

Bahá'í International Community

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The Bahá'ís of Iran – A Persecuted Community

(August 2023)

In the midst of increasingly violent and repressive actions against their own citizens, the Iranian authorities have continued their relentless, multidimensional and state-sponsored persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran, affecting every one of its members across generations and within every phase of life, even in death.

While the specific tactics employed by the Iranian authorities over more than 40 years have sometimes changed—including as a result of external pressure—there is no doubt that their aim of destroying the Bahá'í community as a viable entity in Iran continues in full force. Through various means, new and old, the authorities maintain focus on this goal by striving to exclude Bahá'ís from the public sphere and to prevent them from expressing their beliefs, impoverishing them economically, undermining their intellectual advancement, and erasing traces of their history and culture, as well as spreading disinformation about them and inciting the public so as to create an environment of hatred against them.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, early adherents of the Bahá'í Faith faced violent opposition from the ruling establishment in Iran, which responded to its growth with fierce opposition, inciting violence against followers of the new religion. This persecution has continued intermittently since then to varying degrees of severity, and Bahá'ís were often used as scapegoats for other problems within Iran's borders.

Since 1979, Bahá'ís have been subjected to a new wave of persecution, this time systematic and, clearly, state sponsored. The campaign initially targeted many Bahá'ís of influence and those who served on Bahá'í administrative institutions at the local and national levels. In August 1980, for example, all nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly—a democratically elected national council that forms part of the Bahá'í administrative structure in all countries—together with two individuals serving on other Bahá'í institutions, were abducted by a group of armed men from a meeting in a private home and taken to an unknown location. These individuals disappeared without a trace, presumably the victims of extrajudicial killings, although the government authorities have never admitted to this crime. In the years that immediately followed, subsequent members elected to this council, as well as scores of other Bahá'ís, were executed by the government without due process of law. On 29 August 1983, the Iranian Attorney General announced a legal ban on all Bahá'í

administrative and community activities in Iran, making membership of Bahá'í administrative institutions a criminal offense.¹

In response to this announcement, in an open letter dated 3 September 1983 addressed to Iranian authorities, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran detailed the abuses faced by the Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic and appealed to the Iranian people and the Islamic government to restore their rights as Iranian citizens and as human beings. This letter was the final act of the National Spiritual Assembly before it voluntarily dissolved itself and the rest of the Bahá'í administrative structures within the country as a demonstration of goodwill toward the government.

Since then, over 200 Iranian Bahá'ís have been executed or murdered, thousands have been arrested, detained and interrogated, and tens of thousands more have been deprived of jobs, pensions, and opportunities for higher education. The Bahá'í community's holy places, cemeteries, and properties have been confiscated, vandalized, or destroyed, and many Bahá'ís have had their homes and other property seized or damaged. In fact, hundreds of distinct incidents have taken place since 31 July 2022. These include detentions, interrogations, and other incidents such as beatings, workplace searches, home raids, confiscation and destruction of property, denial of education, economic pressures, summons to court, and cemetery desecrations.

The official policy of the Iranian government against their Bahá'í citizens is summarized in a government memorandum obtained in 1993 by the United Nations Special Representative on the Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran.² Written in 1991 by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved and signed by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, this document, entitled "The Bahá'í Question", sets forth specific guidelines for dealing with the Bahá'ís. It states that "[t]he government's dealings with [Bahá'ís] must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked." It outlines a series of measures to systematically restrict and repress the educational, economic, and cultural life of Iranian Bahá'ís. This memorandum continues to remain in effect today.

The above endeavors to oppress the Bahá'ís are facilitated by the fact that, within Iranian society, people's religious beliefs are more socially discernible. Furthermore, in many official registration

¹ This ban was announced in a statement by the Attorney General, published in the newspaper *Kayhan* on 29 August 1983; a translated excerpt from statement reads as follows: "Now, if a Baha'i himself performs his religious acts in accordance with his own beliefs, such a man will not be bothered by us, provided he does not invite others to Baha'ism, does not teach, does not form assemblies, does not give news to others, and has nothing to do with the administration. Not only do we not execute such people, we do not even imprison them, and they can work within society. If, however, they decide to work within their administration, this is a criminal act and is forbidden, the reason being that such administration is considered to be hostile and conspiratorial and such people are conspirators."

