



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Iran: Baha'i Detainees

SPEECH

Monday, 25 May 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Georganas, Steve, MP

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Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (8.07 pm)—I rise today to speak in support of this motion and I do so because it is such an important motion and because seven Iranian Baha'i leaders have been jailed in Iran for a year. Firstly, there were no formal charges for eight months. After eight months they were charged with trumped-up charges of espionage, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic republic. The detainees have not been given any access to legal representation and have not been subject to due legal process. They are facing charges that could attract the death penalty.

The Australian government is deeply concerned about the situation of the seven members—five men and two women—of the Baha'i community. The Australian government is concerned that these charges constitute official discrimination in Iran against members of the Baha'i faith. On 17 April the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith, conveyed the Australian government's serious concerns directly to the Iranian foreign minister. Over the past year the Australian government has regularly raised its concerns about the seven Baha'i detainees with the Iranian authorities and will continue to do so. At the very least, Iran should ensure that any trial is fair, transparent and meets international standards.

The government has also raised the issue at relevant international meetings, including the June session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. Australia also co-sponsored a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran at the 63rd UN General Assembly in 2008, which expressed the international community's strong concern about the current situation of the Baha'is in Iran.

Others who have spoken out this year in condemnation of the actions of the Iranian authorities against the Baha'is include the European Union and the governments of Great Britain and the United States, as well as many parliamentarians in Brazil, Canada and Germany. Australia is home to people from a diversity of countries and faiths, where mutual respect and tolerance are the tradition. The right of citizens to maintain their own religious and cultural beliefs, to freedom of religion and to the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression and association must be respected in all countries in accordance with international human rights conventions. By refusing these people of the Baha'i faith access to a lawyer, the Iranian government has denied them the human rights to which they are entitled under international law.

The Baha'i faith was founded in Iran in 1844 and now has more than five million followers in 236 countries and territories. The Baha'is come from nearly every national ethnic background. The Baha'i faith has been present in Australia since 1920. I am very proud that they are represented in my electorate of Hindmarsh. And Laird Varzaly does a very good job in representing the Baha'i community in the electorate of Hindmarsh. The importance of peace and the responsibility of each of us to work towards its attainment and continuation is demonstrated more by the Baha'i community than by what some other communities have demonstrated over a millennium.

I support this motion. I call on Iran to respect the right to freedom of religion and the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression and association in accordance with international human rights conventions. I call on the government of Iran to release the seven Baha'i detainees without a single minute of delay. I also call upon the government of Iran to allow, at the very least, for a fair and open trial that meets international standards of justice.