

AV Baha'is to pray for imprisoned in Iran

Valley Press

PALMDALE — Baha'is of Antelope Valley will gather at 3:15 p.m. Sunday to pray for Baha'is held prisoner in Iran.

The prayer service is to express their concern and support for the seven members of their religion who have been in prison in Iran for nearly a year and who are now to stand trial on false charges of spying for Israel and insulting Islam.

The prayer service will be held at the Palmdale Youth Library, 38510 Sierra Highway. The public is invited to attend.

The Iranian Student News Agency, or

ISNA, announced on Feb. 11 that charges had been laid against the seven imprisoned members of the national-level committee that coordinates the activities of the Iranian Baha'i community.

The report quoted deputy Tehran prosecutor Hassan Haddad as having said "the case will be sent to the revolutionary court next week" and that these Baha'is are accused of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic republic."

International reaction to the charges has come swiftly as governments, parliamentary leaders and human rights orga-

nizations expressed strong criticism of any such trial.

The U.S. House of Representatives on Feb. 14 introduced a resolution, H.R. 175, condemning the charges and calling on the government of Iran to release the Baha'i leaders, echoing a similar statement released by U.S. State Department on Feb. 13.

The Baha'is deny categorically the charges, and no evidence against them has been brought to light. Their legal counsel, Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, has not been permitted to see them and has been harassed and intimidated by the Iranian government.

The prosecution of the leaders is just one step in a 30-year-long systematic campaign orchestrated by the government to eliminate the Baha'i community as a viable entity in Iran, the birthplace of the Baha'i Faith.

At this time, some 30 other Baha'is are imprisoned in Iran solely on account of their religion. Another 80 or more Baha'is have been required to post deeds of property and business licenses as collateral for bail. They have likewise been falsely charged and are awaiting trial.

The Baha'i faith is the youngest of the world's independent monotheistic religions and one of the fastest-growing, with a sig-

nificant presence throughout the United States. Baha'is view the world's many religions as part of a single, progressive process through which God reveals His will to humanity.

Major Baha'i tenets include the oneness of humanity, equality of men and women, eradication of prejudice, harmony of science and religion, universal education and world peace.

Updates and background on the situation of the Baha'is in Iran are posted at iran.bahai.us.

To learn more about the Baha'i Faith in America, check www.bahai.us.