

1 February 2016

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Twenty-four Baha'is sentenced to prison in Iran

GENEVA – In an egregious miscarriage of justice, an Iranian revolutionary court in the province of Golestan sentenced 24 Baha'is to long terms of imprisonment solely because of their religious beliefs.

If their sentences were to be fully served, the group would, between them, spend 193 years in prison, one of the heaviest rulings issued against Baha'is in recent years.

The 24 men and women, who range in age from 21 to 60 years old, were arrested by government intelligence agents in coordinated raids on their homes in October 2012, January 2012, or March 2013. Many of them were subsequently released on bail, to await trial.

The final, three-page, joint verdict, issued on 4 January 2016 from Branch 2 of Gorgan's Revolutionary Court, came to surface two days ago. It sentenced two individuals to 11 years in prison, 13 to nine years in prison, and nine to six years in prison.

Their charges were solely based on their membership and activities in the Baha'i community, demonstrating the religious motives behind the arrests and sentencing. The verdict, for example, states that the belief of the Baha'is in their prophet – the Bab – is, in itself, considered propaganda against the regime of the Islamic Republic.

“The Iranian authorities have, once again, sentenced innocent individuals to prison for no other reason than their Faith,” said Diane Ala'i, a representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva.

“These individuals are husbands, wives, sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers to their families, law-abiding citizens who use the principles of their religion to contribute to the betterment of their country,” she said. “And instead of allowing them more opportunities, the Iranian authorities put them behind bars, depriving them of their most basic rights.”

There are currently over 80 Baha'is in prison. Despite promises of President Rouhani to improve the human rights situation in Iran, the treatment of the Baha'i community in the country has not changed over the past two years. They are not only still unjustly arrested and imprisoned, but they continue to be denied the right to higher education as well as

employment in the public sector. Their cemeteries are destroyed, businesses and shops are attacked or closed, and the government's systematic and extensive use of the mass media as a means to denigrate and vilify the Baha'is has increased in recent years.

“The ultimate question is, what should be considered a crime?” said Ms. Ala’i. “A community’s rightful wish to practice their Faith and to be of service to their communities or a government’s systematic plan to persecute and imprison innocent members of its society only on account of their beliefs?”

The names and sentences of the 24 individuals from the province of Golestan are as follows:

11 years imprisonment:

Mr. Shahnam Jazbani and Ms. Sheida Ghoddousi.

9 years imprisonment

Farahnaz Tebyanian, Pouneh Sanaie, Parisa Shahidi, Mona Amri, Mojdeh Zohouri Golkenari, Behnam Hasani, Hona Aghighian, Hona Koushk-Baghi, Bita Hedayati, Vesagh Sanaie, Shohreh Samimi, Bita Mowhebati, Parivash Shojaie

6 years imprisonment:

Roufia Pakzadan, Nazi Tahghighi Hesari, Soudabeh Mehdinejad Behnamiri, Mitra Nouri, Shiva Rowhani, Navid Moallem, Houshmand Dehghan, Karmilia Bidelian, Maryam Dehghan

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