

February 13, 2012 | by USCIRF

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WHO: USCIRF Commissioners and the relatives of imprisoned Iranian Baha'is, including six Baha'i educators who remain in prison after being convicted and sentenced last year to 4 and 5 year prison terms.

In May 2011, in at least four different cities, Iranian authorities raided more than 30 homes of Baha'is involved with the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), the community's 24 year-old effort to educate its youth, whom the government bars from undergraduate or graduate studies. Approximately 18 Baha'is were arrested and a number of books, documents, computers, and other materials associated with the BIHE were seized. Several Baha'is were released after days or weeks in detention, but in October, seven were tried and found guilty of membership in a deviant sect with the goal of taking action against the security of the country.

The seven were sentenced to either 4- or 5-year prison terms. In January 2012, Vahid Mahmoudi, one of the seven educators imprisoned, was released after his sentence was suspended. The other six educators remain in prison. In September 2011, prominent human rights defender Abdolfattah Soltani was arrested for preparing a defense for the Baha'i educators. He remains in prison. He was arrested and detained for several months in 2005 and 2009 under similar circumstances.

USCIRF has recommended that Iran be designated a "country of particular concern" (CPC)

for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily upon the religion of the accused. Since 1999, the State Department has designated Iran a CPC.

WHEN: Thursday, February 16, 2012 at 8:30 am

WHERE: US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 800 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 790, Washington D.C., 20008

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