

Open letter concerning the escalation of persecution of Baha'is in Iran during COVID-19

An open letter from Australian Health Practitioners

As Australian Baha'is and colleagues working in diverse health fields, we have been proud to play our part in caring for our patients and preserving public health since the outbreak of COVID-19. This pandemic has made evident our interconnectedness as one humanity sharing a common home, where an outbreak of disease causing pain and suffering in one part of the planet has implications for us all.

At this time when we, alongside many thousands of our fellow health practitioners, are seeking to combat an unprecedented global health crisis, we are saddened to see Baha'is in Iran having their health put at risk solely due to their religion.

In recent weeks, at least 77 Baha'is across eight provinces of Iran have been arrested, summoned to court, tried, sentenced to jail, imprisoned or re-incarcerated. In the city of Shiraz alone, 40 Baha'is have been summoned to court, sentences of up to 13 years have been imposed, and a court official has threatened to "uproot" the Baha'is from the city.

In the context of the escalating pandemic in Iran, all prisoners face a significant risk of contracting COVID-19 due to overcrowded and unhygienic prison conditions. These actions are directly contrary to the widespread international calls for the release of prisoners of conscience in Iran due to the risk of COVID-19 infection in prisons.

At a time when every government should be focusing on protecting all its citizens, these Baha'is, whose lives and livelihoods are under great strain, are being targeted solely due to their faith.

We call for the release of all those who have been imprisoned due to their faith, and an end to the campaign of harassment and intimidation of Baha'i citizens in Iran, so that they can fully participate in the life of society as equals with their compatriots.

Signed