

Statement by NGO Leaders
Calling for the Immediate Release of the Seven Imprisoned Baha'i Leaders in Iran

May 2016

On the eighth anniversary of their imprisonment, we add our voices to the global chorus urging the immediate release of the seven Baha'i leaders who are behind bars in Iran. As supporters of religious freedom and human rights, we stand in solidarity with the Baha'is in Iran. We ask for nothing less than the full and unconditional inclusion of Baha'is in all spheres of Iranian life.

Since May 14, 2008, the leaders of Iran's Baha'i community have been punished and imprisoned for their beliefs. Their names are Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm. These individuals were initially sentenced to the longest prison terms of any Iranian prisoners of conscience. Their twenty-year sentences have reportedly been reduced to ten years, but not terminated. This is not adequate, nor is it just.

These seven courageous souls – along with hundreds of thousands of Baha'is in Iran – have proven to be great friends of their country. No matter how poorly they are treated, they are law-abiding and shun all forms of violent or political protest. Moreover, Baha'is seek to serve their communities as active and informed citizens – despite being refused equal treatment under the law.

Officially-sanctioned repression of Baha'is ranges the entire lifespan, from birth to death. Children are bullied and youth are denied higher education. Parents are thrown in jail. Baha'i-owned businesses are shut down. Their homes are raided and their property confiscated. Their holy places and cemeteries are defaced or destroyed. Hate speech against Baha'is and fear-inciting propaganda are widespread in state-sponsored media.

Nor are Baha'is alone in the abuses they face. Human rights in Iran are truly in crisis as executions have reached staggering levels, journalists are imprisoned, women are attacked and discriminated against, human rights lawyers and defenders face crackdowns, dissidents are targeted, and religious and ethnic minorities are persecuted.

We call on the Iranian government: Free the seven Baha'i leaders. Respect and protect all Iranian citizens who have a common desire for justice and peace.

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