

## PRESS RELEASE

### IHRDC Condemns the Arrest of Leading Bahá'ís

(New Haven, May 15, 2008) – Yesterday the government of Iran arrested the entire leadership of the Bahai community in Iran in a series of dawn raids. All those detained were members of the group that coordinates the activities of the Bahá'í community in Iran in the absence of a National Spiritual Assembly. The last National Spiritual Assembly in Iran was disbanded in 1983 in the face of a fierce state-led campaign of repression which claimed many Bahá'í lives.

In the early hours of May 14, officers from the Ministry of Intelligence in Tehran raided the homes of six of the seven members of the group: Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamalu'ddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Na'imi, Mr. Sa'id Riza'i, Mr. Bihruz Tavakkuli, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm. All six were taken to the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran which has long been associated with widespread human rights abuses. The seventh member of the group, Mrs. Mahvash Sabit, has been in the custody of the Ministry of Intelligence since March 5, 2008. Mrs. Sabit is the Secretary of the group and had originally been summoned to answer questions apparently relating to the burial of an individual in the Bahá'í cemetery in Mashad.

The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center is gravely concerned for the safety of the detainees. This is not the first time the government of Iran has acted in such a manner. In 1980 all nine members of the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly in Iran were arrested by Revolutionary Guards during a meeting and detained. They were never seen again and are all presumed dead. A second National Spiritual Assembly was constituted and eight of its members were arrested and summarily executed in December 1981. A third Assembly was formed but was disbanded when the Islamic Republic criminalized Bahá'í institutions in Iran in 1983. Seven members of the third National Spiritual Assembly were hunted down and executed. Now, once again the leadership of the Bahá'í community in Iran is under threat.

The IHRDC report ***A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran*** noted a resurgence of anti-Bahá'í activity in Iran since the election of President Ahamadinejad. In November of 2005, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, instructed military agencies to identify and monitor all Bahá'ís living within their areas of responsibility. In the past two years, numerous individual Bahá'ís have been arrested and widespread attacks by vigilante groups against Bahá'ís have been tolerated by the government.

“The IHRDC is greatly concerned that these latest arrests signal the intention of the Islamic Republic of Iran to further escalate its persecution of this peaceful religious minority. The situation of the Bahá'í community is precarious, the IHRDC is calling on the international community to demand the release of these prisoners of conscience and shine a spotlight on one of the most egregious and neglected examples of religious persecution that can be found anywhere on the planet today,” said Tom Parker, Executive Director of the Center.

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Further information about the systematic persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran can be found in the IHRDC reports ***A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Baha'is of Iran*** and ***Community under Siege: The Ordeal of the Bahá'ís of Shiraz***. Both reports are currently available in English and Farsi on IHRDC's website at <http://www.iranhrdc.org>.

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