

Trial of Iran's seven Baha'i leaders

# Innocent of all charges

<http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/yaran-special-report/feature-articles/innocent-of-all-charges.html>

The charges leveled against the seven Baha'i leaders reflect the depth of animosity and prejudice directed towards them — as well as a degree of ignorance regarding the basic principles and history of the Baha'i Faith.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that the Baha'i community in Iran is being persecuted solely because of its religious beliefs, the Iranian government continues – in both public and private forums – to justify its behavior with unsubstantiated accusations.

Specifically in the case of the seven Iranian Baha'i leaders, there was never any evidence presented to support the charges:

## **On the charge of forming or managing a group that aims at disturbing national security:**

There was no evidence to support such a charge against the seven.

The “Baha'i Administration” is generally understood to comprise annually elected governing councils that operate at the national, regional, and local levels as well as individuals and groups who are formally appointed to assist with various aspects of the community's work and needs. This system of Baha'i administration was dissolved in Iran in 1983.

The seven defendants formed a group who oversaw the affairs of the 300,000 Baha'is in Iran on an informal basis in the absence of a formal Baha'i administration. This arrangement was made with the full knowledge of the Iranian government, which had routine dealings with them since 1983.

Among the Baha'i practices that the group coordinated were the education of children and youth, arranging opportunities to study and learn about family life, the advancement of women, upholding high personal moral standards, freeing themselves and their communities from prejudice, and inculcating a spirit of service to humanity.

Iran is a signatory to Article 18 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which upholds the right “to have or to adopt a religion or belief of [one's] choice”, and “to manifest [one's] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”

The government, in having declared as illegal even this informal arrangement for seeing to the needs of the 300,000 Baha'is in Iran—the country's largest religious minority—clearly seeks to debar Baha'is from practicing any of the communal events associated with the worship and practice of one's religion, including marriages, funerals, and other basic elements among the adherents of any religion.

**On the charge of spreading propaganda against the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran:**

The authorities sought to cast the written communications of the Baha'is in Iran to government officials, including presidents Khatami and Ahmadinejad – to appeal against the violation of their basic human rights – as aiming to harm the regime through letter-writing. There is no evidence whatever to support the contention that these individuals have ever sought to malign the authorities.

**On the charge of engaging in espionage:**

To assert that the interaction between the seven defendants and the United Nations and its related institutions about the rights of the Baha'is in Iran, to which the seven have plainly admitted, is an admission of having engaged in espionage is utterly without foundation, legal or otherwise. In relation to the charge that the seven were spying for Israel, such an allegation is absolutely false; it stems entirely from the fact that the international headquarters of the Bahá'í Faith is situated in modern-day Israel. This is so purely as a result of the banishment of the Faith's founder by the Muslim Persian and Ottoman empires in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1868, eighty years before the state of Israel was founded, Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to perpetual imprisonment in the city of 'Akká. He died there and that is where he is buried.

**On the charge of gathering classified information with the intention of disturbing national security or of making it available to others:**

There is no evidence whatever that the Yaran even had access to, let alone possessed and passed along to others, top secret, secret, highly confidential, or confidential government documents.

**On the charge of collaborating with foreign governments hostile against Iran, by some of the accused having taken trips to a number of European countries, such as Turkey and Germany, and by meetings of some of the accused with Australian and Canadian ambassadors:**

To support this contention, reference was made to meetings of some of the accused with Australian and Canadian ambassadors and to trips undertaken to a number of European countries, such as Turkey and Germany. It is not illegal in Iran to meet with representatives of foreign diplomatic missions. The topic of these meetings was the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. Concerning the trips, none of the defendants concerned were prohibited from making these trips and none of these countries are considered hostile by the Iranian government; to the contrary, they all have diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties with Iran; otherwise, they would not have embassies in Iran. Further, none of these actions can be interpreted as involving "collaboration" with foreign governments.

**On the charge of having assembled for the purpose of conspiring to commit offences against national security by having attended conferences held at the Defenders of Human Rights Center:**

All conferences held at the Defenders of Human Rights Center took place in the presence of journalists and domestic news agencies and always in coordination with and under the supervision of the local police.