

URGENT ACTION

TRIAL OF SEVEN BAHA'IS POSTPONED IN IRAN

The trial of seven members of Iran's Baha'i religious minority was postponed on 11 July, the day it was due to start. Their relatives have been told that there will be no trial for the moment and that they will be informed in due course. The seven may be sentenced to death if they are convicted of the charges against them when the trial takes place.

Of the seven Baha'is facing trial, two are women (**Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi** and **Mahvash Sabet**), and five are men (**Jamaloddin Khanjani**, **Afif Naeimi**, **Saeid Rezaie**, **Behrouz Tavakkoli** and **Vahid Tizfahm**). They are members of a group responsible for the Baha'i community's religious and administrative affairs in Iran. They are held in Section 209 of Evin Prison, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence. 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 on 14 May 2008. Mahvash Sabet, who was acting as a secretary for the group, was arrested 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 Baha'i faith is not recognized under the Iranian Constitution, meaning that its members are not allowed to practise their religion freely.

The detainees' families were told in May that they were now facing the additional charge of mofsed fil arz (being corrupt on earth), which can carry the death penalty, and that a new date for their trial has been set. They are scheduled to appear on 11 July before Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran where they are likely to be charged with mofsed fil arz, as well as "espionage for Israel", "insulting religious sanctities" and "propaganda against the system." Their lawyers have never been able to visit them since their arrest, though they have been allowed family visits.

The seven could face the death penalty, if found guilty when their trial does eventually take place as they are likely to be charged with mofsed fil arz (being corrupt on earth), "espionage for Israel", "insulting religious sanctities" and "propaganda against the system."

Amnesty International is continuing to call on the Iranian authorities to release the seven immediately and unconditionally, as it considers them to be prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their beliefs or peaceful activities on behalf of the Baha'i community.

Amnesty International will continue to monitor this case, and will take further action as necessary. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the fourth update of UA 128/08 (MDE 13/068/2008).

Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/068/2008/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The range of crimes punishable by death in Iran is extraordinarily wide, and includes vaguely worded charges, such as "enmity against God" (*moharebeh ba Khoda*) and "being corrupt on earth" (*mofsed fil arz*), which are used against people accused of taking up arms against the state, robbery or spying. These are regarded as crimes against God and as such are not subject to pardon. Offences for which judges may impose the death penalty include those relating to national security.

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 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 say 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.

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