

PUBLIC

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12 February 2009

Further Information on 128/08 (MDE 13/068/2008, 15 May 2008) and follow-up (MDE 13/109/2008, 06 August 2008) - Arbitrary arrests/prisoners of conscience

IRAN	Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi (f) aged 46, homemaker]
	Jamaloddin Khanjani (m), aged 76, businessman]
	Afif Naeimi (m), aged 47, industrialist]
	Saeid Rezaei (m), aged 50, engineer] members of the Baha'i community
	Behrouz Tavakkoli (m), aged 57, lecturer]
	Vahid Tizfahm (m), aged 37, optometrist]
	Mahvash Sabet (f), aged 57, homemaker/former teacher]

The seven people named above, all members of the Baha'i religious minority, are to go on trial shortly, on charges of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the system". 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. If convicted, they would face lengthy prison terms, or even the death penalty.

On 11 February, the Deputy Prosecutor of Tehran told the Islamic Student News Agency (ISNA) that the case against "seven defendants in the case of the illegal Bahai group" would be sent in the next week to the Revolutionary Court. The seven are members of a group responsible for the Baha'i community's religious and administrative affairs in Iran. Six of the group's leaders - Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Vahid Tizfahm - were arrested following raids on their homes by officers from the Ministry of Intelligence in the early hours of 14 May 2008. A seventh person, acting as a secretary for the group, Mahvash Sabet, was arrested earlier, on 5 March 2008. Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Jamaloddin Khanjani had previously been arrested for their activities on behalf of the Baha'i community.

The seven are held in Section 209 of Tehran's Evin Prison, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence. All have been permitted access to relatives but none has been granted access to a lawyer. The five male detainees are said to be held together in one cell of about 10m², without any beds. Paragraph 19 of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners states that "[e]very prisoner shall, in accordance with local or national standards, be provided with a separate bed, and with separate and sufficient bedding which shall be clean when issued, kept in good order and changed often enough to ensure its cleanliness". Amnesty International believes that the failure to provide these detainees with a bed amounts to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Under Article 502 of the Penal Code, those convicted of espionage can be sentenced to between one and five years' imprisonment. Under Article 508, those convicted of the more serious charge of "cooperating with foreign states to harm national security" can face either the death penalty or a sentence of one to 10 years' imprisonment. "Insulting the religious sanctities" carries the penalty of execution or one to five years' imprisonment. "Propaganda against the system" carries a penalty of three months to one year's imprisonment. Ali Ashtari, a telecommunications salesman, was hanged in November 2008 after being convicted for espionage for Israel.

The Baha'i faith was founded about 150 years ago in Iran and has since spread around the world. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the Baha'i community has been systematically harassed and persecuted. There are over 300,000 Baha'is currently in Iran, but their religion is not recognized under the Iranian Constitution, which only recognizes Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Baha'is in Iran are subject to discriminatory laws and regulations which violate their right to practise their religion freely, as set out in Article 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party. The Iranian authorities also deny Baha'is equal rights to education, to work and to a decent standard of living by restricting their access to employment and benefits such as pensions. They are not permitted to meet, to hold religious ceremonies or to practise their religion communally. Since President Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005, dozens of Baha'is have been arrested.

Members of the Baha'i community in Iran profess their allegiance to the state and deny that they are involved in any subversive acts against the government, which they state would be against their religion. The Baha'i International Community believes that the allegations of espionage for Israel which have over the years been made against the community in Iran stem solely from the fact that the Baha'i World Centre is in Israel.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, Arabic, English or your own language:

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, Vahid Tizfahm and Mahvash Sabet, whom Amnesty International considers to be prisoners of conscience held because of their beliefs or peaceful activities on behalf of the Baha'i community;
- expressing concern that the charges brought against the seven are politically motivated and calling on the authorities to drop them;
- expressing concern at the possibility that the seven could face the death penalty;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that the seven are protected from torture and other ill-treatment and that their conditions of detention meet international standards for the treatment of prisoners;
- urging the authorities to ensure that they are given regular access to their relatives and lawyers of their choice and any medical treatment that they may require.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh (Office of the Head of the Judiciary)

Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhouri, Tehran 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: shahroudi@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In the subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Leader of the Islamic Republic

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader

Islamic Republic Street – End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info_leader@leader.ir

via website: <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter> (English)

<http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?p=letter> (Persian)

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 6 649 5880

Email: via website: <http://www.president.ir/email/>

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 March 2009.