

13 IRANIAN JEWS
A PUBLIC STATEMENT--APRIL 12, 2000

I am [Rev. Paul Rutgers] the Executive Presbyter Emeritus of the Presbytery of Chicago, the regional governing body of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and now the Executive Director of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago. The Council is composed of approximately 40 of the chief leaders of the Chicago area's Anglican, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic communions and institutions

Before today, I had not heard their names:

Yakov, Broukhim, Farzam, Haim, Kashi, Nemati
13 unfamiliar names in all, and others unnamed today.

And when I received word of this gathering of solidarity and asked if I might speak, my first thought was that I knew little of this matter.

But sadly, I really did know it, all too well – a far too common occurrence.

Gross injustice, men and women suffering for their faith, denied due process, often innocent people caught in the maelstrom of conflict for which they bare no responsibility, people put at risk of their lives, and too often because -- now we name it -- because they were or are Jews.

And knowing that, I know that we ALL share – and need to be aware – of the fate of those 13 men, as in some broader, almost mystical way we share the fate of women and men everywhere who are persecuted, falsely imprisoned and unjustly denied life's basic rights and freedoms.

The hostage and the prisoner occupy a special place in Scripture. They are to be remembered, they are to be cared for, they are to be in our prayers, and -- most importantly -- they are to be set free. And God knows their names.

I know that the members of the Council of Religious Leaders join me in the hope that out of such efforts as today there will come news of the release of the Iranian captives and the day of the Lord's favor shining on them and all those everywhere who suffer unjustly, and often for righteousness' sake.