

Trial of Iran's seven Baha'i leaders

Voices of support

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Throughout more than two years of imprisonment of the seven Iranian Baha'i leaders, voices have been raised around the world in their support, and calling for their release – from politicians to legal experts and human rights campaigners, from academics to well-known writers and performers.

Here is a small selection of some of their statements:

We call on the Iranian Government to guarantee the safety of these individuals and grant their immediate unconditional release.

- **Nobel Women's Initiative** – Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Shirin Ebadi, Wangari Muta Maathai, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Betty Williams, Jody Williams (30 June 2008)

Canada...urges the Iranian regime to respect the rights of the country's Baha'i community and cease persecuting it, discriminating against it and detaining its members. We note the trial of the seven leaders of the Baha'i community was to take place today, and we call on the Iranian regime to ensure that due process is respected.

- **Stephen Harper**, Prime Minister of Canada (12 June, 2010)

If justice is to be carried out and an impartial judge should investigate the charges levelled against my clients, no other verdict can be reached save that of acquittal...I read the dossier and fortunately or unfortunately, found in it no cause or evidence to sustain the criminal charges upheld by the prosecutor...

- **Shirin Ebadi**, Human rights lawyer (12 January 2010)

Today Iran's Baha'is face a very uncertain, dangerous future. We must urge the Iranian Government to give the leaders of the Baha'i community a fair trial and allow independent observers access to ensure this happens. We must also call on Iran to live up to its international obligations to protect all its citizens and allow them to hold and practise their religious beliefs without discrimination or fear.

- **Cherie Blair**, Human rights lawyer (9 July 2009)

These citizens of Iran are innocent of the charges framed against them. They are law-abiding, loyal to their government and working towards the betterment of society. The Government of Iran should release them immediately or, at a minimum, try them fairly. This is one of the basic rights of every man and woman on this planet. Should the detainees be denied a fair trial, it would be an affront to the very notion of fundamental rights.

- **32 prominent Indian citizens** including judiciary and official agencies, religious leaders, artists, academics, business leaders and representatives of civil society (February 2009)

The Iranian judiciary has repeatedly failed to allay international and domestic concerns that these seven men and women are guilty of anything other than practising their faith. It is clear that from

arrest to sentencing, the Iranian authorities did not follow even their own due process, let alone the international standards to which Iran is committed.

- **William Hague**, UK Foreign Secretary (11 August 2010)

...I stand here as an Iranian contrite and resolute—ashamed for what I consider Iran’s disgraceful past in our treatment of our Baha’i citizens, and resolute in my determination to say, Never Again, And Never More...

Today, seven of the leaders of this determined community stand to be tried for “Spreading corruption on Earth” and for being “agents of Zionism,” nefarious charges that could each carry the death sentence...

But not all is gloom and doom. In spite of the concentrated efforts of the regime to poison the minds of the Iranian people about the Baha’i faith, in spite of its monopoly hold on the media, there is a new surging consciousness amongst millions of Iranians, dozens of intellectuals, and even a handful of Shiite clerics that the treatment of Baha’is has been a shameful part of our past. More and more people are convinced that Baha’is have, like any other Iranian citizen, the inalienable right to practice their faith, and that as citizens of Iran, they should be entitled to all the rights allotted to any other citizen, from any faith.

- **Professor Abbas Milani**, Stanford University (15 August 2009)

The United States is deeply concerned with the Iranian government’s continued persecution of Baha’is and other religious minority communities in Iran...Freedom of religion is the birthright of people of all faiths and beliefs in all places. The United States is committed to defending religious freedom around the world, and we have not forgotten the Baha’i community in Iran. We will continue to speak out against injustice and call on the Iranian government to respect the fundamental rights of all its citizens in accordance with its international obligations.

- **Hillary Clinton**, U.S. Secretary of State (12 August 2010)

We extend our sympathies to the Bahá’í community at this difficult time and hope that the widespread and growing international concern over this matter will cause the Iranian authorities to correct this flagrant injustice.

