

# Bahá'í International Community

United Nations Office | GENEVA

Route des Morillons 15, CH-1218 Grand-Saconnex / Geneva, Switzerland  
Tel: +41 (0)22 798 5400 Fax: +41 (0)22 798 6577 E-mail: [geneva@bic.org](mailto:geneva@bic.org)

17 March 2018

## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

For more information, contact Diane Ala'i in Geneva at (office) +41 22 798 5400 or (mobile) +41 78 60 40 100, or Bani Dugal in New York at (office) +1 (212) 803-2500 or (mobile) +1 (914) 329-3020

### **Jamaloddin Khanjani Completes Decade-Long Imprisonment**

NEW YORK – After one decade of unjust imprisonment and harsh treatment in Iranian prisons, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, 85, completed his ten-year sentence yesterday. He is one of the seven members of the former leadership group of the Baha'is in Iran known as the Yaran, who were jailed on false and baseless charges.

Mr. Khanjani, the oldest of the seven, is the fifth to be released this year. The Yaran was an ad-hoc group which tended to the basic spiritual and material needs of the Iranian Baha'i community. It was formed with the full knowledge and approval of Iranian authorities after formal Baha'i institutions were declared illegal in Iran the 1980s.

"We're happy that Mr. Khanjani has finally been released but add that this is not a cause for celebration," said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations.

"He has sacrificed 10 years of his life in prison, during which time he has missed many precious and important moments in his family's life."

In 2011, Mr. Khanjani's wife, Mrs. Ashraf Khanjani, passed away while he was in prison. Cruelly, the authorities did not allow him a furlough to attend her funeral.

"Mr. Khanjani and the other members of the Yaran should have never been put in prison to begin with," stated Ms. Dugal. "They not only committed no crimes, but even contributed to the betterment of their communities and their country."

Mr. Khanjani is a once-successful factory owner who lost his business after the 1979 Islamic Revolution because of his belief in the Baha'i Faith. He spent most of the 1980s under the threat of death from Iranian authorities.

Born on 27 July 1933 in the city of Sangsar, he grew up on a dairy farm in Semnan province and never obtained more than a high school education. Yet his dynamic personality soon led to a successful career in industrial production.

He started a charcoal production business, and eventually established the first automated brick factory in Iran, ultimately employing several hundred people.

In the early 1980s, he was forced to shut down that factory and abandon it, putting most of his employees out of work, because of the persecution he faced as a Baha'i. The factory was later confiscated by the government.

In the 1990s, Mr. Khanjani was able to establish a mechanized farm on properties owned by his family. Nevertheless, the authorities placed many restrictions on him, making it difficult to do business. These restrictions extended to his children and relatives, and included refusing loans, closing their places of business, limiting their business dealings, and banning travel outside the country.

“The treatment accorded to Mr. Khanjani and other members of the Yaran throughout their lives, their arrest and imprisonment for no other reason than their belief, represents the treatment suffered by the entire Baha'i community for generations,” said Ms. Dugal.

Iranian Baha'is continue to face the threat of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, economic discrimination, and the denial of access to higher education. Economic-related persecution against them has particularly escalated in recent years resulting in what the Baha'i International Community has called, in an open letter to President Rouhani, an “economic apartheid against a segment of Iran's population”.

### **Background on the Yaran**

Following their arrest, the Yaran were imprisoned for some twenty months before receiving their charges and were subjected to appalling treatment and conditions in prison. Their trial began on 12 January 2010 behind closed doors.

Following 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 10 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 defendants, 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 Bahá'ís. 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.