British-Australian academic moved to notorious Iran prison

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A British-Australian academic serving a 10-year sentence for espionage in Iran has been moved to a notorious prison where concerns for her well-being have escalated, the Australian government confirmed Wednesday.

Kylie Moore-Gilbert was a Melbourne University lecturer on Middle Eastern studies when she was sent to Tehran’s Evin Prison in September 2018. She had been arrested at Tehran airport while trying to leave the country after attending an academic conference.

Iran told Australia that Moore-Gilbert had been recently moved to Qarchak Prison east of Tehran, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said in a statement.

Australian envoys were “urgently seeking further consular access to her at this new location,” the government statement said.

“We hold Iran responsible for Dr. Moore-Gilbert’s safety and well-being,” it said.

The Center for Human Rights in Iran, a U.S.-based organization, said Moore-Gilbert was being held with violent criminals in harsh conditions.

“Complete contempt for the law is being compounded by inexplicable cruelty towards Kylie Moore-Gilbert,” the center’s executive director, Hadi Ghaemi, said in a statement.

Reza Khandan, husband of human rights lawyer and Evin Prison inmate Nasrin Sotoudeh, posted on social media this week that Moore-Gilbert had been transferred “as a form of punishment.”

Australia describes Moore-Gilbert’s case as one of its highest priorities.

The Australian ambassador recently visited her in the Tehran prison and she had telephone contact with family and the embassy, the government statement said.

Moore-Gilbert has gone on hunger strikes and pleaded for the Australian government to do more to free her during almost two years in custody.

She wrote to Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison last year that she has been “subjected to grievous violations of my legal and human rights, including psychological torture and spending prolonged periods of time in solitary confinement.”