

Harsh slandering campaign against Nobel Peace Prize winner Ms. Shirin Ebadi and her family

Paris – Geneva, August 8, 2008 - The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), express their utmost concern over the increasing intimidation against Ms. Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize and Secretary General of the Defenders of Human Rights Center (DHRC), since she has decided to defend in court seven members of the Baha'i minority^[1].

Ms. **Shirin Ebadi** accepted to defend these persons, demonstrating once more her commitment to defend human rights and fundamental freedoms, as the question of the Baha'is is particularly sensitive, not to say taboo, in Iran. Since then, defamation and slandering have been intensifying against her and her family in the official media.

On August 8, 2008, a long article was published on the website of the official Iranian Republic News Agency (IRNA), titled “Ebadi bogged down with the Baha'is” and signed by Mr. Alireza Heydari. Human rights are considered as a means of pressure to impose western norms to other cultures. The article also insists on the fact that the President of the Nobel Committee congratulated Ms. Ebadi, at the moment of her award, for her struggle in favour of human rights and of the defence of the Baha'i, “which explains why Ms. Ebadi was complimented by President Georges W. Bush”.

Ms. Ebadi is also criticised for appearing without headscarf abroad, for defending homosexuals and for criticising Islamic punishments. It is further mentioned that the activities of Ms. Shirin Ebadi and the DHRC were welcomed by the “damned sect of Baha'is in Israel in October 2007”, and that Ms. Shirin Ebadi defends “CIA agents”.

In addition, the article makes a reference to Dr. Payam Akhavan, the research supervisor of Ms. Ebadi's daughter Nargess Tavassolian, accused of being a Baha'i and of being responsible for Ms. Tavassolian's conversion to the “damned sect of Baha'is”. Both are also accused of being members of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, “financed by the United States”.

This extremely worrying statement follows a series of other slandering articles. On August 4, 2008, a fundamentalist newspaper titled "Kayhan" published an article on its front page in which it asserted that “the Center of the Baha'i sect, which has its headquarters in Israel, sent a letter showing gratefulness to Ms. Shirin Ebadi because she defends the Baha'is”.

On August 6, 2008, on the website of IRNA, one could read that “the daughter of Shirin Ebadi converted to the Baha'i religion the past year, and this is the reason why Shirin Ebadi lately got involved in the defence of the members of this sect”.

The Observatory is deeply concerned with the fact that such declarations follow death threats addressed to her on April 5, 2008^[2], and fears that these latest developments might be perceived as an incitement to further harassment against her and her family. In light of the targeted killings of prominent Iranian intellectuals at the end of the 1990's, this could even be interpreted as a licence to kill.

On August 7, 2008, the Observatory called upon the European Union and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders to guarantee in all circumstances Ms. Ebadi's integrity and capacity to carry out her activities, and called the Acting United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for a strong reaction of support.

The Observatory will continue to closely follow this situation, which sadly confirms the alarming wave of repression against human rights defenders in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Observatory calls upon the Iranian authorities to immediately conform with the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, especially Pt. 16, which provides that “Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics”, Pt. 17, which reads that “Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities” and Pt. 18, which provides that “Lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions”.

The Observatory further calls upon the Iranian authorities to conform in all circumstances with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly on December 9, 1998.

For further information, please contact:

OMCT: Eric Sottas, + 41 22 809 49 39

FIDH: Karine Appy, + 33 1 43 55 14 12

[1] These persons are arbitrarily detained since March 2008, solely on the basis of their religious beliefs, and are yet to be informed of the charges pending against them. At the beginning of August, the Iranian media reported that the Deputy Prosecutor of the Islamic Republic would have declared that the Baha'is arrested would have confessed their membership to an illegal organisation linked to Israel and other countries. FIDH addressed their case to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion as well as to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

[2] See Observatory urgent appeal IRN 004 / 0408 / OBS 056.

L'OMCT a son siège à Genève, en Suisse. Elle coordonne le réseau SOS-Torture composé de 282 organisations régionales et internationales dans 93 pays sur cinq continents.

Contact : omct@omct.org