² The text of the 1991 government memorandum can be accessed through the following links:

Persian original:

<<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/ran/1991%20Bahai%20Question%20Memo%20PER.pdf>>; English

translation: <<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/ran/1991%20Bahai%20Question%20Memo%20ENG.pdf>>.

forms—such as those for enrolling in school and applying for university or business licenses—individuals are required to declare their religion. Bahá'ís answer these questions truthfully, yet this very honesty of the Bahá'ís is used as an instrument with which to oppress and punish the community. Not only this, but authorities also monitor and surveil the Bahá'ís to collect information for the systematic implementation of the state's program of persecution.

In recent months, Bahá'ís in Iran, in addition to being affected by the economic, health and social crisis in the country, have faced intensified patterns of persecution, including a higher number of arrests, imprisonment and prison sentences, as well as the imprisonment of older members of the Bahá'í community or those with health issues without providing medical care. Additionally, the number of pending court cases around the country has sharply increased, thereby subjecting hundreds of Bahá'ís and tens of thousands of their relatives to intense psychological pressure and ill-treatment as Bahá'ís have been forced to endure cycles of arrests, pay heavy bails, and spend months or even years waiting to be called to court or to be imprisoned at any time. Furthermore, hundreds of Bahá'í-owned shops remain sealed by the authorities, depriving thousands from receiving viable incomes. Bahá'ís are barred from employment in the entire public sector and numerous other professions and university studies remain inaccessible. Moreover, incidents of hate propaganda in State sponsored media and confiscation of properties continue unabated.

The Bahá'í International Community is deeply distressed that, in the midst of widespread suffering of Iranians, intensifying pressure has been imposed on Bahá'í burials, a long-standing form of persecution against the Bahá'í community in Iran. In the most recent case, an agent of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence, Masoud Momeni, has been forcibly burying deceased Bahá'ís in the Khavaran Cemetery,³ a mass gravesite where the remains of political prisoners who were executed in the 1980s are buried—attempting to erase the historical identity of both the political prisoners as well as the Bahá'í community. Mr. Momeni has been carrying out the forced burials without the knowledge of the families of the deceased and in violation of Bahá'í burial practices. He has threatened that unless they pay exorbitant fees for the release of the remains of the deceased from the morgue and fees for burials within plots already owned and previously managed by the Bahá'í community, he will continue the forced burials in the mass gravesite.

In the last year, the Bahá'í community of Iran has witnessed an increase in the number of arbitrary arrests and detentions throughout the country. Many Bahá'ís are currently in prison or subject to ankle-band monitoring. Those currently imprisoned include Mrs. Mahvash Sabet and Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, who had previously served 10 years in prison from 2008 to 2018 when they were unjustly charged with “managing the unlawful Bahá'í administration” and imprisoned with five other Bahá'ís because of their work as part of an informal leadership group known as the Yaran.⁴ Mrs.

³ The Bahá'í cemetery is a piece of allotted land adjacent to Khavaran cemetery.

⁴ The Yaran or “the Friends” was an ad hoc group consisting of law-abiding, morally upright and well-respected individuals tending to the social and spiritual needs of the Bahá'í community in Iran, created out of necessity due to the ban on Bahá'í administration and with the full knowledge and approval of the government. In 2008, all seven

Sabet and Mrs. Kamalabadi were again unjustly arrested on 31 July 2022 and subsequently sentenced to another 10 years in prison on 11 December 2022. They are currently being held in the notorious Evin Prison, and at their advanced age, are suffering from several serious and chronic health issues, as well as sustaining new injuries as a result of harsh interrogations by the Revolutionary Guards.

