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## **IRAN: Wave of support in the EU for persecuted Baha'is**

Foreign Minister of Luxembourg writes to Iranian counterpart in wave of support for Iran's persecuted Baha'is

Baha'is International Community (30.07.2020)

– <http://www.bic.org/brussels> – The Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn, has written to Iran's Foreign Minister, Muhammad Javad Zarif, condemning the recent escalation of the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in the country. The letter is part of a new wave of support for Iran's Baha'is by Members of the European Parliament (EP) as well as numerous parliamentarians and prominent figures in Germany, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Finland and Ireland.

In the letter sent to Mr. Zarif, Mr. Jean Asselborn has expressed his concern regarding the situation of the Baha'is in Iran. He has followed this with a

public statement asserting that the reopening of proceedings against “members of the Baha’i community in recent weeks” and the “incarceration of members of the community” during the COVID-19 pandemic were “particularly worrying”.

Since the beginning of 2020 and despite the ongoing health crisis, the Iranian authorities have increased their religiously-motivated prosecution of the Baha’is, targeting over 100 individuals in Bushehr, Fars, Isfahan, Kerman, South Khorasan, Tehran, and Yazd provinces. Moreover, despite international calls to release prisoners of conscience due to the global pandemic, some Baha’is still remain in prison.

At the European Union level, the Chair of the European Parliament’s Delegation for Relations with Iran, Cornelia Ernst, has issued a statement of support, stating that the “intimidation and repression levelled against religious minorities, in particular the Baha’i community, must...end.”

The European Parliament’s Vice President, Heidi Hautala, together with other EP members, has signed a joint statement calling on the Iranian authorities to “cease the baseless accusations against Baha’is, to acquit them of all charges and to let them freely practice their faith.”

On the national level, a group of over 30 German parliamentarians, human rights defenders, health experts and non-governmental organizations have appealed to the Iranian government in a letter addressed to President Hassan Rouhani to drop the charges against Iran’s Baha’is in the proceedings and to release all remaining prisoners.

The Dutch government has also put the situation of the Baha’i community in Iran on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Committee for September.

In Ireland, more than 70 politicians and health experts have signed a similar statement, writing that “[a]s we in Ireland begin to be released from lockdown, the Iranian authorities are locking up dozens of Baha’is.” The letter has further asked the Iranian government to “end the state-sponsored dehumanisation and persecution of their Baha’i citizens” and to “allow Baha’is their basic human rights”.

Parliamentarians in the UK and Norway have also called for an end to the persecution of the Baha’is in Iran.

“These strong expressions of support by European officials at the highest levels demonstrate that although the Iranian

government has tried, time and time again and city after city, to destroy the Baha'i community as a viable entity," said Rachel Bayani, Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the European Union in Brussels. "These discriminatory policies and actions do not go unnoticed and are condemned the world over".

Outside of Europe, just last month, a group of 21 senior members of parliament and senators in Canada has made an "urgent demand" to the Iranian government to halt the recent escalation of the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran. In the United States, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom has expressed concern about the persecution of the Baha'is and various members of congress called for the release of the Baha'is from prison. A joint letter signed by 19 civil society organizations and addressed to the US Secretary of State has expressed concern regarding the rise in persecution against the Baha'is. This week, too, more than 250 Australian health practitioners have signed an open letter expressing their concern about the human rights pressures faced by the Baha'i community in Iran.

The Baha'is in Iran have been systematically persecuted since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. They are barred from numerous businesses and professions and employment in the public sector.

They are denied the right to study in universities, are routinely arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned, their properties are confiscated, their cemeteries desecrated, and their private livelihoods are often disrupted or blocked—all because of their beliefs. This persecution has been widely documented and condemned by UN bodies and the international community for four decades.

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