

The following article appeared in Voice of America on September 22, 2012 at <http://editorials.voa.gov/content/no-new-day-for-irans-bahai-leaders--146313755/1493128.html>

The spring festival of Nowruz, celebrating rebirth and new beginnings, is now over. But there was no “new day” for the seven Baha’i leaders who languish in prison in Iran. Instead, April 1, 2012 marked the 10,000th day the two women and five men have collectively spent behind bars.

Arrested in 2008, the seven Bahai’s who saw to the spiritual and social needs of their religious community, were falsely convicted of espionage and propaganda against the Islamic Republic in August 2010, after summary judicial proceedings. They are currently serving a prison sentence of twenty years.

Although all religious minorities are subject to persecution in Iran, Baha’is are regarded as heretics by the Iranian regime, and are particularly targeted and repressed. The most recent report by the **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** notes that since 1979, Iranian authorities have killed more than 200 Baha’i leaders and dismissed more than 10,000 from government and university jobs.

Baha’is are banned from higher education and the community faces severe economic pressure. The Commission reports that in recent years, Baha’is have faced increasingly harsh treatment, including a surge in the numbers of arrests and detentions and violent attacks on private homes and personal property.

At a press briefing, State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland noted and deplored the now over 10,000 combined days of incarceration the Iranian regime has visited on the seven Baha’i leaders because of their religious beliefs:

“We condemn Iran’s ongoing persecution and arrests of Baha’i community members, and we continue to be deeply concerned by the harassment and intimidation of all religious minorities in Iran, including its significant Sunni and Sufi populations, Christians, like Pastor Yousef Nardakhani [sentenced to death for apostasy], the Zoroastrians and others.”

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