zarif was referring to Jason Rezaian, who has been in prison for more than nine months, most this time without charge, and, since April, under national security charges.

The journalist Parastou Sarmadi, whose husband Hossein Nouraninejad, also a journalist, has been sentenced to one year in prison, wrote on her  [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/parastoo.sarmadi): “Mr. Zarif, we don’t expect you to show us sympathy, but at least don’t throw salt on our wounds. My husband saw [his newborn child] Sohrab for the first time when he was four months old, and only for a month at that. He was in prison for two months after that, and he is now back in prison.”

Nouraninejad began serving his one-year prison term on April 21, 2015, on charges of “propaganda against the state.”

In a short piece on his website, the journalist Bahman Ahmadi Amouee, who served five years and four months in prison on charges of “acting against national security,” and “propaganda against the state through publishing articles on the economy in newspapers and his personal website,” also challenged the statements Zarif made during the Charlie Rose interview.

“As one of the prisoners who was interrogated and psychologically and physically tortured and forced to spend several years in prison, I testify that just as [former president] Ahmadinejad and other judicial and state officials lied about this, the Rouhani Government and his Foreign Minister lie about this,”  [said Amouee](http://www.amouei.com/spip.php?0article34).

Bahman Ahmadi Amouee was arrested immediately after the 2009 disputed presidential election, and was released more than five years later in September 2014 upon completion of his sentence.