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U.S. Senate Passes Resolution 148 Condemning the persecution of the Baha'i community in Iran

WASHINGTON — Last night, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution “**condemning the government of Iran’s state-sponsored persecution of its Baha’i minority** and its continued violation of the International Covenants on Human Rights.” [Senate Resolution 148](#) gained **strong bipartisan backing**, with a total of **39 Senators in support**, including the original sponsor and 38 cosponsors, comprising 18 Republicans and 21 Democrats.

The Resolution directly calls on the government of Iran to release the seven leaders of Iran’s Baha’i community, who have been imprisoned since 2008; the Baha’i teachers and administrators who have been imprisoned for providing education to Baha’i youth; and all other prisoners held on account of their religion in Iran. The Resolution also urges the U.S. President and Secretary of State to “utilize available authorities . . . to impose sanctions on officials of the government of Iran and other individuals directly responsible for serious human rights abuses,” including those against the Baha’i community.

Senate Resolution 148 was passed hours after the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution expressing concern about a range of human rights violations in Iran, including the persecution of the Baha’i community, which is the largest non-Muslim religious minority group in the country.

“More than 5 million members of the Baha’i Faith worldwide celebrate and respect the equality of all mankind – but in Iran these members continue to be persecuted simply for being Baha’i worshippers,” said **Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL)**, who introduced Senate Resolution 148. “The prisoners of conscience in Iran, like the Baha’i seven who have been unjustly imprisoned, must not be forgotten and the regime must be held accountable for the injustices committed against innocent religious groups like the Baha’is.”

Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), one of the Resolution’s authors and an original cosponsor, noted that Iran’s persecution of the Baha’is is emblematic of wider repression in the country: “The Iranian regime continues to imprison journalists and human rights defenders, restrict the rights

BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES
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of women, and persecute ethnic and religious minorities. America must continue to stand with the Baha'is and with all Iranians who are struggling to lead free and peaceful lives.”

The situation of the Baha'is – who constitute Iran's largest religious minority – is increasingly precarious. A total of **71 Baha'is are in prison**, including the seven leaders of Iran's Baha'i community, who were jailed in 2008. While recent reports indicate that their sentences have been belatedly reduced from 20 years to 10 years, in line with changes to the Iranian Penal Code introduced in May 2013, Baha'is continue to suffer arbitrary arrest and detention. There are currently nine Baha'is who have been imprisoned for their efforts to educate Baha'i youth who are excluded from the nation's university system due to their religion. One educator, Azita Rafizadeh, last month began serving a four-year sentence, and her husband, Payman Koushk-Baghi, is expected to begin serving a five-year sentence imminently – leaving their six-year-old son without his parents.

Baha'is continue to face other serious forms of systematic persecution, as well. They are barred from government employment, their homes are raided and their property seized, their marriages are not recognized, and their cemeteries are desecrated. In recent months, **the government has targeted Baha'i-owned businesses**, sealing dozens of shops for their observance of Baha'i holy days, and **the government controlled media** has dramatically increased its efforts to incite hatred against the Baha'is using **anti-Baha'i propaganda**.

Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), another original cosponsor of the Resolution, underscored the need for continued action: “I am glad to see the passage of this important resolution condemning the Iranian regime's violations of human rights and urging the Administration to do more to aid the situation. All over the world, fundamental human rights are violated for reasons of religion, race, gender, disability, political views, and other characteristics. It is crucial to speak out for fundamental rights and freedoms if minority communities like the Baha'is in Iran are to live without fear.”

“We are heartened to see the passage of this resolution with strong bipartisan support. The human rights situation in general – and for the Baha'is in particular – has worsened in the last two years since President Hassan Rouhani took office,” said Mr. Kenneth E. Bowers, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States. “This resolution lets the Iranian government know that the eyes of a watching world are upon it.”

For additional information, please contact the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs at (202) 833-8990, or visit <http://publicaffairs.bahai.us/what-we-do/human-rights/persecution-of-the-bahais-in-iran/>.