- **UK religious leaders** –The Most Revd Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury; The Most Revd Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster; Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks; Jay Lakhani, Hindu Academy; Arjan Vekaria JP, President, Hindu Forum of Britain; Dr Indarjit Singh CBE, Network of Sikh Organisations; Dr Natubhai Shah MBBS PhD, Network of Jain Organisations, Council of Dharmic Faiths; Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, Chair, Religions for Peace UK. (4 October 2010)

As senior advocates at the Supreme Court of India, and as Presidents of the Bar Association of India and the United Lawyers’ Association (respectively), and deeply committed to the human rights of all persons, we are extremely concerned that till date, two weeks after their arrest, their whereabouts are still unknown. None of the persons arrested has been given access to legal counsel, their relatives have had no contacts with them and there have been no indication that any charges have been laid against them...

It is our earnest request to...ensure that these basic rights are upheld by the Government in Iran.

- **Indian senior advocates** - Fali S. Naraman, Soli J. Sorabjee (3 June 2008)

Two “prisoners of conscience” I came to know at Tehran’s Evin Prison are Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi. The women, along with their five male colleagues, are leaders of Iran’s largest religious minority group, the Baha’i community...

Mahvash, Fariba and their five male colleagues are expected to be tried in Branch 28 of Tehran’s Revolutionary Court. This was where I was convicted in April on a bogus charge of espionage and sentenced to 8 years’ imprisonment. I was extremely fortunate that my case gained growing international attention, which helped lead to my release.

The Baha’is’ case also requires this attention. The U.S. government and international community can boost their efforts at the highest levels to raise this case and put pressure on the Iranian authorities to drop the charges against the Baha’is, as well as other prisoners of conscience, and to release them immediately.

- **Roxana Saberi**, journalist (8 July, 2009)

The [Iranian] government's efforts to identify and monitor individual members of the Baha’i community are a particularly troubling part of the strategy to eliminate the Baha’i community of Iran as a viable entity. In the past, aggressive efforts to identify members of a minority group often have been the precursor to deliberate and premeditated violence in the form of ethnic cleansing and, ultimately, genocide.

- **Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire**, Canadian Senate, former Force Commander of the UN peacekeeping force for Rwanda 1993-1994 (16 June, 2010)

The sentences against the representatives of the Baha’i Faith are a shocking signal and an immense disappointment for all who have hoped for an improvement of the human rights situation in Iran. We have strong doubts about the fairness and transparency of the judicial procedure and I deeply deplore this.

- **Jerzy Buzek**, President of the European Parliament (11 April 2010)

At the forefront of all of our minds...is the fate of the seven Baha’i leaders awaiting trial in Iran. We have raised our concerns with the Iranian government and I urge the authorities to ensure that these individuals receive a fair trial and ask them to put an end to discrimination against the wider Baha’i community within Iran.

- **Gordon Brown** Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (22 April 2009)

The Islamic Republic of Iran has ratified the major international Human Rights instruments such as the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR). It is therefore legally bound to uphold the basic rights of these detainees...

We once again reiterate that the safety and well being of the seven detainees are the responsibility of the State and that any harm to them would amount to a gross violation of their rights.

- Bangladesh Minority Lawyers Association (18 June 2008)

This is an outrageous miscarriage of justice and one more example of how the Iranian regime is a gross violator of human rights and religious freedoms. The prosecutions are, pure and simple,

politically and religiously motivated acts, and the Commission calls for the unconditional release of the seven individuals.”

- **Leonard Leo** Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (11 August 2010)

As Iranian-Canadian academics we are writing to express our concern at the arrest two weeks ago of leaders of the Iranian Baha’i community. While we are not, ourselves, members of that particular faith community, as Iranians we feel it unacceptable that the regime in Iran has neither communicated the whereabouts of those arrested nor disclosed the formal charges under which they are being held...

We feel that the international community, especially through the offices of the United Nations should do all it can to press Iranian Government authorities to establish human rights protections for the security and the freedom of all the Iranian people.

