

11 May 2016

His Excellency Mr Abdolhossein Vahaji  
Ambassador of Iran  
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
25 Culgoa Circuit  
O'Malley ACT 2606

By email: [ambassador@iranembassy.org.au](mailto:ambassador@iranembassy.org.au)

Your Excellency,

As members of the legal profession, we are gravely concerned about the plight of the seven former leaders of the Baha'i community in Iran, who since 2008 have been unjustly imprisoned.

14 May 2016 marks the eighth anniversary of the arrests of the seven, namely:

- Mrs Fariba Kamalabadi
- Mr Jamaloddin Khanjani
- Mr Afif Naeimi
- Mr Saeid Rezaie
- Mrs Mahvash Sabet
- Mr Behrouz Tavakkoli
- Mr Vahid Tizfahm

We understand that these five men and two women were all members of a national-level group known as the "Yaran-i-Iran" or "Friends in Iran". They were arrested following coordinated raids on their homes in 2008. An arrest warrant was issued 10 months after they were arrested. Their alleged crimes included "spreading corruption on earth" and collaboration with the "tyrannical Quds-occupying regime" (Israel).

After some 20 months of being imprisoned without charge, a "trial" began on 12 January 2010 and ended on 14 June 2010 after six brief, closed sessions. To this day, they have not been presented with formal charges or a judgment in writing, in clear violation of the Iranian constitution and the most basic requirement of procedural fairness and natural justice. Their lawyers were orally advised of their sentencing to twenty years in prison – the longest jail terms of any prisoners of conscience in Iran – on vague charges for which no evidence has ever been presented.

One of the lawyers brave enough to represent Bahá'ís in Iran was the Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi. Others included Mahnaz Parakand, who defended the seven former leaders before fleeing the country in 2011 fearing persecution, Nasrin Sotoudeh and Abdolfattah Soltani, both of whom have since served prison sentences.

We note that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon, has raised serious concerns about the treatment of Baha'is and other minority groups in Iran.

We wish to highlight that as a country, Iran has ratified the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* which creates the obligation to ensure, amongst other things, that all people in its jurisdiction enjoy:

- Freedom from discrimination, including on the basis of religion (Article 2);
- Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention (Article 9);
- Equality before the law and minimum procedural safeguards in criminal prosecutions (Article 14); and
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18).

We urge the Iranian government to uphold these standards as well as the rule of law and we reiterate the calls of the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran, Ahmad Shaheed, and other high-level UN human rights experts for the immediate release of these seven individuals.

Yours sincerely,

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights

Professor Iain T. Benson

Hon Catherine Branson QC

Mr Julian Burnside AO QC

Mr Rodger M.A. Chongwe SC

Mr Robert Leonard Crowe SC

The Hon John Dowd AO QC

The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP

Mr Stephen Freeman

Mr Jeremy Gormly SC

Mr Noel Hutley SC

Mr Ian Lacey AM

Mr Philip Lynch

Mr Julian McMahon

Ms Jane Needham SC

Ms Elaine Pearson

Dr Sarah Pritchard SC

Professor Michael Quinlan

Mr Garry Rich SC

Mr John Stratton SC

Mr Winston Terracini SC

Dr Keith Thompson

Mr Terence Tobin QC

Mr Barry Toomey QC

Mr Bret Walker SC

Mr Peter Wertheim AM

Mr Tim Wilson (Former Human Rights Commissioner)

Professor George Williams AO

**CC:**

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Dr Hassan Rouhani  
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Hon Julie Bishop MP  
Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs

Senator the Hon George Brandis QC  
Attorney-General and Minister for the Arts