

31 October 2017

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

Fariba Kamalabadi's 10-Year Prison Sentence comes to an End

Fariba Kamalabadi, one of the seven members of the former leadership group of the Baha'is in Iran who were imprisoned due to religious beliefs, has been released after completing her unjust 10-year prison sentence.

Mrs. Kamalabadi, 55, was part of the ad-hoc group known as "the Yaran", or the Friends. She and five other members of the group were arrested in May 2008 after an early morning raid on their homes. The seventh member, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, was arrested two months earlier, in March 2008, and was released last month after completing her sentence.

Some twenty months after being imprisoned without charge and subjected to appalling treatment and conditions, their trial began on 12 January 2010 behind closed doors. After 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 Baha'is. I have studied their files thoroughly," said Ms. Ebadi. "There is not a shred of evidence for the charges leveled against them."

Although Mrs. Sabet and Mrs. Kamalabadi have completed their respective prison sentences, the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran continues unabated.

"The Baha'i International Community welcomes the release of Mrs. Kamalabadi, the second member to complete her unjust 10-year sentence," said Ms. Diane Ala'i, the Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. "However, this does not in any way reflect an improvement in the situation of the Baha'is in Iran. One might even say that the word 'release' is not suitable, as she is completing an unjust sentence and is returning to a society that continues to persecute her co-religionists just as before."

In a report published by the Baha'i International Community titled "The Baha'i Question Revisited: Persecution and Resilience in Iran", the BIC states that the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran not only continues, but has worsened.

"It is a pity that despite the promises made by President Hassan Rouhani regarding equality and justice for all citizens, the Baha'is in Iran continue to face daily pressures aimed at eradicating them as a viable entity in their own country," added Ms. Ala'i.

The constant threat of raids, arrests, and detention or imprisonment is among the main features of Iran's persecution of Baha'is today. There are approximately one-hundred Baha'is in prison, all of whom are held only because of their religious beliefs.

In recent years, economic persecution against the Baha'is has escalated 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". Since 2013, hundreds of Baha'i-owned shops and businesses have been sealed by the authorities, leaving scores of families without an income.

In the most recent example, last week, some 19 individuals were arrested in Kermanshah, Tehran, and Birjand, and the homes of 25 Baha'is were raided. Further, 47 Baha'i-owned shops around the country were sealed off by authorities because the owners observed a Baha'i Holy Day on 21 October. These closures occurred in Shiraz, Marvdasht, Gorgan, Gonbad, and Mahshahr.

The Yaran, now disbanded, were formed with the full knowledge and approval of the Iranian authorities after formal Baha'i institutions were declared illegal in Iran in the 1980s. Their role was to see to the minimum spiritual and material needs of Iran's Baha'i community.

The five remaining members of the Yaran are also expected to complete their sentences in the coming months. They include Mr. Jamalodin Khanjani, 84; Mr. Afif Naeimi, 56; Mr. Saeid Rezai, 60; Mr. Behrooz Tavakkoli, 66; and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm, 44.