

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

## Iran Intensifies Disinformation and Attacks on Baha'is

The fears of Bahá'ís worldwide over the intended fate of their coreligionists in Iran have heightened in the light of occurrences since the arrests, three months ago, of the “Friends in Iran,” the seven Bahá'ís who coordinate the affairs of the 300,000 Bahá'ís across Iran. Reports published in government-run news outlets point to an effort on the part of the authorities to use the mass media to spread accusations that the seven prisoners have engaged in subversive activities, and to continue to deprive these Bahá'ís from any access to legal counsel by maligning Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, the well-known Iranian human rights lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize winner who, together with her colleagues, has stated her readiness to defend the Bahá'ís.

Meanwhile, Bahá'ís throughout Iran are being terrorized in acts of ever-intensifying violence that have in recent weeks extended to a string of arson attacks on their homes and properties. (See “Arsonists in Iran Target Bahá'í Homes, Vehicles,” <http://news.bahai.org/story/645>.) They also continue to be demonized in an unrelenting campaign of propaganda that has been ongoing in the mass media for the past three years; subjected to summary arrests, detentions, interrogations, and searches of their homes; denied the means of livelihood; barred from the nation's institutions of higher learning; vilified from pulpits; and insulted in their schoolrooms. Their cemeteries are being systematically destroyed and the graves of their loved ones desecrated.

These latest developments are especially disturbing when viewed in the light of an established pattern whereby the authorities make or purvey false statements about the Bahá'ís, then deliberately repeat and widely disseminate these falsehoods and misrepresentations to give them credence. The intention, of course, is to foment hatred and mistrust of the Bahá'ís so that there exists within the general population an atmosphere wherein egregious violations of the Bahá'ís' human rights are either condoned or not questioned. Moreover, having themselves done everything possible to rouse the population, the authorities have been disingenuously telling the Bahá'ís that they will be incapable of protecting them when mob violence erupts.

The first of the most recent series of inflammatory news reports published in Iranian state-sanctioned news media purported that the seven Bahá'í prisoners had “confessed” to operating an “illegal” organization with ties to Israel—a blatant distortion of fact that has been categorically denied by the Bahá'í International Community. (See “Baha'is reject allegations of subversive activity in Iran,” <http://news.bahai.org/story/648>.)

A few days later, as soon as it became public that Mrs. Shirin Ebadi and her colleagues were prepared to serve as legal defense for the Bahá'í prisoners, these same news media published false allegations in relation to an expression of gratitude conveyed by the Bahá'í community in Iran to Mrs. Shirin Ebadi's organization. The article states: “In a letter to Shirin Ebadi, the Centre of Zionist Bahaism in Israel thanked her for organizing the press conference on ‘Rights to Education,’ considering it an indication of ‘goodwill,’ ‘sincerity,’ and ‘courage’ from Shirin Ebadi and her colleagues” and describes Mrs. Ebadi's efforts to defend the rights of Bahá'í university students as “suspicious.”

Immediately following the publication of the foregoing article, statements also began appearing in the Iranian press that Mrs. Ebadi's daughter is a Bahá'í. Bahá'ís do not hide the fact that they are Bahá'ís; if Mrs. Ebadi's daughter were a Bahá'í, she would say so. Mrs. Ebadi and her daughter have categorically denied this and the Bahá'í International Community confirms that she is not a member of a Bahá'í community anywhere in the world.

Clearly the intention here is simply to stir up irrational fears and prejudices. This is yet another instance of a well-known tactic employed by the authorities in Iran: any individuals or groups who speak out on behalf of the Bahá'ís inevitably find themselves subjected to public vilification or other forms of intimidation. The Bahá'ís are encouraged, therefore, that a growing number of individuals and groups in Iran are both coming to their defence and courageously withstanding such pressure.

The blatant attempt to turn the straightforward relationship between the Head of the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'ís in Iran into a conspiracy that casts the Friends in Iran as a secret organization receiving instructions from Israel is absurd, as is the article's attempt to malign Mrs. Ebadi by referring to “Zionists” having “worked so hard to give the Nobel Prize to [her].”

Despite their persistent charge that the Bahá'ís are agents of Zionism, the Iranian authorities have always known that the international headquarters of the Faith was established in Haifa as a result of the successive banishments imposed upon Bahá'u'lláh by the Persian and Ottoman authorities themselves, over three-quarters of a century before the establishment of the state of Israel.

The article concerning the expression of thanks to Mrs. Ebadi's organization completely misconstrues the press conference to which it refers, which was, in fact, an event held on 2 October 2007 that had been organized by the Defenders of Human Rights Centre to publicize the plight of all those who are deprived of access to education. The Bahá'ís were only one of many

groups whose situations the event highlighted. The Bahá'í representative made a 5-10 minute presentation describing the difficult circumstances faced by Bahá'í students, who have persistently been denied access to post-secondary education. The proceedings were covered by journalists from within the country and abroad.

So heartened were the Friends in Iran by this milestone in the long history of the suffering of the Bahá'ís in that country, that they wrote to the Head of their Faith, the Universal House of Justice, explaining what had happened. It is not at all unusual that the Friends in Iran would communicate about such a matter with the Universal House of Justice or that it would reply with encouragement and guidance.

On 21 November 2007 the Universal House of Justice responded, advising the Friends in Iran to explore contacts with other Iranian individuals and organizations sympathetic to the plight of the Bahá'ís and to continue the effort to secure legal representation for the Bahá'í students. It also encouraged them to convey the gratitude of the Iranian Bahá'ís to the Defenders of Human Rights Centre.

The Iranian government seizes every means at its disposal to stigmatize the Bahá'ís and then, within the poisoned atmosphere it has itself created, when it wants to discredit someone, it asserts that the person is a Bahá'í. Mrs. Ebadi is not the first individual upon whom this tactic has been used. As a lawyer, Mrs. Ebadi defends individuals and groups of many different backgrounds; this does not mean that she necessarily espouses their beliefs. What, then, is the state-sanctioned press trying to insinuate when it contends that her daughter is a Bahá'í?

The Persian language version may be read [here](#).