

BAHÁ'Í

United Nations Office

INTERNATIONAL

866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120, New York, NY 10017 USA

COMMUNITY

Phone: +212-803-2500, Email: uno-nyc@bic.org, Web: <https://www.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

Reaction to meeting with a Baha'i exposes the truth

NEW YORK — A storm of furious denunciation, in reaction to a simple meeting between two friends in a private home, has dramatically exposed the duplicity of the Iranian authorities who have repeatedly claimed that their treatment of Baha'i is not motivated by religious prejudice.

The encounter which has generated the controversy was the visit of Faezeh Hashemi, daughter of former president of Iran Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, to the home of Fariba Kamalabadi, one of the seven former Baha'i leaders who have been in prison since 2008.

Tens of senior clerics and political figures were quick to denounce Ms. Hashemi, with a Grand Ayatollah even calling for her prosecution, because of her meeting with a Baha'i. Another high-ranking figure described "friendly relations" with Baha'i as "treason against Islam and the Revolution." "Consorting with Baha'is and friendship with them is against the teachings of Islam," said one Ayatollah whilst another described the Baha'is as "deviants" who must be "isolated" and asserted that meeting with a Baha'i is itself "an absolute religious deviation." The head of the judiciary as well as its first deputy have confirmed the possibility of Ms. Hashemi's prosecution which has been specifically demanded by many clerics as a lesson to the rest of society.

Speaking in New York, Bani Dugal, principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations said: "What is surprising is the candor, the scale, and the high-profile of the regime's reaction. From a Grand Ayatollah, designated as a 'source of emulation,' to senior religious and political figures as well as the executive organs of the government, consistent statements have now shown, beyond the shadow of doubt, that it is religious prejudice which motivates their treatment of the Baha'is. And in doing so, this collective reaction has laid bare the mendacity of the Iranian government's representatives in international human rights forums and has flatly contradicted their claims." Ms. Dugal added: "Let this be a moment of absolute clarity for the whole world."

“Just imagine what it is like to be a Baha’i in Iran when even those who visit you in your home are publicly condemned in this way and are threatened with prosecution.”

The meeting between the two women came about during a five day period when Mrs. Kamalabadi was allowed to leave prison before being required to return for the completion of her ten-year sentence.

Ms. Hashemi, who is also a former member of the Iranian parliament, spent six months in the same prison as Mrs. Kamalabadi in 2012 after being convicted of “spreading propaganda against the ruling system.” The women who had not seen one another since Ms. Hashemi’s release were renewing their friendship forged in prison.

“Despite the furor of criticism that has greeted this humanitarian gesture, a simple interaction of two citizens, there have also been countless fearless individuals—human rights activists, journalists, academics, and ordinary citizens—who have defended the right of Baha’is to normal human relations in their own country,” said Ms. Dugal. “But we hope more such voices will be raised so that the efforts aimed at the systematic isolation and ‘othering’ of the Baha’i community in Iran does not succeed.”

Ms. Dugal added: “The extraordinary threats and condemnation expressed by many clerics and authorities stand in contrast with the courageous statements and actions in recent years by several senior clerical figures and religious thinkers in Iran and beyond who have spoken out in favor of coexistence, tolerance, and equality for every citizen. We hope that the voice of conscience will lead the rest of the clerics to end their silence and to show that true religion cannot condone cold-hearted hatred, estrangement and apartheid.”

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