- **Iranian-Canadian academics** - Professor Amir Hassanpour, Professor Haideh Moghissi, Professor Shahrzad Mojab, Professor Saeed Rahnema, Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (2 June 2008)

This verdict is a sad and damning manifestation of the deeply-rooted discrimination against Baha’is by the Iranian authorities.

- **Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui**, Middle East and North Africa deputy director, Amnesty International (10 August 2010)

Iran’s accusation that these seven leaders were spies for Israel is patently absurd and as delusional as the mentality that allows a state to embrace Holocaust denial as a matter of policy. It reflects a willingness to ignore reality in favor of a show trial that resembles the trials of Stalinist Russia. And, by not allowing the victims access to lawyers Iran has demonstrated once again that the more basic concepts of human rights are irrelevant to its leadership. As long as Iran flouts these most basic legal and human rights, as long as it denies its own citizens or foreign countries the right to exist in peace, its participation in the community of nations must be seriously questioned.

- **Mark Weitzman**, Director, Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Task Force Against Hate (19 February 2009)

It is the ethical and the humanitarian duty of open-minded free thinkers, democrats, freedom fighters and human rights activists, to defend and endeavor to restore the lost rights of the Baha’is. Similarly, it is their responsibility to uphold the rights of all other Iranian residents, irrespective of their religion, convictions, political and social views. The foundation of democracy and liberty is based on the equality of human beings, meaning that the innate and natural human rights of any Iranian living in any geographical part of the country is equal to the right of any other Iranian...

Silence and indifference will not resolve problems; rather it will increase problems and will open the way for further transgressions of the civil rights of our Baha’i countrymen.

- **Hojjatoleslam Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari**, Iranian cleric, researcher and journalist (14 August 2009)

The persecution of the Baha’i community in Iran is intolerable and deeply troubling.

- **Lawrence Cannon**, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs (10 August 2010)

The fate of Iranian Baha’is is not only a matter of their fundamental civil rights in the context of any republic, Islamic or otherwise. It is the very cornerstone of democratic citizenship without which the

Muslim majority of Iranians is denied their constitutional protection. Watch the fate of the Iranian Baha'is carefully.

The day they are free to practice their religion without fear, Iranians at large will have finally secured their civil liberties.

- **Professor Hamid Dabashi**, Columbia University, New York. (16 September 2009)

The illegal and unjust detention of these seven Baha'i leaders, which again shows a policy of oppressing a religious minority, must be brought to an end. The group is being denied basic civil rights by neither being allowed to visit with their lawyer, nor being formally charged with any crime.

The continued persecution of the Baha'i community in Iran degrades all of the people of Iran. The arbitrary detention and targeting of members of any single community should not be tolerated in any country, including Iran.”

- **Aaron Rhodes**, International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (14 May 2009)

As artists who strive to uplift the human spirit and enrich society through our work, we register our solidarity with all those in Iran who are being persecuted for promoting the best development of society — be it through the arts and media, the promotion of education, social and economic development, or adherence to moral principles.

Further, we join with the governments, human rights organisations and people of goodwill throughout the world who have so far raised their voices calling for a fair trial, if not the complete release of the Baha'i leaders in Iran.

- **The United Kingdom's leading comedians** - David Baddiel, Bill Bailey, Morwenna Banks, Sanjeev Bhasker, Jo Brand, Russell Brand, Rob Brydon, Jimmy Carr, Jack Dee, Omid Djalili, Sean Lock, Lee Mack, Alexei Sayle, Meera Syal, Mark Thomas (26 February 2009)

Therefore, be it resolved that this House condemns the ongoing persecution of the Baha'i minority of Iran and calls upon the government of Iran to reconsider its charges against the members of the Friends in Iran, and release them immediately or failing this, that it proceed to trial without further delay, ensuring that the proceedings are open and fair and are conducted in the presence of international observers.

- Canadian Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Human Rights (24 February 2009)