

THE HONOURABLE MOBINA JAFFER, Q.C.
SENATOR – BRITISH COLUMBIA



L'HONORABLE MOBINA JAFFER, C.R.
SÉNATRICE – COLOMBIE-BRITANNIQUE

SENATE | SÉNAT
CANADA

October 16, 2020

The Honourable François-Phillipe Champagne, PC, MP
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Re: Iran and Coronavirus

Dear Minister,

We are writing to urge you to make a public intervention on behalf of the Government of Canada to call for the immediate release of Baha'is and all other prisoners of conscience detained in Iran, owing to the life-threatening health risks posed by coronavirus.

Iran has notoriously overcrowded prisons with conditions that have allowed for multiple outbreaks of coronavirus. Reports by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran and Amnesty International found that prisons are not disinfected and basic hygiene products, like soap, are unavailable to prisoners. Prisoners who contract the virus are denied proper medical attention and those displaying symptoms are rarely tested and separated from others.

Although Iran reportedly released some 85,000 prisoners on furlough in March to mitigate the spread of coronavirus, it has continued to hold human rights defenders like prominent lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh.

Furthermore, Iran has continued its campaign of persecution against its own Baha'i minority. The Canadian family of Hooshmand Talebi and Mojdeh Eghterafi has raised the alarm at their arbitrary arrest and detention on August 23rd. They have been held in unsanitary prisons for almost two months with no charges. Farhad Fahandej, a Baha'i serving a 10-year sentence recently contracted the coronavirus in Rajai Shahr Prison. Baha'is are wrongfully detained, solely because of their beliefs, and no prisoner should face conditions that may be akin to a death sentence.

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We are asking you to add Canada's voice to that of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, who called on authorities in Tehran to release all prisoners of conscience on account of the spread of coronavirus in Iranian prisons. Her call followed the release of a UN report that stated: "Shortages of water, hygiene products and disinfectant, insufficient protective equipment and testing kits as well as a lack of isolation spaces and inadequate medical care have led to the spread of the virus among detainees and have reportedly resulted in a number of deaths."

Canada's statement on this urgent health crisis and humanitarian issue will send a strong signal to Iran and here at home of the expectation that the government will stand up for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mobina Jaffer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Honourable Mobina S.B. Jaffer, Q.C.
Senator for British Columbia with on behalf of:
The Honourable Kim Pate, Senator
The Honourable Marilou McPhedran, Senator