



Bahá'ís in Iran

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This note provides background information on the detention of seven leaders of the Bahá'í faith who have been imprisoned in Iran since March and May 2008. It also considers the international responses to their imprisonment.

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1 Who are the Bahá'ís?

The Bahá'í faith was founded a century-and-a-half ago in Iran and is estimated to have more than five million followers in more than 100,000 localities around the world. The international headquarters of the Bahá'í faith is based today in Haifa, Israel, as a result of the banishment of the faith's founder, Baha'u'llah, by the Persian and Ottoman empires in the mid-19th century. In contemporary Iran, there is a 300,000-strong Bahá'í community, making the group Iran's largest religious minority.¹ The Bahá'ís claim to be “the youngest of the world's religions” and believe that “humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in one global peaceful society”.²

2 What is the position of Bahá'ís in Iran?

Since the early 1930s, the Iranian government has accused the Bahá'ís of being tools of Russian imperialism, British colonialism, American expansionism and, most recently, of Zionism. Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, Bahá'ís have faced further religious persecution in Iran. The US Commission on Religious Freedom (USCRF) says that the Bahá'í community “has long been subject to particularly severe religious freedom violations in Iran”.³ It estimates that over 200 Bahá'ís were executed by Iran between 1979 and 2008 while many more were imprisoned and tortured, and more than 10,000 have been dismissed from government and university jobs. Bahá'ís are viewed as heretics by the Iranian authorities, and may face repression on the grounds of apostasy. Bahá'ís may not establish places of worship, schools, or any independent religious associations and are barred from the military and denied government jobs and pensions as well as the right to inherit property. Their marriages and divorces are also not recognized by the Iranian authorities. Bahá'í cemeteries, holy places, and community properties have been seized or desecrated and many important religious sites have been destroyed. In recent years, Bahá'ís in Iran have faced increasingly harsh treatment, including increasing numbers of arrests and detentions and violent attacks on private homes and personal property. The Bahá'í faith and its community in Iran have also been vilified in the state-run Iranian press.⁴

According to the USCRF, nearly 200 Bahá'ís have been arbitrarily arrested since early 2005 and, at present, more than 30 Bahá'ís remain in prison on account of their religion or belief. Dozens are said to be awaiting trial while others have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from 90 days to several years. All of those convicted are in the process of appealing the verdicts. Charges typically ranged from causing anxiety in the minds of the public and of officials to spreading propaganda against the regime.⁵

3 Who are the detained Bahá'í leaders and what are the charges against them?

In March and May 2008, seven Bahá'í leaders – Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naemi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm – were arrested and taken to Evin prison in Tehran.⁶ All are members of an informal Bahá'í national coordinating group, known to the Iranian government, which was established to help meet

¹ Bernd Kaussler, “Iran: a faith on trial”, *Open Democracy*, 23 April 2009, pp1-2

² Cited in *Ibid.* p2

³ [Annual Report 2009](#), United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 1 May 2009, pp34-35

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Bernd Kaussler, “Iran: a faith on trial”, *Open Democracy*, 23 April 2009, pp1-2

the educational and social needs of the Bahá'í community after the Iranian government banned all formal Bahá'í activity in 1983. In February 2009, they were charged with espionage, insulting religious sanctities, and propaganda against the Islamic Republic, charges that could result in the death penalty. A subsequent charge of "spreading corruption on earth" has recently been added to the original charges.⁷ An article in *New Statesman* on 13 May 2009 analysed the significance of this latter charge and suggested that:

to the Western reader, such an accusation may seem to be a confusing or even nebulous basis for criminal charges. But in theocratic Iran it has a basis in the penal code and leaves the accused in an extremely vulnerable position.

The term, found in the Koran, has increasingly been used within Islamic legal practice to brand any undesirable "offender": Muslims considered to be too lax in their practices; those who are considered socially evil, such as drug-traffickers and prostitutes; or those with whom the authorities have a fundamental theological disagreement, such as the Bahá'ís.

Vague as these charges may be, they still have the potential to lead the accused to the executioner.

