



Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom

Statement on Iran

As representatives of the international community, we stand together in condemning the systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom taking place in Iran and call on authorities to ensure religious freedom for all. Many members of Iranian religious minorities – including Baha’is, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Sunni and Sufi Muslims – face discrimination, harassment, and unjust imprisonment because of their beliefs.

The Iranian regime continues its crackdown on Gonabadi Sufis. Hundreds remain unjustly detained, with several deaths reported at the hands of Iran’s brutal security forces. In June, Iran executed by hanging a Sufi bus driver following a trial described by international monitors as “grossly unfair”, while it continues to hold the group’s religious leader, Dr. Noorali Tabandeh, under house arrest, denying the 91-year old man much needed medical care. Baha’is also face particularly severe ill-treatment. As with many other minority communities, Iranian authorities reportedly harass, arrest, and mistreat Baha’is on account of their faith, and in May the Baha’i International Community reported an uptick in arbitrary arrests and raids across the country. One Baha’i leader, Afif Naeimi, jailed because of his religious affiliation, continues to serve a 10-year prison sentence handed down in 2008 despite his declining health. Iranian authorities also routinely employ anti-Baha’i rhetoric, close Baha’i businesses, and deny Baha’is access to education.

The Government of Iran continues to execute dissidents, political reformers, and peaceful protesters on charges brought because of their peaceful religious beliefs or activities. Blasphemy, apostasy from Islam, and efforts to proselytize Muslims are punishable by death, contrary to Iran’s international human rights obligations. Authorities monitor Christian religious practices closely to enforce a prohibition on proselytizing, which continued to result in the jailing of pastors and members of house churches. Shia Muslim religious leaders who do not support government policies also face intimidation and arrest. There are reports that Sunni Arabs are routinely harassed and tortured because of their religious beliefs, and even executed for crimes such as blasphemy that could not be justified as “most serious crimes” under Iran’s international human rights obligations. The religious books and teachings of these communities are largely banned throughout the country.

Countries that respect and ensure religious freedom and other human rights are more secure, stable, and peaceful than those that do not. We strongly urge the Government of Iran to cease its violations of religious freedom and ensure that all individuals – regardless of their beliefs – are treated equally and can live out their lives and exercise their faith in peace and security.

Co-Signatories: Canada, Djibouti, Kosovo, UAE, United States of America