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PRESS RELEASE

Baha'i International Community

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Nations rally to defend human rights in Iran

GENEVA – Countries from around the world have voiced strong concern at the United Nations Human Rights Council over Iran's deteriorating human rights record.

In speeches yesterday and in documents filed with the Council, nations and human rights groups described the degree to which Iran has failed to live up to its obligations under international human rights law.

"The good news is that governments and organizations are rallying to defend innocent Iranians, who have over the last year seen their human rights so gravely violated," said Diane Ala'i, the representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva.

"The bad news is that Iran continues to ignore such appeals," she said, speaking after yesterday's session of Council, which specifically focused on Iran's human rights record.

Muhammad Javad Larijani, secretary general of the Islamic Republic of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, told the session that there is religious freedom in Iran and that no Baha'i is persecuted for his beliefs. If any Baha'is are imprisoned, he said, it is because of "illegal activities" as a cult.

"Put bluntly, Iran once again completely discredited itself before the eyes of the international community," said Ms. Ala'i, noting that last week Iran arrested at least 14 more Baha'is.

Among those arrested, she said, was Niki Khanjani, the son of one of the seven Baha'i leaders who are currently on trial on false charges.

"As the Nobel laureate Mrs. Shirin Ebadi has recently stated in an open letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Iran is now trying to increase pressure on

prisoners by taking their relatives hostage,” said Ms. Ala’i. “Jamaloddin Khanjani is 76. He has been incarcerated for almost two years – and then they arrested his granddaughter at the beginning of January and now, his son.”

“These are the desperate acts of a regime that is frantically lashing out to blame others for its troubles and to suppress any viewpoint that is different from its own ideology,” she said.

The majority of countries who spoke out against Iran focused on the violence following last June’s presidential election and also on the situation of the country’s religious minorities.

Brazil called for Iran to extend rights to all religious groups in the country, saying Baha’is should enjoy the same rights as everyone. Mexico said all minorities – particularly the Baha’i community – must be able to practice their religion.

“Romania and Slovenia devoted almost the entire allotment of their time to discussing the increasing repression of Iran’s Baha’i community,” reported Ms. Ala’i.

Human rights groups, in documents filed with the Council, made similar points.

“Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, individuals belonging to minorities in Iran are subject to an array of discriminatory laws and practices,” wrote Amnesty International in its statement. “Minorities suffering persecution include ethnic and linguistic minorities such as Kurds, Arabs, Azerbaijanis, Turkmen and Baluchis, and religious minorities such as Baha’is and the Ahl-e Haq.”

“The government systematically denies rights associated with freedom of religion to members of the Baha’i faith, Iran’s largest non-Muslim religious minority. In most cases, including the persecution of the Baha’i community, the government uses ‘security’ as a pretext for detaining individuals and denying them basic due process rights,” said a statement from Human Rights Watch.

The session was part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a relatively new procedure that seeks to review the human rights record of all 192 United Nations member states once every four years. This year is the first time Iran has come up for review.