

Five years unjustly imprisoned

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The daily news about Iran is dominated by the stand-off on its nuclear programme and the presidential elections.

[Lees column in het Nedertlands - Vijf jaar onterecht gevangen](#)



For banks, Iran is relevant first and foremost because of the [financial sanctions](#) that apply. Western media discuss whether a presidential candidate who is 'conservative' will be able to reform the strictly authoritarian system and bring more prosperity. There are good reasons to take Iran's long and proud history into account when dealing with the Islamic Republic, as [a former Omani military argued in the Financial Times](#).

But there is even more reason to devote attention to an ugly aspect of Iran's rulers: their [complete disregard for freedoms](#), notably religious freedom, and particularly when its largest religious minority is concerned. Iran is the cradle of the [Bahá'í faith](#).

This is an independent world religion whose founder preached the equality of men and women and the even worth of all faiths. Bahá'ís can be found across the globe. Their religion of tolerance and hope attracts followers among all nations. Their joint leadership by men and women is democratically chosen from among the faithful, with a supreme governing body in [Haifa](#) (Israel). The more than 300,000 [Bahá'ís in Iran face systematic persecution](#).

Holy places are destroyed and the livelihood of faithful undermined. Students are not allowed to do examinations because they need to fill in their religion on the exam forms, where there is place for three monotheistic religions only, not for the fourth monotheistic religion that the Bahá'ís follow. In Iran, Bahá'ís are accused of assisting 'the Zionist entity' (Israel) because their supreme governing body is based near the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) – the name means 'Glory of God' –, who had been banned to the then farthest and darkest place in the Ottoman Empire, which nowadays happens to be in Israel, a State that was established in 1948.

In 2008, seven Iranian Bahá'í leaders were arrested. The seven have been held under inhuman and degrading circumstances ever since without a proper trial. In the past month, a world-wide call for their release has been issued by politicians, religious leaders and others, from [South Africa](#) to Austria and many other countries, notably including Islamic leaders. It is time the Western governments raise their voice even louder for the release of the seven, and all other prisoners of conscience in Iran, and for freedom of worship and expression in the Islamic republic.

[These people](#) deserve freedom now: Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm.

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