The allegations against the Bahá'ís are as nonsensical as they are unjust. The accusations play to the fears of certain areas of the Iranian population about enemies – internal and external – conspiring to undermine the country.⁸

The seven detained Bahá'ís had to wait over eight months to be notified of the charges against them. They have not been given access to their lawyer, Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Laureate. Their legal team, in turn, has not had access to their case files while the detainees themselves have had only minimal contact with their families.⁹ It has also been reported that people who have worked closely with the seven have had their homes raided and items confiscated, and have been interrogated and even arrested. It is now over a year since their arrest in March and May 2008.

4 International responses

4.1 The United Kingdom

Following the arrest of the seven Bahá'í leaders, the UK Government expressed its concerns over the treatment of Bahá'ís in Iran and called upon the Iranian government to uphold fully the right of its citizens to adopt and practise a religion of choice, to end the persecution of the Bahá'í community, and to release the detained individuals. On 3 June 2008, the then Foreign Office Minister, Kim Howells, said, "we remain deeply concerned by the Iranian government's refusal to respect the right of its citizens to freely adopt and practise a religion of choice and the ongoing systematic persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran".¹⁰ Mr Howells said that, following a recommendation by the UK, the EU had issued a public declaration expressing "serious concern" about the treatment of the Bahá'ís in Iran and calling for a release of the seven detainees.¹¹

⁷ "Bahá'ís say jailed leaders in Iran face harsh new accusation", CNN, 14 May 2009

⁸ Moojan Momen, "[A bleak future for Bahá'ís](#)", *New Statesman*, 13 May 2009

⁹ "Trial of members of the Iranian Bahá'í community", Statement by Foreign Office Minister Bill Rammell MP, 16 February 2009

¹⁰ HC Deb, 3 June 2008, c833W

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Responding to the Iranian government's decision to charge the seven detainees in February 2009, the Foreign Office Minister, Bill Rammell, expressed the Government's concern that the Iranian government appeared to be using "vaguely worded charges of this nature to target human rights defenders and religious minorities". He argued that "it is hard not to conclude that these people are being held solely on account of their religious beliefs or their peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association". Their treatment, particularly the refusal of the Iranian authorities to allow the seven detainees access to their lawyer, Mr Rammell said, "makes it very hard to believe that they will receive a fair trial", particularly in the context of "disturbing reports of systematic discrimination against and harassment of Bahá'ís on the grounds of their religion".¹²

In terms of the steps the UK Government has taken to raise the issue of the arrested Bahá'í leaders with the Iranian authorities, Mr Rammell stated (in a written answer on 5 May 2009) that the Foreign Secretary had not met or spoken to his Iranian counterpart since April 2008 and that Mr Rammell himself last met the Deputy Foreign Minister in September 2008. Nevertheless, Mr Rammell said that he had met the Iranian Ambassador to the UK on 20 November 2008 and had "raised our concerns about human rights issues including the draft penal code, which would impose a mandatory death sentence for apostasy". He further stated that "we, along with EU partners, will continue to press Iran to fully uphold the right to freedom of religion and to end the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran". Similarly, on 18 May 2009, the Foreign Office Minister, Lord Malloch Brown, said that the UK Government had expressed its concerns about the treatment of the Bahá'í community in Iran "on several occasions to the Iranian Government". He said that, now that the detainees have been charged, the Iranian government should give them "a fair trial with independent observers". He also stated that Iran should uphold fully the right to adopt and practise a religion of choice and end discrimination against the Bahá'í community. However, Lord Malloch Brown noted that "the Iranian authorities are reluctant to engage with the international community, and refuse to receive formal representations on human rights issues from the EU".¹³ He concluded that:

In this context we believe the most significant impact we can have is by ensuring that international attention remains focused on the human rights environment in Iran. We will continue to urge Iran to put an end to persecution of religious minorities and respect the right to freedom of religion and belief as described in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party.¹⁴

