

Trial of Iran's seven Baha'i leaders

Oral Statement of the Baha'i International Community to the Eighth Session of the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva, 6 June 2008

<http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/yaran-special-report/un-statements/bic1>

Mr. President,

On 14 May 2008, six members of the Baha'i leadership in Iran were summarily arrested in Tehran. Officers of the Intelligence Ministry entered their homes, carried out extensive searches, and have arbitrarily detained them ever since, without charge. To date, we have not received any information about where they are being held. They have not been given access to legal counsel, nor have their relatives been able to contact them.

The seventh member of the group has been in custody since 5 March 2008, when she was summoned to Mashhad by the Intelligence Ministry, ostensibly because she was required to answer questions about a burial in the Baha'i cemetery there. Like the others, she is still being held incommunicado.

These seven people compose the group that coordinates the activities of the Baha'i religious minority in the absence of a National Spiritual Assembly in Iran. In each country, the Baha'i community has an elected governing body, but the Assembly in Iran was disbanded by order of the authorities in 1981.

Mr. President, a spokesperson of the Iranian government, Mr. Gholam Hossein Elham, said in a press conference that these arrests had nothing to do with ideology, and Representatives of the Islamic Republic have repeated in various international fora – including at the Human Rights Council – that, in Iran, no one is prosecuted for his or her beliefs. But fallacious accusations continue to be levelled against Baha'is. The mere fact that the government tells Baha'is they can be released, if they agree to recant their faith, clearly demonstrates that the real issue is their religious beliefs, which they freely share with their fellow citizens – a right laid down in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the government of Iran is signatory.

While denying that religion is the issue, the authorities provide a platform, in mosques, in government sponsored media and even in schools across the country, for incitement to hatred and defamation of the Baha'i Faith. And when violent acts are committed – such as attempting to set a man on fire, demolishing people's homes, or exhuming remains and crushing the bones under the wheels of a car – the perpetrators enjoy total impunity.

The Baha'i International Community believes that it is high time that the Human Rights Council called for the Islamic Republic of Iran to abide by its international commitments. As a first step, the Council should call upon Iran to release the Baha'i leadership and grant all Iranian Baha'is their individual and collective human rights.