A third former member of the Yaran, Mr. Afif Naimi, who was also arrested a year ago and is also experiencing health issues, has recently received a seven-year jail term. Recently, a fourth former member of the Yaran, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, a 90-year-old Bahá'í in failing health, was arrested on 13 August 2023. Of particular concern is for the health of Mr. Khanjani as he has been diagnosed with cancer of the pancreas, a heart condition, high blood pressure, prostate issues and other health issues which require urgent treatment. Remaining in prison could have been tantamount to a death sentence for him. On 2 September 2023, Mr. Khanjani was released on payment of an excessively high bail, however the legal proceedings against him will continue to be a source of stress on this aged and ailing man.

Nine other Bahá'ís were also arrested on 13 August 2023 in a new wave of repression targeting the Bahá'ís that has seen over 180 incidents of persecution against the community, including over 60 arrests and imprisonments, in recent weeks. They are the owners and employees of a number of pharmacy businesses, which were sealed and shut down by the authorities, who have accused them of disrupting pharmaceutical supplies. In the face of growing solidarity between the Bahá'ís and the general population the government is trying to drive a wedge between Iranian citizens by calling these legitimate Bahá'í-owned trading businesses “hoarders”.

These new arrests have taken the number of Bahá'ís arrested or imprisoned in recent weeks to almost 60 incidents, as stated above. During the same period, over 26 Bahá'ís also received sentences for jail terms that could begin at any time. Further, 18 Bahá'ís have faced interrogations, fifty-nine Bahá'í-owned businesses were reported to have been sealed by the authorities, and the homes of nine others were raided and searched.

It is safe to say that no Bahá'í in Iran remains untouched by this persecution, as the authorities strive to heighten a state of constant insecurity and uncertainty amongst the Bahá'ís across every aspect of life. This represents the latest phase in a calculated plan by the authorities to eliminate the entire Bahá'í community of Iran through its gradual strangulation.

To date, Iran has been reviewed three times under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR); in February 2010, in October 2014, and more recently in November 2019. In 2010, Iran accepted a number of recommendations that resulted through this process, while also claiming that some others had either already been implemented or were in the process of implementation. In 2014, of the 10 recommendations that dealt specifically with the situation of the Bahá'ís, only two of them were partially accepted by the Iranian government. However, the Bahá'í International Community, in a

members of the Yaran had been arrested and each sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment, of which they served 10 years and were finally released in 2018.

recent analysis of the implementation of these recommendations accepted by Iran in 2010 and 2014, confirmed that, in fact, not a single one has yet been implemented.⁵ In effect, by failing to abide by the commitments and assurances it made to the international community, Iran has gravely undermined the entire UPR process. In the most recent third cycle of UPR, Iran also supported, or partially supported, a number of recommendations, to which it has again failed to adhere. The sections that follow provide an overview of the current situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran in relation to the third cycle UPR and contain a sample of the latest reported and confirmed cases of persecution.

I. Legislative Impact – Penal Code revisions of 499 and 500 bis

The most concerning legal development that discriminates against the Bahá'ís is the recently passed legislation aimed at criminalizing various sects not explicitly recognised under Iran's Constitution. These amendments, namely Article 499 bis and Article 500 bis, which are now part of the Iranian Penal Code, have broad and disturbing implications, and provide the authorities with further legal justification for their systematic targeting of the Bahá'í community in Iran.⁶

Article 499 bis

Article 499 bis of the Penal Code now states that anyone who “insults divine religions or branches of Islam, as stipulated by the Constitution” may be prosecuted. The punishment for this charge carries a sentence of up to two years. Article 499 bis lacks any precision or clarity that would enable individuals to know if they are committing a crime under these provisions, which was perhaps the intention of the amendment. The amendment gives Iranian authorities free rein to apply this article to any situation they see fit and increases their ability to target dissenting opinions or beliefs. It also gives them wide discretion to implement more severe punishments. Furthermore, the amendment intentionally limits the scope of religions by including only those that have been recognised in the Constitution, which, as mentioned, excludes the Bahá'ís. As Bahá'ís are regularly labeled by the government as a “perverse sect”, “morally corrupt”, and “deviant”, this article severely increases the discrimination set out in the Constitution.

