

Brasilia, 17 February 2009

Open Letter to the Legal Authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran

For the Freedom of Bahá'í Citizens Imprisoned in Iran

The Commission for Human Rights and Minorities of the House of Representatives of Brazil defends association and religious tolerance to be heritage of all human beings, assumed to be pillars to the full validity of human rights, which must govern international relations of Brazil, as determined by Article 4 of the Federal Constitution .

It is on this basis that we express our concern with the news released by the Iranian Student News Agency (ISNA) concerning accusations against seven members of the Bahá'í leadership, known as "Friends in Iran", a group responsible for the community activities in that country – imprisoned in Tehran since the second trimester of 2008.

This publication quotes Hassan Haddad, deputy prosecutor of Tehran, as having stated that "the case will be forwarded to the revolutionary court", and that these Bahá'ís are being accused of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities, and propaganda against the Islamic Republic".

The Bahá'í International Community categorically denies the accusations against these individuals – one of whom has been imprisoned since March and the remaining six since May 2008.

The peace-loving, humanistic principles and practices for which the Baha'is are known in Brazil have earned this community respect and credibility among the country's human rights supporters. There is therefore no reason to doubt the credibility of their claims.

This community recalls that all elected or appointed Bahá'í institutions have been banned by the Iranian government for nearly thirty years, soon after the Islamic Revolution. In the absence of a national administrative council (National Spiritual Assembly), the group of "Friends in Iran" was formed with the full knowledge of the government, and since then has served as the coordinating body of the 300.000 Bahá'ís in that country. The various governments that came to power in Iran since then have always been aware of the activities of this group, with whom they have dealt regularly during the past years, although informally. To now declare them to be an "illegal" group does not appear correct to us.

The accusations against these five men and two women that they would be "spying" is vehemently denied by the Bahá'í community, who believes it to be merely a pretext to persecute the Bahá'ís.

Since the early years of 1930, the antagonists of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran have insisted that this new religion is a political sect created by imperialistic governments who seek to weaken Islam. The Bahá'ís have been consecutively accused of being instruments of Russian imperialism, of British colonialism, of American expansionism, and more recently of Zionism.

The Bahá'í Community points out that the international administrative center of the Bahá'í Faith is based today within the modern borders of Israel merely as a result of the banishment of the Founders of the Faith by the Persian and Ottoman Empires in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1860 – and therefore eighty years before the creation of the State of Israel, Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to his perpetual imprisonment in the city of Acre (Akka).

The Bahá'í Community questions: if in fact these Bahá'ís are being accused of espionage for Israel, why were hundreds of others executed for having refused to recant their Faith and embrace Islam? For what motives have thousands been deprived of their employment, pensions, businesses, and educational opportunities? For what reason were their holy places, temples and cemeteries confiscated and demolished? All of these questions demonstrate an orchestrated attempt to destroy a religious community, it must be concluded.

It has taken the Iranian Government more than eight months to present accusations against these individuals for nay crime, and no evidence against them has been presented during this period. During their imprisonment they have not been allowed access to their lawyer, Mrs. Shirin Ebadi. She has been harassed, threatened and intimidated ever since she took over the case, and up to the present has not been able to obtain access to the case files. Now that these Bahá'ís have been accused, we demand that the government allow Ms. Ebadi access to these documents, as well as to the prisoners themselves.

The prosecution of the "Friends in Iran" represents only one more step in the 30-years systematic campaign orchestrated by the governments to eliminate the Bahá'í Community as a viable entity in Iran, the cradle of the Bahá'í Faith – a campaign for which documentary evidence is available and has been brought to light by agencies of the United Nations.

One of the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith is that its followers must strictly abstain from involvement in any type of activities related to partisan politics, be it local, national or international. The Bahá'ís view government as a system for maintaining the wellness and orderly progress of human society. They reject violence and are constructive, peace-loving citizens, with no interest in assuming power.

The human rights defender who profess the Bahá'í Faith in Brazil also affirm that thirty other Bahá'ís are currently in prison in Iran. Some eighty others have been required to post deeds of property and business licenses as collateral for bail, having equally been falsely charged and are awaiting trial.

In view of this situation of risk and persecution against the above mentioned individuals due to their their belonging to a religious minority, we address the constituted Authorities of Iran, through the Embassy in Brazil, and having as witnesses the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as international organizations and civil society organizations – to whom we transmit this official communication – in order to respectfully plead for the lives, security and liberty of the Bahá'í citizens in Iran.

[Signed]

Congressman Pompeo de Mattos (PDT-RS)

President

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