

Concern Regarding the Trial of Thirteen Iranian Jews - 2000

In late March 1999, thirteen Iranian Jews living in the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan were arrested and imprisoned without an official explanation. News reports indicated that they were accused of spying and would be tried in a Revolutionary Court. In June 1999, Amnesty International expressed concern that they were at risk of unfair trial and if convicted, could face the death penalty. In Iran espionage is punishable by death. The thirteen individuals include rabbis, as well as religious and community leaders, and range in age from seventeen to forty.

On April 13, 2000, the trial of the imprisoned Iranian Jews began in the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz. After approximately ninety minutes the judge adjourned the trial; hearings resumed on May 1, 2000. Although they were originally accused of spying for Israel and the United States, the accusation of spying for the United States has been recently dropped. Nonetheless, the specific charges and evidence against them have not been formally announced. Although the defendants have defense attorneys and several were brought out to speak to reporters, the trial is closed; no members of their families, members of the Jewish community, media, representatives of foreign governments or human rights activists have been permitted to enter the courtroom.

As of May 10, 2000, six of the accused allegedly confessed in court; one denied all charges. The confessions show many discrepancies and their veracity is doubtful. When the last hearing is concluded and the judge makes a decision, an appeals process goes into effect.

Women of Reform Judaism, with ongoing concern not only for Jews but also for international human and legal rights of minorities worldwide and an ongoing commitment to justice, calls on national and international leaders to urge Iranian authorities to insure an open, fair and just trial for the thirteen Iranian Jews.