On 18 May 2009, in response to a written question about how many Bahá'ís had been imprisoned in Iran since 2000, Lord Malloch Brown said that:

The use of short-term detention in Iran is particularly fluid and difficult to monitor, therefore it is difficult to accurately determine the number of Bahá'ís imprisoned in Iran since 2000. However, Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials are in close contact with the National Spiritual Association of the Baha' is of the UK, who have provided information dating back to 2004. Our records show that 228 Bahá'ís have been arrested since August 2004. Of those: three are currently imprisoned in Iran; 81 have been arrested and released on bail and are awaiting trial; nine have been arrested and released without bail; 84 have been tried and sentenced and are free pending appeal or summons to begin serving their sentences; 10 have been tried and sentenced and have completed their prison terms; eight have had charges cleared in their original

¹² "Trial of members of the Iranian Baha'i community", Statement by Bill Rammell MP, 16 February 2009

¹³ HL Deb, 18 May 2009, cWA264

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

trials or have had their verdicts overturned on appeal; and three have served their prison sentences and have begun their terms of exile. Whilst we have received reports of members of the Bahá'í community being killed or executed since 2000, we cannot directly attribute those deaths to the fact that they were Bahá'ís. The last documented killing of a Bahá'í in Iran dates back to July 1998, with the execution of Mr. Rúhullah Rawhani. The persecution of individuals based solely on the grounds of their religion or beliefs is wholly unacceptable, and alongside our EU partners we have repeatedly expressed our firm opposition to all forms of discrimination and oppression. We will continue to urge Iran to respect and protect its religious minorities and free all prisoners held due to their faith or religious practice.¹⁵

A number of Early Day Motions (EDMs) have been tabled in the UK Parliament about the fate of Bahá'ís in Iran (a total of 14 since March 1996). The most recent EDM, tabled by Lembit Opik on 2 March 2009 (EDM 937), has so far attracted the support of 81 Members. The EDM states:

That this House notes the arrests in March and May 2008 of Mahvash Sabet, Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Vahid Tizfahm, members of an informal leadership council of the Iranian Bahá'í community; further notes with concern the announcement of 12 February 2009 by the deputy-prosecutor of Tehran that these seven Bahá'ís are to face a revolutionary court to answer charges including, espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic republic, despite no evidence produced against them to date; observes that such accusations can merit capital punishment under Iranian law; is concerned that the charges against these Bahá'í community leaders may be motivated by a growing culture of anti-Bahá'í repression in Iran; and calls on the Government to protest to the Iranian authorities and press for the immediate release of these seven individuals.¹⁶

In its 2007 report on Iran, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee considered briefly the treatment of the Bahá'í community in Iran. The Committee stated that:

Religious minorities such as the adherents of the Bahá'í faith continue to suffer widespread discrimination and persecution. We received evidence from the Bahá'í community in the UK that strongly suggests recent vigilante campaigns have led to deaths amongst its adherents.¹⁷

The Committee also took evidence from the then Foreign Office Minister, Kim Howells, who said that the treatment of the Bahá'ís was “absolutely dreadful”.¹⁸ More broadly, the Foreign Affairs Committee concluded that “Iran’s human rights record is shocking”. Its report stated that:

We recommend that the Government presses Iran to remove the death penalty, which includes hanging by strangulation, stoning, flogging and amputation from its statute books. We further recommend that the Government ensures human rights are not treated as a secondary concern to the nuclear issue, and that it underlines to Iran that its poor record in responding to human rights concerns makes it more difficult for the international community to trust its intentions in other fields.¹⁹

¹⁵ HL Deb, 18 May 2009, cWA264

¹⁶ EDM 937, tabled by Lembit Opik MP on 2 March 2009

¹⁷ Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2007-08, *Global Security: Iran*, HC (2007-08) 142, p40

¹⁸ Cited in *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

4.2 The European Union

The European Union has called several times for the Iranian government to immediately release the seven detainees. Following the arrests in May 2008, the EU called upon Iran to end its persecution of the Bahá'í and to release the imprisoned leaders. In a statement, the EU said:

The EU reiterates its serious concern about the continuing systematic discrimination and harassment of the Iranian Bahá'ís on the grounds of their religion. [...] The EU calls on the Islamic Republic of Iran to uphold fully the right to adopt and practise a religion of choice, to end the persecution of the Bahá'í community, and to release the detained individuals.²⁰

In a statement on 7 February 2009, the EU Presidency declared that:

The EU is concerned about the ongoing systematic discrimination and harassment of Bahá'ís in Iran, including the expulsion of university and high school students, restrictions on employment and anti-Bahá'í propaganda campaigns in the Iranian media.

