

**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

**World reacts to the trial of the seven Baha'i leaders**

GENEVA – Iran's decision to begin the trial yesterday of seven Baha'i leaders has triggered a strong international reaction, including a call by Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi for their immediate release and ultimate acquittal.

"If justice is to be carried out and an impartial judge should investigate the charges leveled against my clients, no other verdict can be reached save that of acquittal," said Mrs. Ebadi, in comments posted yesterday on WashingtonTV, a Web-based news service in the United States.

Mrs. Ebadi, who is one of the lawyers for the seven, said she had carefully read the dossier of charges against them and "found in it no cause or evidence to sustain the criminal charges upheld by the prosecutor."

Others also expressed concerns about the fairness of the trial, calling for it to be open and held in accordance with international legal standards. Governments and prominent individuals in the European Union, the United States, Brazil, India, and Canada issued strong statements of concern.

The European Union statement came yesterday, echoing an earlier call for international observers to be allowed in the trial of the seven Baha'is.

"The EU recalls that freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental and undeniable right which shall be guaranteed in every circumstance," the statement said. "The EU calls for a just, fair and open trial respecting all international standards and obligations..."

In Brazil yesterday, Luiz Couto, the President of the Human Rights Commission of the Federal Chamber of Deputies said in a letter to the Iranian Ambassador to Brazil that it

appears the “trial is not transparent and public,” and that any closed trial would violate the right to a full and fair defense.

“We consider the freedom of religion and belief – that of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Baha’is, and all other religious expressions – a fundamental human right for democracy, both in the east and west,” said Congressman Coutu.

On Monday, the United States Department of State condemned Iran’s decision to move ahead with the trial.

“Authorities have detained these persons for more than 20 months, without making public any evidence against them and giving them little access to legal counsel,” said Philip J. Crowley, assistant secretary, Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “These persons are entitled to due process.”

In India, prominent Indians called upon the government to take up the issue of the Baha’i persecution with Tehran. “Our country has a long record of pluralism and tolerance and must speak out,” said Maja Daruwala, director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, according to The Hindu newspaper on Saturday.

In Canada, Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon issued a statement on Friday expressing deep concern about the ongoing detention of the seven Baha’i leaders. “It is deplorable that these individuals were detained on the sole basis of their faith and have been denied a fair trial,” said Mr. Cannon.

Leading human rights barrister Cherie Blair in an interview today with the BBC World Service called for the release of “this group of people who live a religion which preaches peace and did nothing whatsoever to deserve this trial.”

In the WashingtonTV interview, Mrs. Ebadi, who is currently outside Iran, also offered a glimpse of what happened yesterday inside Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court, where the “first session” of the trial was held.

She said only two lawyers of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, which she established, were able to be present in the court. And that in spite of a request for an open hearing, the court was closed.

The charges against the seven were reiterated yesterday in news accounts in government-sponsored news media. They were given as: espionage; “propaganda activities against the Islamic order,” the establishment of an illegal administration, cooperation with Israel, the sending of secret documents outside the country, acting against the security of the country, and “corruption on earth.”

Diane Ala'i of the Baha'i International Community said the seven have consistently and categorically denied such accusations. "We can be certain that they also did so in front of the judge yesterday," 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. They have been held in Tehran's Evin prison ever since, spending their first year there without formal charges or any access to lawyers.

Prior to their arrest, the seven served as an appointed, ad hoc group known as the "Friends." Their role, carried out with the government's knowledge, was to see to the minimum spiritual and material needs of Iran's Baha'i community, which has been without formal leadership since its elected governing bodies were disbanded in response to a government decree in 1983.

For more information, go to <http://news.bahai.org>