

PUBLIC

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27 March 2009

UA 84/09 Arbitrary arrests/ prisoners of conscience

IRAN **Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi (f)**] members of the Baha'i community
Farham (also known as Hadi) Masoumi (m)]

Two members of the Baha'i community, Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi and Farham Masoumi were arrested after being summoned to appear on 18 March at the Ministry of Intelligence's offices in the city of Shiraz, in Fars Province, south western Iran. Based on the information available, Amnesty International believes they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their religious beliefs or their peaceful activities on behalf of the Baha'i community.

Farham Masoumi was arrested and released a few hours later on 15 March, following a search of his house. He was detained for a second time on 18 March when he was summoned to appear at the detention facility run by the Ministry of Intelligence in Shiraz.

Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi and her husband Mr Houshmandi were away from Shiraz on 15 March when their home was raided by officers from the Ministry of Intelligence. Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi's mother was threatened and forced to hand over the house keys by officers who confiscated all the family's books, CDs, computer and other personal items, including some of their child's belongings. The officers also had an arrest warrant for Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi who was not present at the time. On 17 March, she received a telephone call in which she was summoned to appear the next day at the detention facility run by the Ministry of Intelligence in Shiraz. She was arrested when she went there on 18 March.

When Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi's husband asked officials at the detention facility about the reason for his wife's arrest, he was informed that she and Farham Masoumi were arrested because of their involvement in "illegal activities". When he contacted the local Information Office of the Ministry of Intelligence he was told: "Your wife is a Baha'i, and for now that is sufficient reason for her arrest".

Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi was amongst a group of more than 53 individuals, mostly Baha'i, involved in a programme teaching underprivileged children in the city of Shiraz. They were arrested in May 2006 even though the authorities had granted permission for their activities and later released. In August 2007, all 53 were tried by Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz. They were charged with offences relating to state security. Fourteen who attended the court sessions were told orally of the verdict against the whole group. Three were each sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "organizing illegal groups" and to an additional one year's imprisonment for "propaganda on behalf of groups that are opposed to the Islamic system". The other 50, including Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi, were sentenced to suspended prison sentences of four months for "participating in an illegal group" and a further eight months for "propaganda on behalf of groups that are opposed to the Islamic system". All those involved have appealed against their convictions and sentences (see UA 25/08, MDE 13/017/2008, 25 January 2008).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 currently 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 state would be against their religion. The Baha'i International Community, which describes itself as an international non-governmental organization with affiliates in over 180 countries and territories, together representing over 5 million members of the Bahá'í Faith, 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.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, Arabic, English or your own language:

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Haleh Houshmandi-Salehi and Farham Masoumi as they appear to be detained solely because of their beliefs or peaceful activities on behalf of the Baha'i community;
- otherwise calling for their release unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial promptly and fairly;
- urging the Iranian authorities to ensure that they are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment;
- urging the authorities to ensure that they are given immediate and regular access to their relatives and lawyers of their choice, and to any medical treatment they may require.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh (Office of the Head of the Judiciary)

Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhouri, Tehran 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: shahroudi@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In the subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Leader of the Islamic Republic

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader

Islamic Republic Street – End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info_leader@leader.ir

via website: <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter> (English)

<http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?p=letter>(Persian)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of Judiciary, Fars Province

Mr Siyavoshpour

Fars Province Judiciary

Karim Khan Zand Street

Shohada Square, Shiraz, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@farsjudiciary.ir

COPIES TO:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 6 649 5880

Email: **via website:** <http://www.president.ir/email/>

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 May 2009.