The EU wishes to express its firm opposition to all forms of discrimination, in particular regarding freedom of religion. In this context, the EU urges the Islamic Republic of Iran to release the Bahá'í prisoners and stop prosecuting members of the Bahá'í minority due to their belief and practice of the Bahá'í Faith.²¹

Ten days later, on 17 February 2009, the EU Presidency stated that:

The EU expresses its deep concern at the grave charges raised against seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran. They have been detained by the Iranian authorities for eight months without charge, during which time they have not had access to legal representation.

The EU is concerned that, after being held for so long without due process, the Bahá'í leaders may not receive a fair trial. The EU therefore requests the Islamic Republic of Iran to allow independent observation of the judicial proceedings and to reconsider the charges brought against these individuals.

The EU wishes to express its firm opposition to all forms of discrimination and oppression, in particular on the basis of religious practice. In this context, the EU urges the Islamic Republic of Iran to respect and protect religious minorities in Iran and free all prisoners held due of their faith or religious practice.²²

On 18 February 2009, the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, called upon the Iranian government to reconsider its case against the seven Bahá'í leaders. Mr Pöttering said that it was “worrying” that the seven would be “judged in a trial, without respect of the basic requirements of law”. He continued:

The European Parliament demands of the Iranian authorities to urgently respect human rights and the rights of religious minorities and to rethink its charges against the

²⁰ [“EU calls on Iran to end the persecution of the Bahá'í”](#), *New Europe*, 26 May 2008

²¹ [Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the deteriorating situation of the religious minority Bahá'í in Iran](#), 7 February 2009, p1

²² [Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the trial with seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran](#), 17 February 2009, p1

seven leaders of Bahá'í [...] These people were arrested only because of their Faith and should be immediately released.²³

On 25 May 2009, the EU Presidency said that it “reiterates its concern about the situation of seven members of the Bahá'í religious community in Iran”. The EU argued that the charges brought against the detainees by the Iranian government, and other evidence, “suggests that the persecution deliberately aims to suppress Bahá'í religious identity and legitimate community activities”. It also voiced its concerns about the “numerous reports of official harassment of members of the Bahá'í community, including detentions, police summons and pressure to desist from community religious activities”.²⁴

4.3 The United States

In February 2009, the US Department of State issued a condemnation of the accusations made by the Iranian government against the seven Bahá'í leaders, saying they “are part of the ongoing persecution” of Iranian Bahá'ís. A spokesperson for the State Department, Robert Wood, commented that:

The United States condemns the Iranian government's decision to level baseless charges of espionage against seven leaders of the Iranian Bahá'í community: Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, Mr. Vahid Tizfahm and Mrs. Mahvash Sabet. Authorities have detained these Bahá'í for more than nine months without access to legal counsel or making public any evidence against them. The accusations reported in Iranian and international media are part of the ongoing persecution of Bahá'í in Iran. Thirty other Bahá'í remain imprisoned in Iran solely on the basis of their religious belief.

Other religious minorities continue to be targeted solely on the basis of their beliefs. Last month authorities arrested three Christians: Jamal Ghalishorani, Nadereh Jamali and Hamik Khachikian. In addition, authorities detained several members of the Gonabadi Dervishes, followers of Sufism, on Kish Island in January.

