

## **Case Narrative for the Baha'i Seven**

Eight years ago, seven innocent men and women were rounded up and thrown into Iran's infamous Evin prison. After more than a year of illegal detention, they were put on trial, accused of espionage, "propaganda against the regime" and other alleged crimes that, in fact, related solely to their religious belief and practice.

The seven Baha'is – whose names are Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm – were sadly convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

In November, that term of imprisonment was reduced to 10 years, due to the very delayed application of a new national penal code adopted in 2013, which essentially states that sentences should be served concurrently instead of consecutively.

Under the terms of the new penal code, the seven are also now eligible for conditional release. Indeed, as with their reduction in sentence, this should have happened promptly after passage of the new code. The seven must therefore, as a matter of justice and consistency with Iran's own national laws, be released immediately.

## **Profiles of the seven imprisoned Iranian Baha'i leaders**

The seven imprisoned Baha'i leaders have long served both Iranian society and the Baha'i community. They are law-abiding citizens who have used the principles of their religion to contribute to the betterment of their country. However, instead of allowing them more opportunities for such service, the Iranian authorities have put them behind bars, depriving them of their most basic rights. The story of their persecution is the story of the entire Baha'i community in Iran.

On 14 May 2008, after a coordinated raid on their homes, six of these individuals were arrested in Tehran. The seventh, Mahvash Sabet, had been arrested on 5 March 2008 while on a trip to Mashhad. The seven were subsequently held incommunicado for weeks, placed in solitary confinement for months, and spent a year behind bars without access to legal counsel.

The seven formed the entire membership of the now-disbanded group known as the "Friends" (*Yaran* in Persian) that with the full knowledge and permission of the government tended to the spiritual and social needs of the Iran Baha'i community.

They are listed here after in alphabetical order.



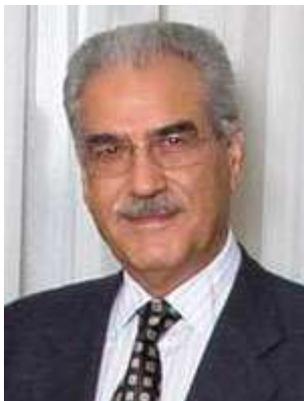
### **Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi**

Fariba Kamalabadi, 53, is a developmental psychologist and mother of three who was denied the chance to study at a public university as a youth because of her Baha'i belief. Before her current incarceration, she had been arrested twice before, and was held for periods of one and two months respectively, all due to her volunteer work for the Baha'i community.

Mrs. Kamalabadi was born in Tehran on 12 September 1962. An excellent student, she graduated from high school with honors but was nevertheless barred from attending university. Instead, in her mid-30s, she embarked on an eight-year period of informal study and ultimately received an advanced degree in developmental psychology from the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), an alternative institution established by the Baha'i community of Iran to provide higher education for its young people.

Mrs. Kamalabadi married fellow Baha'i Ruhollah Taefi in 1982. They have three children, the youngest of whom was only 13 when she was arrested in 2008.

Mrs. Kamalabadi's experience with persecution extends beyond her immediate situation. Her father was fired from his job as physician in the government health service in the 1980s because he was a Baha'i, and he was later imprisoned and tortured.



### **Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani**

Jamaloddin Khanjani, 82, is a once-successful factory owner who lost his business after the 1979 Islamic revolution because of his belief in the Baha'i Faith – and who then spent most of the 1980s on the run under the threat of death from Iranian authorities.

Born 27 July 1933 in the city of Sangsar, Mr. Khanjani grew up on a dairy farm in Semnan province and never obtained more than a high school education. Yet his dynamic personality soon led to a successful career in industrial production – and as a Baha’i leader.

In his professional career, he has worked as an employee of the Pepsi Cola Company in Iran, where he was a purchasing supervisor. He later left Pepsi Cola and started a charcoal production business. Later he established the first automated brick factory in Iran, ultimately employing several hundred people.

In the early 1980s, he was forced to shut down that factory and abandon it, putting most of his employees out of work, because of the persecution he faced as a Baha’i. The factory was later confiscated by the government.

In his career of voluntary service to his religious community, Mr. Khanjani was at various points a member of the local spiritual assembly of Isfahan, a regional level Auxiliary Board member, an appointed position which serves principally to inspire, encourage, and promote learning among Baha’is. In the early 1980s, he was elected to the national governing council of the Baha’is of Iran – a group known as the “National Spiritual Assembly.” Several years prior to his election, the entire membership of the Assembly had been abducted and never heard from again. That was in 1980. Their successors were arrested and executed in 1981. Mr. Khanjani was thus a member of the so-called “third” National Spiritual Assembly, which later saw four of its nine members executed by the government in 1984.

In the 1990s, Mr. Khanjani was able to establish a mechanized farm on properties owned by his family. Nevertheless, authorities placed many restrictions on him, making it difficult to do business. These restrictions extended to his children and relatives, and included refusing loans, closing their places of business, limiting their business dealings, and banning travel outside the country.

Mr. Khanjani married Ms. Ashraf Sobhani in the mid-1950s. They have four children. His wife passed away in March 2011 while he was in prison. Authorities refused to furlough Mr. Khanjani even to attend her funeral.

Mr. Khanjani was arrested and imprisoned at least three times before his current incarceration. After years on the run, he was arrested and imprisoned for two months in the late 1980s. During this period of detention, he was intensely questioned. During those interrogations, however, he was able to make considerable headway in convincing authorities of the non-threatening nature of the Baha’i Faith and he, along with many others, were subsequently released.



### **Mr. Afif Naeimi**

Afif Naeimi, 54, is an industrialist who was unable to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor because as a Baha'i he was denied access to a university education. Instead, he diverted his attention to business, one of the few avenues of work open to Baha'is, taking over his father-in-law's blanket and textile factory.

