

**BAHÁ'Í  
INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNITY**

*United Nations Office*

866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120, New York, NY 10017 USA

Telephone: 1-212-803-2500, Fax: 1-212-803-2566, Email: [uno-nyc@bic.org](mailto:uno-nyc@bic.org)

**PRESS RELEASE**

Baha'i International Community

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For more information, contact Bani Dugal in New York at (office) 212-803-2500 or (mobile) 646-404-4210 or Diane Ala'i in Geneva at (office) +41 (-22) -798-5400 or (mobile) +41 (-78) -60-40-100

**Iranian Baha'i leaders' may face new accusation on anniversary of imprisonment**

NEW YORK (12 May 2009) – The seven Baha'i leaders currently imprisoned in Iran are facing the anniversary of their arrest this Thursday, along with new and extremely grave accusations, after spending a year in jail without formal charges or access to their lawyer, Shirin Ebadi.

“Despite their obvious innocence and the call by many for their immediate release, these seven men and women have been in legal limbo for a year now, against all international human rights standards,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations.

“Moreover, their families have recently been told of a possible new charge – ‘the spreading of corruption on earth,’ which goes by the term ‘Mofsede fel-Arz’ in Persian and carries the threat of death under the penal code of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” said Ms. Dugal.

“The sequence of events surrounding their detention exposes a shameless travesty of justice. Notwithstanding their having been subjected to intensive interrogations, it took a full seven months before they were given even a single pretext for their detention. On February 10, 2009, the Iranian Student News Agency quoted Tehran deputy prosecutor Hassan Haddad as having said that the investigation of these individuals was complete and that ‘the case will be sent to the revolutionary court next week’ and that these Baha'is are accused of ‘espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic.’ The international protest expressed by governments and civil society was immediate and widespread, causing the Iranian authorities to review their approach.

“Now a new wrongful accusation reportedly has been added some three months after the investigation was supposed to have concluded. The charge of being spreaders of

corruption was used against the Baha'is who were executed in the years immediately following the Islamic revolution. That it may now be resorted to in this case is a further demonstration that the authorities have no basis for any allegation against these seven individuals, other than blatant religious persecution. This action against the Baha'i leadership reflects the government's sharply increased persecution of the entire Iranian Baha'i community of more than 300,000 members.

“The upcoming anniversary of their arrest offers an important milestone and we ask that the international community re-state once again in the strongest terms its demand for their immediate release, or, at least, for a fair and open trial that meets international standards of justice,” said Ms. Dugal.

Ms. Dugal also noted that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has frequently emphasized the importance of “justice and human dignity” and “the establishment of a just world system,” such as when he addressed the UN Durban Review Conference in Geneva last month.

“How can the calls of the Iranian leadership for justice in the international sphere be taken seriously if they do not grant justice to their own citizens? In Iran, by all accounts universally agreed upon human rights are routinely ignored, not only for Baha'is but also for women, journalists, and others who only seek dignity and justice,” she said.

The seven are Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm. All but one of the group were arrested on 14 May 2008 at their homes in Tehran. Mrs. Sabet was arrested on 5 March 2008 while in Mashhad.

For more information, go to:

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