

14 May 2009

To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved Friends,

A year has now passed since the former members of the Yárán were arrested. Despite what has been reported in Iran's state-run media, the people of your nation and others throughout the world have become increasingly convinced of their innocence and, indeed, of the innocence of all Bahá'ís. A review of the events associated with the imprisonment of these seven dearly loved friends, so representative of the pattern of persecution established against the Bahá'ís of Iran, exposes a shameless travesty of justice.

The members of the Yárán were summarily arrested and subjected to intensive interrogation with no recourse to legal counsel. In an effort to construct a case against them, the authorities seized and questioned those with whom they worked closely. A full seven months elapsed before even a single pretext could be furnished for their detention. Finally, on 11 February 2009, a series of baseless charges were levelled against them, each an obvious distortion of their irreproachable efforts to tend to the needs of the Bahá'í community. Their routine correspondence with the Universal House of Justice on matters such as the difficulties facing Bahá'ís was presented as "espionage for Israel"; their allegiance to the Faith was portrayed as an insult to Islam; and their service as members of the Yárán—a group with which various agencies of the government had maintained regular contact for some twenty years—was denounced as illegal.

The authorities then proceeded to exploit the official media to condemn the Yárán in the eyes of the public. An immediate worldwide outcry made it clear to the authorities that any trial would not escape intense international scrutiny, compelling them to replace the examining magistrate. Now, some twelve weeks after the reported conclusion of investigations, the families of the Yárán have been informed that a new accusation has been levelled at the prisoners: "spreading corruption on earth" (*Mufsid-i-fil-ard*). Such a charge can leave no doubt that the only basis for the allegations made against the Yárán is to be found in religious prejudice.

The past year has also seen an increase in the pressure brought to bear on your community as a whole. You have endured acts of violence and summary arrests and aggressive interrogations, experienced growing attempts at the coercion of young students and continued denial of higher education, and suffered economic sanctions and other privations. The ad hoc arrangements made for addressing the spiritual and social needs of the believers—the Yárán and the Khádimín—were declared illegal, and in demonstration of your sincerity as loyal, law-abiding citizens, you brought to a close their collective functioning. Yet every instance of injustice has served only to sharpen the contrast between your sincere intent and the deepseated prejudice of those who persist in their assaults against you, a contrast that has not gone unnoticed by observers, either within or outside your country.

Support from progressive Iranian thinkers and from others in both the East and the West who champion the cause of justice grows stronger with every day that passes, and the call for the protection of your civil rights resounds ever louder. Surely you are aware of the many articles and statements issued by prominent and influential Iranians in your defence over the past few months. Similar concern has been voiced by individuals and representatives of organizations and governments in all parts of the world. Recent action taken by the Canadian House of Commons provides a noteworthy example of the recognition accorded to all fair-minded people of your country, on the one hand, and the outspoken condemnation of the persecution you are forced to bear, on the other. For an hour and a half on the evening of 30 March 2009, members of Parliament, representing every one of the country's political parties, rose in the House of Commons and spoke

of your plight with eloquence and passion. While acknowledging the distinguished role your nation has played in the advance of civilization and expressing esteem for the people of Iran and admiration for the Bahá'ís, regarded as compassionate and conciliatory, they lamented the harm caused to your country by those who persecute you and your fellow citizens. By unanimous consent they adopted a motion which “condemns the ongoing persecution of the Bahá'í minority of Iran and calls upon the government of Iran to reconsider its charges against the members of the Friends in Iran, and release them immediately or failing this, that it proceed to trial without further delay, ensuring that the proceedings are open and fair and are conducted in the presence of international observers.”

Parallel to such developments, news of the efforts you are making to accommodate recent changes, to manage the affairs of the community, and to pursue without interruption your collective endeavours has been a constant source of encouragement to us. We are in receipt of numerous communications from across Iran, forwarded here through both your friends and Bahá'í institutions outside of the country, that point to your unwavering resolve. This correspondence raises many questions, some of which we will address in a separate response in the coming days; it also testifies to the determination with which you are discharging your individual spiritual responsibilities, are providing for the spiritual education of all members of your community irrespective of age, are cooperating with your fellow citizens to further the social and economic development of Iran, and are engaging in constructive discussions with your neighbours, friends, relatives, and co-workers. We offer gratitude to God that your lives have become a reflection of the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

Man’s honour and glory lie in purity, truthfulness, benevolence, virtue and constancy, not in earthly vanities and riches. Should a soul succeed in rendering a signal service to the world of humanity, and in particular to the land of Persia, he will be exalted above the most exalted and will be accounted as the greatest of the great ones. This, indeed, is abounding riches! This, indeed, is abundant treasure! This, indeed, is everlasting wealth!

Among the communications you have sent are many kind expressions of sentiment, written for the occasions of Naw-Rúz and Riḍván. We reciprocate warmest greetings to each and every one of you, extending our very best wishes for a year filled with opportunities to serve your country and your compatriots. May the coming year witness, by the grace of God, the dawning of the sun of justice in your homeland, that the darkness of adversity may be dispelled and the horizon of peace and prosperity open before you and your people.

Dear friends: It is known to every person of insight that those who sow the seeds of dissension will ultimately reap the bitter fruit. Calumny and lies, employed toward dishonourable ends, will result only in the erosion of public trust. The mass of the people, observing with discernment the acts against you, will cease, in the end, to be misled by such deception and will be compelled instead to examine the true character of your beliefs and aspirations. So it is that the air now reverberates with the outcry for the protection of your civil rights, raised by fair-minded Iranians in schools and universities and throughout the various sectors of society.

With these words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá we beseech Divine assistance on your behalf:

O Divine Providence! Bestow Thine aid and vouchsafe Thine assistance. Dispel this darksome cloud and disperse this obscuring mist. Waft Thy life-giving breezes and quicken the lifeless hearts. Rain down the showers of Thy mercy and refresh this withered plant. Cause the bowers of human hearts to become the gardens of the all-glorious Paradise and the realities of human souls to become the meadows of the Concourse on high.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