Mr. Naeimi was born on 6 September 1961 in Yazd. His father died when he was three and he was raised in part by his uncles. While still in elementary school, he was sent to live with relatives in Jordan and, although he started with no knowledge of Arabic, he soon rose to the top of his class.

He has long been active in volunteer Baha'i service. He has taught Baha'i children's classes, conducted classes for adults, taught at the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education, and been a member of the Auxiliary Board, an appointed position which serves principally to inspire, encourage, and promote learning among Baha'is.

He married Ms. Shohreh Khallokhi in the early 1980s. They have two sons.



### **Mr. Saeid Rezaie**

Saeid Rezaie, 58, is an agricultural engineer who had run a successful farming equipment business in Fars Province for more than 20 years. He is also known for his extensive scholarship on Baha'i topics, and is the author of several books.

Born in Abadan on 27 September 1957, Mr. Rezaie spent his childhood in Shiraz, where he completed high school with distinction. He then obtained a degree in agricultural engineering from Pahlavi University in Shiraz, attending with the help of a scholarship funded from outside the country.

In 1981, he married Ms. Shaheen Rowhanian. They have three children, two daughters and a son.

Mr. Rezaie has actively served the Baha'i community since he was a young man. He taught Baha'i children's classes for many years, and served the Baha'i Education and Baha'i Life Institutes. He was also a member of the National Education Institute.

A scholar and an author, he has served as an academic adviser to Baha'i students.

During the early 1980s, when persecution of Baha'is was particularly intense and widespread, Mr. Rezaie moved to northern Iran and worked as a farming manager for a time. Later he moved to Kerman and worked as a carpenter and at other odd jobs in part because of the difficulties Baha'is faced finding formal employment or operating businesses.

In 1985, he opened an agricultural equipment company with a Baha'i friend in Fars Province. That company prospered and won wide respect among farmers in the region.

He has experienced various forms of persecution for his Baha'i belief, including an arrest and detention in 2006 that led to 40 days in solitary confinement.



### **Mrs. Mahvash Sabet**

Mahvash Sabet, 63, is a teacher and school principal who was dismissed from public education for being a Baha'i. For the 15 years prior to her arrest, she had been director of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, which provides alternative higher education for Baha'i youth. She also served as secretary to the Friends in Iran, before becoming a member of the group.

Born Mahvash Shahriyari on 4 February 1953 in Ardestan, Mrs. Sabet moved to Tehran when she was in the fifth grade. In university, she studied psychology, obtaining a bachelor's degree.

She began her professional career as a teacher and also worked as a principal at several schools. In her professional role, she also collaborated with the National Literacy Committee of Iran. After the Islamic revolution, however, like thousands of other Iranian

Baha'i educators, she was fired from her job and blocked from working in public education.

It was after this that she became director of the BIHE, where she also has taught psychology and management.

She married Siyvash Sabet on 21 May 1973. They have a son and a daughter.

While the other members of the Friends were arrested at their homes in Tehran on 14 May 2008, Mrs. Sabet was arrested in Mashhad on 5 March 2008. Although she resides in Tehran, she had been summoned to Mashhad by the Ministry of Intelligence, ostensibly on the grounds that she was required to answer questions related to the burial of an individual in the Baha'i cemetery in that city.



### **Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli**

Behrouz Tavakkoli, 64, is a former social worker who lost his government job in the early 1980s because of his Baha'i belief. Prior to his current imprisonment, he has also experienced intermittent detainment and harassment and, in 2005, he was jailed for four months without charge, spending most of the time in solitary confinement.

Born 1 June 1951 in Mashhad, Mr. Tavakkoli studied psychology in university and then completed two years of service in the army, where he was a lieutenant. He later took additional training and then specialized in the care of the physically and mentally handicapped, working in a government position until his firing in 1981 or 1982.

Mr. Tavakkoli married Ms. Tahereh Fakhri Tuski at the age of 23. They have two sons.

Mr. Tavakkoli was elected to the local Baha'i governing council in Mashhad in the late 1960s or early 1970s while a student at the university there, and he later served on another local Baha'i council in Sari before such institutions were banned in the early 1980s. He also served on various youth committees, and, later, during the early 1980s he was appointed to the Auxiliary Board, an appointed position which serves principally to inspire, encourage, and promote learning among Baha'is. He was appointed to the Friends group in the late 1980s.

To support himself and his family after he was fired from his government position, Mr. Tavakkoli established a small millwork carpentry shop in the city of Gonbad. There he also established a series of classes in Baha'i studies for adults and young people.

He has been periodically detained by the authorities. Among the worst of these incidents was in 2005 when he was held incommunicado for 10 days by intelligence agents, along with fellow Friends' member Fariba Kamalabadi. He was then held for four months and during that confinement developed serious kidney and orthotic problems.



### **Mr. Vahid Tizfahm**

Vahid Tizfahm, 42, is an optometrist and owner of an optical shop in Tabriz, where he lived until early 2008, when he moved to Tehran.

He was born 16 May 1973 in the city of Urumiyyih. He spent his childhood and youth there and, after receiving his high school diploma in mathematics, he went to Tabriz at the age of 18 to study to become an optician. He later also studied sociology at the Advanced Baha'i Studies Institute (ABSI).

At the age of 23, Mr. Tizfahm married Furuzandeh Nikumanesh. They have a young son, who was in the third grade when Mr. Tizfahm was arrested in 2008.

Since his youth, Mr. Tizfahm has served the Baha'i community in a variety of capacities. At one time he was a member of the Baha'i National Youth Committee. Later, he was appointed to the Auxiliary Board, an appointed position which serves principally to inspire, encourage, and promote learning among Baha'is. He has also taught local Baha'i children's classes.