

Bahá'í International Community

Brussels Office

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Mr. Ján Figel'
Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief
outside the European Union

Brussels, 13th May 2016

Dear Mr. Figel',

The Bahá'í International Community would like to congratulate you on your appointment as the first Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union.

It is our conviction that one of the defining characteristics of the human mind is a yearning to find meaning and to search for truth. To protect this yearning through the principle of the freedom of religion or belief is, therefore, essential for individuals to flourish and for societies to progress. We believe that the duty to uphold the freedom of religion or belief rests not only with states but also with religious leaders, who bear a special responsibility to inspire communities to cultivate moral qualities such as forgiveness, understanding and selfless service to the common good.

As a global community, we have a longstanding and deeply felt commitment to furthering the freedom of religion or belief. In Iran, where the Bahá'í Faith is the largest non-Muslim religious minority, Bahá'ís are routinely arrested, assaulted, barred from holding government jobs, and denied access to university education – all solely on account of their religious beliefs, and despite the fact that Iranian Bahá'ís love their country deeply and strive to contribute to its peaceful advancement. Recently, in its 14th of March 2016 statement addressed to the 31st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the European Union expressed “serious concern at the situation of religious minorities in Iran, in particular the continuous systematic discrimination of persons belonging to the Bahá'í community.”

This week happens to mark the eighth anniversary of the unjustified arrest and incarceration of seven Iranian Bahá'í leaders, who were sentenced on utterly false and concocted charges and imprisoned solely because of their beliefs. Their imprisonment violates not only international law but also Iran's own domestic law and the Bahá'í International Community is calling for their immediate release.

We look forward to supporting your efforts in this vital field of endeavor and would welcome the opportunity to meet you in person, at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,

Rachel Bayani
Representative,
Bahá'í International Community - Brussels office