

A Call to the Government of Iran: Release Innocent Baha'i Detainees Facing Trial Immediately

We have learnt that the seven Baha'is, detained in Tehran without charges since May 2008, are going to undergo trial at the Revolutionary Court very shortly. The Iranian Deputy Public Prosecutor has recently announced that the seven Baha'is are accused of "*espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic.*"

Amnesty International "considers the charges to be politically motivated and those held to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their conscientiously held beliefs or their peaceful activities on behalf of the Baha'i community."

We are appalled to note that during the nine months of their arbitrary detention, the seven Baha'is have been denied access to their legal counsel, Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, and that the five male detainees are now being held together in a 10m² prison cell without basic amenities like beds.

We are also deeply concerned that Ms. Ebadi has not been allowed access to the files of the detainees. Instead, she continues to be threatened and harassed.

In June 2008, prominent citizens of India had appealed to Iran to "abide by the international human rights conventions it has ratified and release these detainees immediately."

Along with many governments, parliamentary leaders and human rights organizations around the globe, we, the undersigned, call once again on the Government of Iran to dismiss the arbitrary "politically motivated" charges against the seven innocent Baha'i leaders and release them immediately and unconditionally.

At the very least, if the Baha'is are put on trial, we urge Iran to abide by the provisions of Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it has ratified and is legally binding. This entails, among others, that the detainees:

- Be granted at the very least a "fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal".
- Be "presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law".
- Be given adequate time and facilities for the preparation of their defence and be able to communicate with the counsel of their choice.

These citizens of Iran are innocent of the charges framed against them. They are law-abiding, loyal to their government and working towards the betterment of society.

The Government of Iran should release them immediately or, at a minimum, try them fairly. This is one of the basic rights of every man and woman on this planet. Should the detainees be denied a fair trial, it would be an affront to the very notion of fundamental rights. ■

– February 2009

JUDICIARY AND OFFICIAL AGENCIES

Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, *Former Judge, Supreme Court of India*

Justice J.S. Verma, *Former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of India – Former Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission*

Justice Rajinder Sachar, *Former Chief Justice, Delhi High Court – Former President, People's Union for Civil Liberties*

Soli J. Sorabjee, *Former Attorney General for India – President, United Lawyers' Association*

Dr. Syeeda Hameed, *Member, Planning Commission of India*

Prof. Tahir Mahmood, *Member, Law Commission of India – Former Chairperson National Commission for Minorities*

Dr. Mohini Giri, *Founder, Guild of Service India – Former Chairperson, National Commission for Women*

Prof. Amitabh Kundu, *Centre for the Study of Regional Development, JNU – Member, National Statistical Commission*

Mr. D.R. Kaarthykeyan, *Former Director, Central Bureau of Investigation*

RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Maulana Khalid Rasheed, *Farangi Mahali, Naib Imam Eidgah, Lucknow – Member, All India Muslim Personal Law Board*

Archbishop Vincent Concesso, *Archbishop of Delhi, Sacred Hearts Cathedral*

Swami Agnivesh, *President, World Council of Arya Samaj – Former Chairperson, UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery*

Fr. Philip Kuruvilla, *Youth Director of the Orthodox Church of India*

ARTISTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Aamir Khan, Actor – Producer – Director

B. George Verghese, Senior Columnist – Visiting Professor, Center for Policy Research

Miloon Kothari, Coordinator Housing and Land Rights Network – Former UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing

Maja Daruwala, Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

Tapan Kumar Bose, Secretary General, South Asia Forum for Human Rights

Mukul Sharma, Director, Amnesty International India

Madhu Kishwar, Founder, Manushi – Senior Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)

Ajay Mehta, Executive Director, National Foundation for India

Dr. Mira Shiva, South Asian Focal Point, International Peoples Health Council

Ashok Agarwal, Advocate – Member, Social Jurist

S.K. Sharma, President, Society for the Protection of Human Rights in Uttarakhand

ACADEMIA AND CORPORATE SECTOR

Dr. S.K. Barua, Director, IIM Ahmedabad

V. Raghunathan, Former Professor IIM Ahmedabad – Author

Arun Bharat Ram, Chairman SRF Ltd – Chairman CII Family Business Council

Ishwar Subramanian, Managing Director AkzoNobel, India

Manish Sabharwal, Chairman, Teamlease Services

Sudhir V. Kamath, Managing Director 2i Capital (India) Private Limited

Suki Iyer, CEO Metamorph Learning Pvt. Ltd.

Lakshmi Ishwar, Management Educator