

May 13, 2014

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

May 14 will mark the sixth anniversary of the imprisonment of the seven members of the former ad hoc leadership group of the Bahá'ís of Iran, known as the “Yaran-i-Iran,” or friends of Iran. These seven individuals – Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm – were arrested and detained in 2008. As governments and human rights organizations have attested, their imprisonment is for no other reason than their membership in the Bahá'í Faith and their service to the Bahá'í community.

We understand that these prisoners were initially held in solitary confinement and denied communication with their families. They were then “tried” in a series of brief, closed-door sessions in which they were denied meaningful access to their counsel. One of their lawyers, Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, stated that there was no evidence to sustain the charges against them and that the proceedings were riddled with irregularities. They were convicted on a number of charges, including espionage, propaganda activities against the Islamic order, acting against the security of the country, and corruption on earth – all of which they categorically denied.

The Yaran were ultimately sentenced to 20 years in prison, the longest sentence of any prisoner of conscience currently detained in Iran. The two women are now serving this sentence in Tehran's infamous Evin prison, while the five men are in the notorious Rajai Shahr prison in Gohardasht.

The imprisonment of these seven individuals is taking place against a backdrop of generalized persecution of the Bahá'í community, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, over 200 Bahá'ís have been killed, the majority by execution, and thousands have been imprisoned. Bahá'ís are denied government jobs and business licenses, and are excluded from university. Their marriages are not recognized, their cemeteries are desecrated, and their holy places have been destroyed. They are, in short, a community under siege.

Mr. Secretary, the gross mistreatment of the Yaran and the severe and systematic state-sponsored persecution of the Bahá'ís is emblematic of a deteriorating human rights situation in Iran. In

addition to Bahá'ís, other religious minorities, including Christians, Sufis, and Sunnis face persecution; ethnic minorities are repressed; journalists are jailed; lawyers and other human rights defenders are targeted; and executions are on the rise.

We are deeply concerned about religious freedom and human rights in Iran. We ask you to call for the release of the Yaran and all prisoners of conscience in Iran, and to speak out for the fundamental rights of all citizens of Iran.

Sincerely,

American Islamic Congress

American Jewish Committee (AJC)

Anti-Defamation League

Bahá'ís of the United States

Baptist World Alliance

Christian Solidarity Worldwide UK

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Hindu American Foundation

Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of AJC

Jubilee Campaign

Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society