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PRESS RELEASE

Baha'i International Community

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Baha'is imprisoned in Yemen may face deportation to Iran

NEW YORK (27 August 2008) – Three Baha'is currently imprisoned in Yemen are facing the possibility of imminent deportation to Iran, where Baha'is are intensely persecuted and they would likely face imprisonment or torture.

“We are gravely concerned about the fate of these three Baha'is, who are being held without charges in a case that is clearly based on religious persecution,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations.

“Although the three have lived in Yemen for more than 25 years, they hold Iranian passports and we have come to believe that the Yemeni government may be planning to deport them to Iran, where the government is waging a systematic campaign against Baha'is.

“While calling for their immediate release, our primary concern today is to ask that the Yemeni government resist any impulse to deport these three Baha'is to Iran – or any other country. Deportation to any country for three individuals with well established businesses and families for their religious beliefs would be grossly unjust, but deportation to Iran, where they face the possibility of torture, would be a clear violation of international human rights law,” said Ms. Dugal.

The three Baha'is were arrested in June, apparently in relation to their belief in and practice of the Baha'i Faith, along with a Baha'i of Iraqi origin.

The three Baha'is of Iranian origin who were arrested are Mr. Zia'u'llah Pourahmari, Mr. Keyvan Qadari, and Mr. Behrooz Rohani. A fourth Baha'i, Mr. Sayfi Ibrahim Sayfi, was also arrested and faces the possibility of deportation to Iraq.

The three Baha'is of Iranian background all have successful businesses in Yemen, and their families are well established there.

The arrests occurred in the capital, Sana'a, on the night of 20 June 2008, when some 20 armed security officers carried out raids at several Baha'i homes. During the raids, papers, CDs, photographs and a computer were also confiscated.

Although no formal charges have been filed, government officials have indicated that the Baha'is were arrested on the suspicion of "proselytizing" in a manner against Yemeni law, which the Baha'is deny.

Since their arrest, the Baha'i International Community has been working through diplomatic channels to obtain their release.

"Our hope has been to prevent this case from becoming a major human rights matter, over the issue of religious persecution. Deportation to Iran would certainly be a matter for international concern, and such an action would be out of character with the Yemeni government's past record on human rights issues.

"Under international laws on the freedom of religion, there is no question that Baha'is – and others in Yemen – should be free to practice their faith. While the situation is still unfolding, we stand by the right of Baha'is in Yemen and elsewhere to practice their religion in all aspects, without the fear of being forced to leave their adopted country," said Ms. Dugal.

There are approximately 250 registered Baha'is in Yemen, and the community has enjoyed relative freedom for its members to quietly practice their faith.

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