We join the international community in urging the authorities to release all religious minorities who are currently in detention for peacefully exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.²⁵

In its annual report, published on 1 May 2009, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom concluded that:

Since August 2005, the Iranian government has intensified its campaign against non-Muslim religious minorities. A consistent stream of virulent and inflammatory statements by political and religious leaders and an increase in harassment and imprisonment of, and physical attacks against, these groups indicate a renewal of the kind of oppression seen in the years immediately following the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s. [...]

The Bahá'í community has long been subject to particularly severe religious freedom violations in Iran. [...] In recent years, Bahá'ís in Iran have faced increasingly harsh

²³ [Declaration of the President of the European Parliament](#), 18 February 2009

²⁴ Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the violation of religious freedom in Iran, 25 May 2009, p2

²⁵ [Statement by US Department of State Acting Spokesperson Robert Wood on the persecution of religious minorities in Iran](#), 13 February 2009

treatment, including increasing numbers of arrests and detentions and violent attacks on private homes and personal property.²⁶

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the US Congress has passed a number of resolutions condemning the Iranian government's treatment of the Bahá'í community.²⁷ Since the imprisonment of the seven Bahá'í leaders in March and May 2008, the Congress has passed further resolutions calling for their release and criticising the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran. On 1 August 2008, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution (H.Res 1008) condemning the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran and calling for the immediate release of all Bahá'ís imprisoned solely on the basis of their religion. The resolution, sponsored by Congressman Mark Steven Kirk, passed with 408 votes to 3. The text of the resolution stated that the US House of representatives:

(1) condemns the Government of Iran for its state-sponsored persecution of Bahá'ís, calls on the Government of Iran to immediately cease activities aimed at the repression of the Iranian Bahá'í community, and continues to hold the Government of Iran responsible for upholding all the rights of its nationals, including members of the Bahá'í community;

(2) condemns the Government of Iran's continued imprisonment of individuals without due process and a fair trial;

(3) calls on the Government of Iran to immediately release 10 Bahá'ís: Ms. Raha Sabet, Mr. Sasan Taqva, Ms. Haleh Roohi, Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm; and

(4) calls on the Government of Iran and the Iranian Parliament to reject a draft Islamic penal code, which violates Iran's commitments under the International Covenants on Human Rights.

On 13 February 2009, a further resolution (H.Res 175) was introduced to the US House of Representatives, again sponsored by Congressman Kirk. The resolution "condemns the government of Iran for its state-sponsored persecution of its Bahá'í minority and its continued violation of the International Covenants on Human Rights". It also calls on the Iranian government to release the seven Bahá'í leaders and "all other prisoners held solely on account of their religion".²⁸ Three weeks later, on 9 March 2009, an identical resolution (S.Res 71) was introduced to the US Senate, sponsored by Senator Ron Wyden.²⁹ The Senate Resolution was co-sponsored by nine other senators while the House Resolution was co-sponsored by 56 Congressmen. To date, neither resolution has been passed and no formal votes have yet taken place. In the House, the resolution was referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee and in the Senate it was referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Introducing the resolution in the House of Representatives, Congressman Kirk compared the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran to the treatment of Jews and gypsies in Nazi Germany. He argued that:

To an Islamic dictatorship that denies its people basic political and human rights, this religion founded in Iran on the tenets of religious tolerance remains an anathema to the

²⁶ [Annual Report 2009](#), United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 1 May 2009, p34

²⁷ In 1982, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2006, and 2008, Congress declared that it deplored the religious persecution by the Government of Iran of the Bahá'í community and would hold the Government of Iran responsible for upholding the rights of all Iranian nationals, including members of the Bahá'í faith.

²⁸ [House Resolution 175](#), 13 February 2009, Library of Congress

²⁹ [Senate Resolution 71](#), 9 March 2009, Library of Congress

Supreme Leader. And the world is standing by as Iran's state-sponsored persecution of its Bahá'í minority nears its final stages. [...]

I am introducing a bipartisan resolution calling on the Government of Iran to immediately release the seven Bahá'í leaders and all others imprisoned solely the basis of their religion.