Article 500 bis

Article 500 bis now states that a person may be prosecuted if perceived to engage in “any deviant educational or propaganda activity that contradicts or interferes with the sacred religion of Islam in any ways such as making false or delusional claims in religious and Islamic domains”. Given that

⁵ See Islamic Republic of Iran: Non-implementation of accepted and partially-accepted UPR recommendations - Concerning human rights violations against Iranian Bahá'ís (January 2018), <https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/iran/iran_upr_mid-term_report_january_2018.pdf>.

See also Bahá'í International Community's publication *Unfulfilled Promises: Iran's failure to act after its 2010 Universal Periodic Review*, <https://www.bic.org/publications/unfulfilled-promises#yv1u85hTQ0ISXzhR_99>.

⁶ Articles referred to as “recurrent” articles—often marked as “bis”—are provisions that are subsequently added to a piece of legislation without replacing the provision carrying the same number.

many persecuted Bahá'ís who are charged with proselytizing the Bahá'í faith, and face charges such as “propaganda against the State” and “membership of an illegal group”, this article provides the Iranian government with additional tools to ramp up their persecution. Article 500 bis also increases punishment by one degree for any “connection of groups subject to this article with [entities] outside the country for the purpose of receiving support or organizational guidance”. Given that the Bahá'í Holy Land is located in Israel and that Bahá'ís are already accused of spying for Israel, this amendment is likely to further intensify the persecution faced by Bahá'ís.

These changes to the law further erode freedom of religion or belief in Iran and, in effect, outlaw any expression of Bahá'í belief. The danger, particularly with Article 500 bis, is most obviously related to Bahá'ís practicing their Faith, particularly teaching children, and other elements of Bahá'í educational endeavors. However, it may also include the mere declaration of one's religion as Bahá'í, even just when this declaration is in response to questions in particular administrative and civil processes. The vague nature of the law—leaving terms like “false” and “deviant” undefined, and not elaborating on what is meant by verbs like “insult”, “interfere”, or “contradict”—grants extensive interpretive discretion to the prosecutorial and judicial authorities and has proven to provide further legal justification for arbitrary arrest, detention, and judgment. One commentator stated that this law effectively offers a green light for Iran's law enforcement to crack down with additional tools on already persecuted individuals and groups for expressing their beliefs.

Indeed, a range of lawyers and experts have asserted that the targeting of Bahá'ís is the main purpose of the legislation and highlighted how their persecution will now enjoy the veneer of legality. Others have drawn attention to its wider impact on civil society and freedom of expression, though they have acknowledged the higher burden that will fall on minorities such as the Bahá'ís. In either scenario, it is clear that the adoption of this law leaves the Bahá'ís vulnerable to and unprotected from further persecution.

II. Home Raids, Unlawful Arrests, Arbitrary Detentions, and Violations of Due Process

In violation of third cycle UPR recommendations #26.1, 26.46, 26.145, 26.170, 26.172, 26.176, 26.178, and 26.180.

Bahá'ís are not free to practice their religion without harassment. Arbitrary detentions and interrogations are continually carried out against adherents of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the country, and the charges they are accused of reflect the absence of freedom of religion or belief for Bahá'ís in Iran. Currently, more than a thousand Bahá'ís are awaiting their legal hearings on spurious charges or waiting to be summoned and placed into overcrowded prisons, their state of limbo presenting another form of psychological torture.

Those who are arrested suffer ill-treatment at the hands of governmental officials. As the number of arrests and imprisonments continue, there are still grave concerns owing to the spread of the

coronavirus (COVID-19) through the prison system and in the country. For those who are arrested they are kept in solitary confinement for long periods and are often detained for weeks or months before being released on bail. The bail demands are exorbitantly high, requiring families to hand over deeds to their properties or business licenses. Others are serving their unjust sentences under conditions which are now further compounded by the risk of being unnecessarily exposed to the virus in Iran's overcrowded prison system.

In nearly all cases of those detained, their homes and/or workplaces are searched and items confiscated, such as personal belongings, particularly books, photographs, computers, copying machines, and other supplies, as well as items related to the Bahá'í Faith.

The situation has not changed since Ebrahim Raisi became president, nor has the government adhered to the due process and equal citizens' rights detailed in Iran's own Constitution as well as its obligations under international commitments.

