

**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, Web:

<http://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) 914-329-3020 or Diane Ala'i in Geneva at (office) +41 (-22) -798-5400 or (mobile) +41 (-78) -60-40-100

“Five Years Too Many” campaign aims to free seven imprisoned Iran Baha'i leaders

NEW YORK – To mark the five year anniversary of the wrongful imprisonment of the seven Iranian Baha'i leaders, the Baha'i International Community is today launching a campaign to call for their immediate release – and to draw attention to the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran.

“On 14 May, the seven innocent Baha'i leaders will have been behind bars for five full years, unjustly imprisoned solely because of their religious beliefs,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations.

“We are asking people of good will around the world to raise their voices in an effort to win their freedom and the freedom of other innocent prisoners of conscience in Iran,” she said.

The campaign will run from today through 15 May, under the title “Five Years Too Many.” Around the world, Baha'i communities and others are planning public events that focus on the plight of the seven, who face 15 more years in prison, and whose 20-year sentences are the longest of any current prisoners of conscience in Iran.

“The arrest of the seven Baha'i leaders on false charges, their wrongful imprisonment, and severe mistreatment while in detention are emblematic of the suffering of the Iranian Baha'i community as a whole – and, indeed, the situation of the hundreds of other innocent prisoners of conscience who have been incarcerated for their beliefs,” said Ms. Dugal.

“Their long sentences reflect the Government's determination to completely oppress the Iranian Baha'i community, which is the country's largest non-Muslim religious minority.”

Six of the seven Baha'i leaders were arrested on 14 May 2008 in a series of early morning raids in Tehran. The seventh had been detained two months earlier on 5 March 2008.

Since their arrests, the seven – whose names are Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm – have been subject to an entirely flawed judicial process.

During their first year in detention, the seven were not told of the charges against them and they had virtually no access to lawyers. Their trial, conducted over a period of months in 2010 and amounting to only six days in court, was illegally closed to the public, demonstrated extreme bias on the part of prosecutors and judges, and was based on non-existent evidence.

Today the seven endure harsh conditions in two of Iran's most notorious prisons. The five men are incarcerated at Gohardasht prison in Karaj, a facility known for its overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and dangerous environment. The two women remain at Tehran's infamous Evin Prison.

The Baha'i International Community has created a special section on its website to focus on the campaign. It features articles and documents about the lives and situation of the seven Baha'i leaders, along with a blog that will report on activities and events in the campaign as they happen.

The URL for that site is <http://www.bic.org/fiveyears>