

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

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**Roxana Saberi and the Commission on International Religious Freedom
Call for Release of Iranian Bahá'ís Ahead of Trial**

Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) have called for the release of seven Baha'i leaders who may face trial tomorrow, July 11, 2009, in Tehran.

Ms. Saberi stated, in a letter to the Commission, "The seven Baha'is, along with at least 20 other Baha'is imprisoned across Iran, are not threats to Iran's national security but are being held because of their beliefs and peaceful activities on behalf of the Baha'i community. They have been willing to cooperate with Iran's Shiite Islamic regime, but they refuse to surrender to pressure to abandon their beliefs, knowing that the decisions they make could have far-reaching implications for the estimated 350,000 Baha'is and other religious minorities in Iran."

Saberi was imprisoned in Evin, where the seven Baha'is are currently being held, for nearly four months before she was released as a result of significant international pressure.

According to its statement, the Commission is appealing to the Iranian government to take similar action and release the Baha'is: "The charges against these imprisoned Baha'is are baseless and a pretext for the persecution and harassment of a disfavored religious minority. They should be released immediately," said USCIRF Chair Leonard Leo. "USCIRF urges the President and other leaders in the international community to speak out and call for the release of the seven Baha'i leaders, as the President did for Miss Saberi. These prisoners are in jail solely because of their religious identity, and have not been afforded any due process or direct access to legal representation."

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The seven Baha'i leaders have been detained for more than a year without access to their attorneys, including Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi. Official Iranian news reports have said the Bahá'ís will be accused of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic"—all charges that the Bahá'í International Community categorically denies. The espionage charge is punishable by death in the Islamic Republic.

For additional information, please contact the U.S. Bahá'í Office of External Affairs at (202) 833-8990, or visit <http://iran.bahai.us> to access the statements by Ms. Saberi and the Commission. These resources are also available on the Commission's website: <http://www.uscirf.gov>.

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