



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Iran: Persecution of Baha'i Faith

SPEECH

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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<p>Date Wednesday, 10 March 2010 Page 63 Questioner Speaker Symon, Mike, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr SYMON (Deakin) (7.34 pm)—Tonight I wish to highlight two separate issues in overseas countries that have been brought to me by groups of constituents in Deakin. Firstly, I would like to comment on the situation of the seven leaders of the Baha'i community who were detained in Iran. The persecution of the Baha'i in Iran has been a subject of comment in this House for at least three decades now, and unfortunately the situation does not appear to be improving. If anything, it is getting worse.

Representatives of the local Maroondah and Whitehorse Baha'i communities introduced themselves to me in early 2008 and at that meeting they explained that the Baha'i Faith is a worldwide religion with more than five million members around the globe and comprises people from all backgrounds and walks of life. At the heart of their region is a call to deal justly with people and a commitment to the causes of peace. The Baha'i Faith supports the idea of the unity of the human race, the promotion of equality between women and men and the need for economic justice and access to education for all.

The current situation in Iran was brought to my attention by several members of the Baha'i community who live in my electorate. They had written to me in the past and made personal representations a few weeks ago highlighting their grave fears for seven Baha'i leaders detained in Tehran, asking that I support their calls for a fair and transparent trial. The seven people are Mrs Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr Afif Naeimi, Mr Saeid Rezaie, Mrs Mahvash Sabet, Mr Behrouz Tavakkoli and Mr Vahid Tizfahm.

The first trial of these seven imprisoned Baha'i leaders was held on 12 January this year in Tehran and it was here that they first heard the charges that were being levelled against them, charges such as espionage, propaganda activities against the Islamic order, the establishment of an illegal administration, cooperation with Israel, sending secret documents outside the country, acting against the security of the country and the corruption of the earth. All of the accused have strenuously denied the charges.

These Baha'i leaders, arrested nearly two years ago, had their second court appearance a few weeks ago. Again, the sessions were closed and no family members were permitted to attend. I know our government has registered its strong concerns with

Iran about the treatment of the Baha'i community, and I would like to add my voice to those concerned at the treatment of the seven arrested. I think it is right that I should call on Iran to follow the UN treaty, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a treaty to which it is a signatory. Furthermore, I call on Iran to act humanely, and to either release the detained Baha'i or hold a fair and transparent trial with full access to legal representation and in accord with the rule of law.

The second issue that I wish to highlight is the issue of Fairtrade certification, which was raised with me just last week by two of my constituents, Catherine Williamson and Ceryss Lim. I briefly spoke about child slavery in the cocoa industry in this place in 2008, as have many others. Fairtrade certification and labelling of products is a very effective way of ensuring that Australian consumers are able to choose products that are produced ethically and in a sustainable manner. Products such as coffee, tea, chocolate, cotton and even sports balls are available with Fairtrade certification.

The Fairtrade label allows consumers to identify products that meet agreed environmental, labour and developmental standards. This certification ensures that producers in poor countries can get a fair deal for their product. Very briefly, this consists of: a fair price which covers the cost of production and guarantees a sustainable livelihood; long-term contracts which provide security of income; and a premium on top of the negotiated fair price which is used to fund local community projects, especially in the areas of health and education. The supply chain is also traceable for compliance and auditing purposes.

It is now possible to buy Fairtrade certified instant coffee in Australia. Although not always easy to find at the supermarket, it is certainly worth asking for. Cadbury dairy milk chocolate is produced in my electorate of Deakin and this is a very popular product. It is also changing its source this year so that it becomes Fairtrade certified. I commend Cadbury on their decision to switch to Fairtrade cocoa for the majority of their chocolate production in Ringwood and I hope that this move brings Australia's other chocolate producers on board with the use of Fairtrade certified cocoa. I also commend Catherine Williamson and Ceryss Lim for raising this very important issue with me.