In Addition to Articles 499 and 500 of the Iranian penal code, which outlaw any expression of Bahá'í belief, article 498⁷ has been included to further bolster their previous charges of national security against the Bahá'í community. The Human Rights Committee has stipulated that limitations to manifest one's religion or belief should only be made on the grounds provided in Article 18.3 of the ICCPR, which does not include national security.⁸ Additionally, restrictions may not be applied in a discriminatory manner and the limitations on the freedom to manifest a religion or belief for the purpose of protecting morals "must be based on principles not deriving exclusively from a single tradition".⁹ Therefore, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the restriction to manifest a religion or belief on the basis of national security and discriminatorily targeting religious minorities is incompatible with Article 18 of the ICCPR.

Nevertheless, in the last year there was a significant surge of persecution with mass raids and arrests of Bahá'ís across Iran under the guise of national security. In fact, the upsurge of arrests have proven to be widespread and systematic in nature where intelligence agents raided a number of homes throughout half the provinces of Iran and in cities such as Tehran, Karaj, Mashhad, Shiraz, Sari, Gorgan, Gonbad, and Qazvin. After searching the homes and confiscating the usual items (phones, laptops, Bahá'í books and works, etc.), some Bahá'ís were arrested and prosecuted under the newly passed legislation.

⁷ Articles 498 ("establishing a group that aims to disrupt national security"), 499 ("membership in a group that aims to disrupt national security"), and 500 ("spreading propaganda against the system"), Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2013), Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, <https://iranhrdc.org/islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-ofiran-book-five/>

⁸ CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fb22.html>

⁹ CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fb22.html>

Below are some detailed examples of those individuals who were targeted and charged with national security crimes, propaganda against the regime and in a few cases the use of 499 bis and 500 bis.

ALBORZ PROVINCE

- In August and September 2022, the homes of a large number of Bahá'ís were searched, especially in Alborz Province, and a number of them were arrested and summoned at that time. It was learned on Friday, 10 February 2023, that the Karaj Revolutionary Court, in a jointly heard case, sentenced 13 Bahá'ís living in Alborz Province to more than 36 years of imprisonment under tazir law¹⁰, monetary fines, bans on residing in Alborz Province, bans on leaving the country, bans on educational and cultural activities, deprivation of social rights and other human rights violations.

Those sentenced were: **Mr. Afif Naimi, Ms. Mahsa Tirgar, Mr. Kamyar Habibi, Mrs. Rameleh Tirgrenchad, Ms. Sabin Adeyani Yazdani, Ms. Elham Shareghi Arani, Ms. Nakisa Sadeghi, Ms. Sadaf Sheikhzadeh, Ms. Shahrzad Mastouri, Ms. Negin Rezaie and Mr. Saman Ostovar.** According to the verdict **Mr. Kamyar Habibi, Mrs. Rameleh Tirgrenchad, Ms. Sabin Adeyani Yazdani, Ms. Elham Shareghi Arani, Ms. Nakisa Sadeghi, Ms. Sadaf Sheikhzadeh, Ms. Negin Rezaie, Ms. Shahrzad Mastouri, Ms. Mahsa Tirgar, Mr. Saman Ostovar and Mr. Afif Naimi** were sentenced to a total of more than 36 years of imprisonment, fines, and other punishments. They were charged with:

1. Insulting and promotion of educational activities against Islamic Sharia;
2. Participating in the formation of groups and managing individuals with intent to disturb national security by promoting “Bahá'ism” in children, and youth;
3. Educational and promotional activities contrary to Islamic Sharia through education and promotion based on Bahá'í teachings in kindergartens;
4. Propaganda against Islamic Sharia, through holding coaching courses,

Mr. Kamyar Habibi has been sentenced to five years of imprisonment and a fine of 50 million tomans, followed by five years of deprivation of social rights, a ban of leaving the country, prohibition of residence in Alborz province, and a two-year prohibition from educational and cultural activities.

