

PRESS RELEASE

Baha'i International Community

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**CALLS FOR ACTION AS IRANIAN BAHÁ'Í LEADERS
ENTER THIRD YEAR IN PRISON**

NEW YORK — As seven Baha'i leaders in Iran enter their third year of imprisonment, new details about the harsh conditions of their incarceration have emerged, prompting renewed calls for their immediate release.

The prisoners are Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm.

"These innocent Baha'is have now been locked up for two full years in Tehran's notorious Evin prison, under conditions which clearly violate international standards," said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations. "We call on the Iranian authorities to release them now, and ask the international community to join us in this plea. The dictates of justice demand no less."

The prisoners, former members of an informal group known as the Yaran, or "Friends," used to attend to the spiritual and social needs of the several hundred thousand Baha'is of Iran. They have been held in Evin prison since they were arrested in 2008 – six of them on 14 May and one of them two months earlier.

No court hearing was held until 12 January this year when they appeared in Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court. Charges including espionage, propaganda activities and "corruption on earth" were all denied. Further appearances took place on 7 February and 12 April.

"In the three trial sessions that have so far taken place, no evidence has been provided whatsoever of wrongdoing – making it all the more obvious that the prisoners are being held only because of their religious belief," said Ms. Dugal.

"If their freedom is not immediately granted, at the very least they should be released on bail. Steps should be taken to ensure that their trial is expedited and conducted fairly, in accordance with international standards," she said.

Severe prison conditions

Friday marks the second anniversary of the group's imprisonment, and details continue to emerge about the severe conditions under which they are being held. It is known, for example, that the two women and five men are confined to two cells which are so small that they restrict adequate movement or rest.

"They have neither beds nor bedding," said Ms. Dugal.

The place has a rancid smell, and they are permitted to have fresh air for only two hours each week. They have a light that if turned off during the day makes it impossible for them to see anything.

"Contact with their loved ones is restricted to one 10-minute telephone call a week, or visits which are mostly conducted through a glass barrier," Ms. Dugal said.

"Such inhumane conditions show no regard for the principles outlined in international agreements for the treatment of prisoners, which provide that no one may be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment," she said.

"The prisoners' own requests for modest improvements to their conditions remain unaddressed, and as a consequence their health is suffering.

"These people are innocent, and there is no reason they should be made to suffer like this," she said.

According to the journalist Roxana Saberi – who shared a cell for three weeks with two of the Baha'i prisoners – the women are confined in a small space. "They roll up a blanket to use as a pillow," she said. "The floor is cement and covered with only a thin, brown carpet, and prisoners often get backaches and bruises from sleeping on it. ... When I was with them, we were allowed into a walled-in cement yard four days a week for 20 to 30 minutes."

International action

The Universal House of Justice – the head of the Baha'i Faith – has called for the worldwide Baha'i community to host special prayer meetings across the globe this Friday, to remember the Baha'is of Iran and all their compatriots who are similarly subject to oppression.

"It grieves our hearts to contemplate the passing of yet another year in which the seven former members of the Yaran remain imprisoned on baseless charges for which the authorities have no evidence whatsoever," the House of Justice has written.

The second anniversary, they say, calls to mind the "multifarious forms of oppression" being faced by Iran's Baha'i community, including "interrogations, summary arrests and imprisonment, deprivation of the means to a livelihood, wanton destruction of property, and the denial of education to Baha'i students."

A collective gesture of solidarity with the imprisoned Baha'i leaders has also been called for by the human rights network United4Iran. They are asking sympathizers worldwide to replicate the dimensions of the cells in Evin prison, and document themselves confined to the

space. Photographs and video clips will be then shared on the Internet to bring the international community's attention to the ongoing arbitrary imprisonment being endured by the seven.

Details about the United4Iran campaign can be found [here](#).