I urge President Obama and Secretary Clinton, in concert with the international community, to publicly condemn Iran's persecution of its religious minorities and demand the release of these seven community leaders.³⁰

Similarly, introducing Senate Resolution 71 on 9 March 2009, Senator Wyden said:

Last year, the Iranian regime imprisoned seven leaders of the Bahá'í community. In February 2009, Tehran's deputy prosecutor announced that these seven leaders would be tried on charges of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities, and propaganda against the Islamic Republic." Not surprisingly, the regime provided no evidence to support these preposterous accusations and has refused to allow a lawyer for the seven to even meet with them. These actions are clear and unambiguous violations of Iran's international commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Some in the international community have already condemned this mockery of justice, and rightly so. My colleagues and I believe the time has now come to add the United States Senate to this growing chorus of voices.

Our resolution is simple and straightforward. It denounces the Iranian government's persecution of the Bahá'ís and calls on the regime to immediately release all prisoners held for their religious beliefs, including the seven Bahá'í leaders. It further calls on President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to work with the international community in condemning the Iranian regime for its repeated human rights violations.³¹

4.4 Other international responses

A number of other countries have also called upon the Iranian government to release the seven imprisoned Bahá'í leaders. On 20 February 2009, the Dutch government voiced its concerns over the fate of the imprisoned Bahá'ís. In a statement, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "the Netherlands fears that the trial will not be fair, and it has asked Iran through the EU to allow an independent observer to monitor the judicial process". The Dutch Foreign Minister, Maxime Verhagen, said he was "seriously concerned about the fate of the Bahá'ís".³² Similarly, the official spokesperson for German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said that the German government was deeply concerned about the trial and particularly about the Iranian authorities decision to deny the seven access to legal representation.³³ On 14 May 2009, the Canadian Foreign Minister, Lawrence Cannon, said that "Canada is deeply troubled by the continued imprisonment of these Bahá'í leaders, without charge or legal representation" and said the Canadian government "believe they are being detained solely because of their faith". Calling upon Iran to release the seven Bahá'í leaders, Mr Cannon urged Iran to "respect its human rights obligations".³⁴ Earlier, on 27 February 2009, the

³⁰ [Comments by Congressman Kirk introducing House Resolution 175](#), 13 February 2009, Library of Congress

³¹ [Comments by Senator Wyden introducing Senate Resolution 71](#), 9 March 2009, Library of Congress

³² ["The Netherlands condemns the trial of Iranian Bahá'ís"](#), Statement by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 February 2009

³³ ["Germany says worried about trial of Bahá'ís in Iran"](#), *Ynet News*, 18 February 2009

³⁴ ["Minister Cannon expresses concern over Iran's continued detention of seven Bahá'í leaders"](#), Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 14 May 2009

Canadian Parliamentary sub-Committee on Human Rights called for the immediate release of the seven Bahá'í leaders.³⁵

International human rights groups have also condemned the Iranian government's imprisonment of the seven Bahá'í leaders and Iran's treatment of Bahá'ís more generally. Human Rights Watch used the anniversary of the arrests to call for the release of the seven Bahá'ís or for a prompt trial with "fair and open proceedings". In a statement, Human Rights Watch said:

These Bahá'í leaders have been languishing in prison for a year now, with no access to their lawyers and no glimmer of a trial to date...These reported new charges only add to the fears for their lives under a government that systematically discriminates against Bahá'ís.³⁶

Likewise, Amnesty International says that it:

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 Bahá'í community.³⁷

Moreover, Amnesty International accuses Iran of subjecting the seven Bahá'í leaders "to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" by denying them beds and by putting the five male detainees in a single cell just 10 metres square.³⁸

³⁵ ["Parliamentary Committee demands immediate release of imprisoned Bahá'ís"](#), *Canadian Bahá'í News Service*, 27 February 2009

³⁶ ["Iran: Free Bahá'í leaders"](#), Human Rights Watch press release, 14 May 2009

³⁷ [Amnesty International press notice](#), 15 May 2008

³⁸ [Amnesty International press notice](#), 15 May 2008