

# Bahá'í International Community

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## PRESS RELEASE

Baha'i International Community

16 February 2018

### For Immediate Release

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### Fourth member of Yaran completes his imprisonment

After ten years of unjust imprisonment for his beliefs, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, one of the seven members of the former leadership group of the Baha'is in Iran, was released today at the completion of his wrongful sentence.

Mr. Rezaie and six of his colleagues were arrested in 2008 after an early-morning raid on their homes. They were part of the ad hoc group known as “the Yaran,” or the Friends, which tended to the basic spiritual and material needs of the Iranian Baha'i community. The group was formed with the full knowledge and approval of authorities after formal Baha'i institutions were declared illegal in Iran in the 1980s. Mr. Rezaie is the fourth member to complete his sentence.

During the decade he spent in prison, Mr. Rezaie, 60, missed out on countless family events. Married with three children, he was deprived of attending the graduations of his children and the funerals of his close relatives.

Now, after ten years, he returns to a society that has changed little in terms of its treatment of the Baha'i community.

“Although Mr. Rezaie and three other members of Yaran have been released, the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran continues unabated,” says Ms. Diane Ala'i, Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. “From prison, Mr. Rezaie will go back to a community that is still under immense pressure from the government and faces discrimination and persecution for no other reason than belief in the Baha'i Faith”.

Iran's Baha'i community has been the subject of state-sponsored persecution since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Baha'is have faced executions, arrests, torture, imprisonment, and exclusion from public employment. In recent years, since the presidency of Dr. Hassan Rouhani, their situation has in many ways worsened. The economic-related persecution against them has escalated to what the [Baha'i International Community](#) (BIC) has called in an open letter to President Rouhani, an “[economic apartheid against a segment of Iran's population](#)”.

Last week, a group of 25 prominent professors, lawyers, and judges from around the world addressed an [open letter](#) to the head of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, Mr. Mohammad

Javad Larijani, asking him to acknowledge and take steps to remedy the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran. The letter brings attention to a newly-launched [website](#) by the BIC in which thousands of official documents, reports, testimonials, and audio-visual material revealing documentary evidence of years of relentless oppression have been published for the first time.

“This collection of records”, the letter states, “vividly demonstrates the depth and breadth of unjust, relentless, and systematic oppression against a religious minority.”

The constant threat of raids, arrests, detention, or imprisonment are among the main features of Iran's persecution of Baha'is today. In recent months, arrests of Baha'is have been intensifying in cities such as Birjand, Kermanshah, and Rasht. There are currently nearly 80 Baha'is in prison in the country, all of whom are held only because of their religious beliefs.

Additionally, Baha'i-owned shops and businesses are regularly sealed by the authorities after owners temporarily close them to observe Baha'i Holy Days. Just in the last few years, hundreds of such businesses have been sealed and scores of families have been deprived of an income. The three remaining members of the Yaran are expected to complete their sentences in the coming months. They include Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, 84; Mr. Afif Naeimi, 56; and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm, 44.

### **Background on the Yaran**

Although the Yaran functioned with the full knowledge and approval of the Iranian authorities, the members of the group were arrested and imprisoned for some twenty months before receiving their charges. They were subjected to appalling treatment and conditions in prison. Their trial began on 12 January 2010 behind closed doors.

After six brief sessions characterized by a lack of due legal process, the trial ended on 14 June 2010. The government originally sentenced them to 20 years' imprisonment, which was later reduced to ten years after a delayed application of the 2013 penal code to their case. Following the first session of their trial, their lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Ms. Shirin Ebadi, who had hardly one hour's access to her clients, explained that she had read the dossier of charges against them and found no proof to sustain their criminal charges.

“I am the head of the legal team representing these seven Baha'is. I have studied their files thoroughly”, said Ms. Ebadi. “There is not a shred of evidence for the charges leveled against them.”

Their arrest and imprisonment prompted an international outcry for their release by the United Nations (UN), governments, and media around the world. In 2010, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay, expressed “deep concern that” their “trials did not meet the requirements of due process and fair trial” and in a 2014 report by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, he urged “their unconditional release” from prison.