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PRESS RELEASE

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Unprecedented UN resolution demands end to harassment of Baha'is in Yemen

A United Nations (UN) resolution regarding the situation in Yemen, introduced by Egypt on behalf of the Arab Group and supported by the entire membership of the UN Human Rights Council, called for the release of all Baha'i detainees in the country.

Titled "Human Rights, Technical Assistance and Capacity-building in Yemen", the resolution was adopted at the Human Rights Council on Friday, 29 September 2017, by consensus. The Council is the principal human rights body at the UN and is composed of 47 members who are elected by the General Assembly based on equitable geographic distribution.

The text expressed concern over "the severe restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, including for minorities, such as members of the Baha'i faith". It further called upon "all parties to immediately release all Baha'i[s] detained in Yemen due to their religious belief, to cease the issuance of arrest warrants against them and to cease the harassment to which they are subjected".

There are presently seven Baha'is in prison in Yemen, most of whom are held in undisclosed locations and one of which has been detained for nearly four years due to repeatedly postponed court-hearings. Arrest warrants have been issued for over a dozen others, while a number of families have been forced to leave their homes. Recent developments in Yemen have indicated that the authorities' prosecution of individuals has broadened in scope to be against the Baha'i community in general and that efforts are being made to turn public opinion against all of the Baha'is under the premise that they are secretly plotting to stir unrest in Yemen.

"What is remarkable about this resolution," explained Ms. Ala'i, the Representative of the Baha'i International Community at the United Nations in Geneva, "is that all members of the Council, were able to reach a consensus regarding the dire situation in Yemen, including the persecution of the Baha'is as a religious community."

The resolution establishes a Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts tasked with monitoring and reporting on the situation on human rights in Yemen. It is also mandated to carry out a comprehensive examination of all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights in the country. The text was presented by Egypt to the Council on behalf of the Arab Member States of the UN.

“The people of Yemen are all suffering under an extremely difficult humanitarian situation, and their strife appears to be daily increasing,” said Ms. Ala’i. “Yemeni Baha’is not only experience these hardships, but as a religious community they face additional pressures solely because of their beliefs.”

While the Yemeni Baha’is are being targeted by the Houthi-Saleh authorities, the Baha’i International Community indicated, in a statement delivered at the Council last week, that information from reliable sources confirms that Iranian authorities are, in fact, behind the persecutions.

“Despite the harrowing circumstances in Yemen, the Baha’is have, based on the principle of non-involvement in political activities, refused to side with one group or another,” further stated Ms. Ala’i. “They have, instead, endeavoured to serve all people.

“Therefore, this strong signal from the Human Rights Council not only calls on the responsible entities to cease this unjust treatment, but it also serves as a beacon of hope for those currently suffering in the country.”