

August 1, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:  
Aaron  
Winters

847-940-0202

cell: 847-691-6744

## **House Passes Kirk Resolution Condemning Iranian Persecution of Bahá'ís**

*Largest Iranian religious minority under assault by Islamic regime*

*North American Assembly headquartered in Wilmette*

*Bahá'í Temple, Wilmette, Ill.*

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan resolution authored by Congressmen Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and Rob Andrews (D-N.J.) today condemning the persistent repression of the Bahá'í community in Iran, the nation's largest religious minority with more than 250,000 members. H.Res. 1008 also calls upon Iran to immediately release three Bahá'í youths and reject a recent draft Islamic penal code requiring the death penalty for all “apostates” (a term applied to Bahá'ís) in direct violation of Iran's commitments under the International Covenants on Human Rights.

“As the representative in Congress for the Bahá'í Temple of North America, I know the Bahá'í faith well -- a faith of tolerance and diversity of thought,” Congressman Kirk said. “But even to an oppressive Islamic dictatorship like Iran, Bahá'ís pose no danger to the regime. Nevertheless, the repression of the Bahá'ís is well documented. Government monitoring, expelling Bahá'í students from Iranian universities and public attacks are now common place. We've seen this movie before - the opening scenes of one of the most horrific episodes in human history. In 1945 we made a solemn promise of ‘never again.’ The message from America to Iran is clear: end your repression of the Bahá'í people.”

While Iranian Bahá'ís have suffered for decades, their repression has grown significantly in the past few years. In 2006, Iran's Armed Forces Command Headquarters ordered the Ministry of Information, the Revolutionary Guard, and the Police Force to identify members of the Bahá'í faith in Iran and monitor their activities.

In that same year, the largest roundup of Bahá'ís took place. The Iranian Interior Ministry ordered provincial officials to “cautiously and carefully monitor and manage” all Bahá'í social activities. The Central Security Office of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology ordered 81 Iranian universities to expel any student discovered to be a Bahá'í.

In 2007, the situation worsened. More than two thirds of the Bahá'ís enrolled in universities were expelled once identified as Bahá'ís. Police entered Bahá'í homes and businesses to collect details on family members.

Twenty-five industries were ordered to deny licenses to Bahá'ís. Employers were pressured to fire Bahá'í employees and banks were instructed to refuse loans to Bahá'í-owned businesses. Bahá'í cemeteries were destroyed.

In November 2007, three Bahá'í youths, Ms. Raha Sabet, Mr. Sasan Taqva and Ms. Haleh Roohi, were detained for educating underprivileged children. They were later sentenced to 4 years in prison.

The following month, the Iranian Parliament published a draft Islamic penal code, requiring the death penalty for all “apostates” – a term applied to Bahá'ís and any convert away from Islam.

On May 14, 2008, 7 members of Iran's national Bahá'í coordinating group were arrested, reminiscent of the mass disappearance and assumed murder of all the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran in August, 1980. The seven arrested in May are still being held without any charges or access to attorneys.

And in just the last two weeks, a number of Bahá'ís were targeted with acts of arson.

“This government-sponsored persecution must end,” Congressman Kirk said. “The world cannot be silent as Iran prepares to ethnically cleanse its Bahá'í minority.”