

MEDIA RELEASE

March 25, 2009

APRO shares Australia's concern over religious persecution in Iran

The Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO) shares the Australian Government's deep concern for the seven Baha'i leaders currently imprisoned in Iran.

The seven members of the "Friends in Iran", the national coordinating group for Iran's Baha'i community, have been detained since March and May 2008.

On 17 February 2009, it was announced that they were to face trial in the Revolutionary Court within a week, on charges of: spying for Israel; insulting religious sanctities; and propaganda against the Islamic republic.

Since then no hearing has been held, and no date for a trial announced. The Australian Government has stated that it is "hard to believe there is any basis to the charges or that they will receive a fair trial".

Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their conscientiously held beliefs or their peaceful activities on behalf of the Baha'i community.

APRO believes the detention of these seven individuals for almost a year, without access to their legal counsel or the laying of formal charges, is in clear breach of rights to which they are entitled under international law. They must be allowed to communicate with their lawyer and either released or allowed a fair and open trial.

Freedom of religion and belief is a right guaranteed to all people under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party.

We call on the Iranian government to respect and protect the right of all Iranians, including Baha'is and other religious minorities, to profess and practise the religion of their choice.

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Statement supported by the following APRO members

Professor Emeritus Gary Bouma, FAICD, UNESCO Chair, Inter-religious and Intercultural Relations - Asia Pacific, Monash University

Dilip Chirmuley AM, Hindu Society of South Australia

Venerable Bhante Sujato, Australian Sangha Association

The Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils

The National Council of Churches in Australia

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry

Josie Lacey OAM, The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia interfaith advisor and Women's Interfaith Network.

Kulbir Singh Malhotra, Sikh Kirtan Prachar Mission of Australia

Benjamin Chow AO

The Australian Multicultural Foundation

The Settlement Council of Australia

Australian Baha'i community

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Media comment:

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