

Bahá'í International Community

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European Parliamentarians call for release of Iranian Baha'i prisoners

BRUSSELS – Together with many voices from [within Iran](#)—including Nasrin Sotoudeh, a prominent human rights lawyer there—and from outside, five members of the European Parliament are [calling](#) for the immediate release of the seven imprisoned former Iranian Baha'i leaders saying, among other things, that such religious persecution is "unjust" and "unacceptable".

The five MEPs—Cornelia Ernst of Germany, Ana Gomes of Portugal, Tunne Kelam of Estonia, and Andrew Lewer and Julie Ward of the United Kingdom—made individual video statements as part of a global campaign designed to call attention this month to the seventh anniversary of the arrest and imprisonment of the seven Baha'is, collectively known as the Yaran—the friends.

"We join this appeal for their immediate, unconditional release," said Mr. Kelam, "because no country can claim that it has normal conditions for its citizens when a part of their citizens—some minority—is being persecuted systemically and so cruelly."

Ms. Gomes said: "It is really quite unacceptable that these Iranian citizens, who do not want more than to actually serve their country, their people, in service to the very peaceful teachings of the Baha'i Faith, be in prison and be charged with accusations that are totally baseless."

Ms. Ward said that it is "very difficult to understand why the Iranian regime would be so aggressive and so cruel" towards its Baha'i citizens, who represent a faith of "peace, humanity, gender equality and fairness".

Mr. Lewer said Iran should be held accountable for its human rights violations generally, and particularly for its persecution of Baha'is. "With so much attention on Iran at the moment because of the nuclear talks," he said, "I think it is important that these issues are not overlooked."

"Human rights and religious freedom should remain something that we stay concerned about even as we make progress, possibly, with Iran in other areas," said Mr. Lewer.

Ms. Ernst said: "We are strictly against the fact that individuals such as the Baha'is are being imprisoned because they speak in favour of the right for education or because they support the right to practice their religion."

"This is something that is absolutely unacceptable," she said.

Rachel Bayani, representative of the Baha'i International Community's Regional Office to the European Union, said the videos reflect the sincere concerns of European Parliament over Iran's treatment of Baha'is.

"These statements are a powerful expression of solidarity of the representatives of the people of Europe towards the people of Iran," said Ms. Bayani.

The video statements, which have also been posted to a campaign page on Facebook, can be viewed [here](#).

Also available is a statement by Nasrin Sotoudeh addressing the seventh anniversary of the wrongful imprisonment of the former members of the Yaran. Ms. Sotoudeh was herself imprisoned in Iran with the Baha'i women who are among the seven now imprisoned. Her video statement is available [here](#).

In 2010, the seven, Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm, were tried and wrongfully convicted on charges of "espionage" and "spreading propaganda against the regime," among other false accusations. They were sentenced to 20 years in prison, the longest term of any current prisoners of conscience in Iran.

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