

PRESS RELEASE

Baha'i International Community

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Trial of seven Baha'i leaders in Iran looms

GENEVA – Recent developments in Iran have raised grave concern about the ultimate fate of the seven Baha'i leaders who are scheduled to go on trial next Tuesday.

“The Baha'i community in Iran has all too often been subjected to campaigns of vilification and false charges devised to deflect the attention of a disquieted population onto the Baha'is and away from those in power,” said Diane Ala'i, the Baha'i International Community representative to the United Nations in Geneva. “And now, in these days leading to the trial, there are signs that once again the Baha'is are being made scapegoats.

“Rather than accepting responsibility for the turmoil in the country, the Iranian government seeks to lay the blame on others, including foreign powers, international organizations and media outlets, students, women, and terrorists. Now the Baha'is have been added to this long list of alleged culprits,” she said.

“Over the past several days, Iranian state-sponsored media have accused the Baha'is of being responsible for the unrest surrounding the holy day of Ashura,” said Ms. Ala'i. “This is clearly aimed at rousing public sentiment against the seven Baha'is being held in Evin prison. We are particularly concerned that the government, or ultraconservative elements within it, may use the turmoil in Iran as cover for extreme measures against these wrongly imprisoned individuals.

This concern deepened on Sunday, she said, when authorities rounded up 13 Baha'is from their homes in Tehran, took them to a detention center, and tried to get them to sign a document saying that they would not engage in any future demonstrations.

“Putting two and two together, the situation facing these Baha'i leaders is extremely ominous. We are deeply concerned for their safety.

“We expect their trial to be nothing but a show trial, with a predetermined outcome,” she said.

“Should anything happen to any of these seven Baha’is before or after the trial, the Iranian government must be held responsible,” said Ms. Ala’i. “We ask that the international community indicate clearly to Iran that it will be watching and that it expects any trial to be public and held in accordance with internationally recognized principles of due process.”

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. They were arrested in the spring of 2008 and have been held in Evin prison ever since.

Official Iranian news accounts have said the seven are to be accused of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities, and propaganda against the Islamic republic." All of the charges are utterly baseless, said Ms. Ala’i.

Trial dates were previously announced for July, August, and October but were postponed each time. In December, lawyers were notified that 12 January had been set as a new date.

Ms. Ala’i noted that persecution of Baha’is in Iran had intensified steadily throughout 2009. Currently, some 48 Baha’is are imprisoned, and many others across the country have been subjected to home searches, confiscation of personal property, and revolving-door arrests. Since last March, some 60 Baha’is have been arrested and imprisoned for periods ranging from overnight to several months.

An anti-Baha’i campaign in the news media campaign has also continued, she said, culminating in the absurd accusations last week that Baha’is were involved in provoking the recent civil unrest on the Ashura holy day on 27 December.

The semiofficial Fars News Agency, for example, reported the next day that Ne’ mattollah Bavand, described as an “expert” in political affairs, said “Bahaism under the leadership of Zionism is behind the latest crisis and unrest.”

Ms. Ala’i said these statements have raised concern among the Baha’is that there may be a coordinated effort to introduce these false accusations at the upcoming trial.

Among the 13 arrested on 3 January were relatives of two of the imprisoned leaders, including Negar Sabet, daughter of Mahvash Sabet; Leva Khanjani, granddaughter of Jamaloddin Khanjani; and her husband, Babak Mobasher. Others arrested were Jinous Sobhani, former secretary of Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, and her husband Artin Ghazanfari; Mehran Rowhani and Farid Rowhani, who are brothers; Nasim Beiglari; Payam Fanaian; Nikav Hoveydaie and his wife, Mona Misaghi; and Ebrahim Shadmehr and his son, Zavosh Shadmehr.

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