Mrs. Rameleh Tirgrenchad, the wife of Mr. Habibi, was sentenced to three years in prison under tazir law, a monetary fine of 30 million tomans, followed by five years of deprivation of social rights, a ban on leaving the country, prohibition of residence in Alborz province, and a two-year prohibition from educational and cultural activities.

¹⁰ *Tazir law* (discretionary punishment): Punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.

Ms. Mahsa Tirgar, Ms. Shahrzad Mastouri, Ms. Sadaf Sheikhzadeh, Ms. Negin Rezaie and Ms. Nakisa Sadeghi, were each sentenced to 25 months in prison under tazir law, a monetary fine, five years of deprivation of social rights, a two-year prohibition of residence in Alborz province, a two-year ban on leaving the country and a two-year prohibition from educational and cultural activities.

Ms. Elham Shareghi Arani and Sabin Yazdani were each sentenced to three years in prison under tazir law, five years deprivation of social rights, two-year ban on residence in Alborz province, two years ban on leaving the country and a two-year prohibition from educational and cultural activities.

Mr. Saman Ostovar to five years imprisonment, and 50 million tomans monetary fine.

This court also sentenced **Mr. Afif Naimi**, one of the former members of the Yaran (an informal leadership group) – who was released in 2018, after serving a decade in prison – to a further seven years in prison and a 5 billion tomans monetary fine.

Mr. Afif Naimi, Mr. Kamyar Habibi and Mr. Saman Ostovar were charged and sentenced pursuant to the recently passed Article 500 bis of the Islamic Penal Code as well as Article 498 of the Penal Code.

In the same verdict **Mrs. Bita Momtazi, Ms. Sahba Adyani Yazdi**, were each sentenced to 25 months in prison under tazir law, a monetary fine, five years of deprivation of social rights, a two-year prohibition of residence in Alborz Province, a two-year ban on leaving the country and a two-year prohibition from educational and cultural activities.

The details of the verdict against **Sabin Adeyani Yazdani** are still unknown.

- On 24 September 2022, **Mr. Payam Vali**, a Bahá'í in Karaj was arrested and taken to Ghezel Hesar Prison in Karaj. On 24 September 2022, eight agents of the Ministry of Intelligence went to Mr. Vali's workplace in Karaj where he was beaten and arrested. The security agents then searched his home, during which Mr. Vali's son, Adib, was also beaten. The agents confiscated a number of personal belongings, including Adib's mobile phone and laptop.

It was then learned on 27 January 2023 that the indictment of **Mr. Payam Vali** was issued by Investigator Mr. Sasan Ali Ramji of the Investigation Branch 7 of the Karaj Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office, and his case was referred to the Revolutionary Court. According to the indictment Mr. Vali was accused of "propaganda against the regime through communication with hostile foreign media".

On 26 February 2023, Mr. Payam Vali, was sentenced by Branch 1 of Alborz Province Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Seyyed Mousa Asef Al-Hoseini, to a total of 16 years of imprisonment including the days of detention, a two year ban on leaving the country

and two years of exile to Yasuj City. According to this ruling, Mr. Vali was sentenced to ten years in prison for the charge of “collaboration with hostile governments”, to five years in prison for the charge of “inciting people to war and killing each other”, to one year in prison including the days of detention, for the charge of “propaganda against the regime”, and as additional punishments of a two year ban on leaving the country after serving the prison terms and two years of mandatory residence in Yasuj along with reporting himself weekly to the Revolutionary Court.

GOLESTAN PROVINCE:

- On 21 January 2023, **Mr. Pouya Amri** and **Mrs. Nafisa Saadatyar**, a Bahá’í couple, were arrested in Gorgan. They were charged with “activities against the security of the regime” and “connection with hostile governments”. Since their arrest they have been detained in the detention center of the Intelligence Organization of Gorgan. Mr. Pouya Amri was released a few days later, but Mrs. Saadatyar was detained for more than two weeks and released on 12 February 2023. The prosecutor of the case would not allow delivery of personal goods during their detention. Mr. Amiri is a well-known musician in Gorgan, who has taught and performed throughout Iran for the last 17 years.
- On 5 May 2023, **Ms. Azadeh Yaghini (Hedayati)**, a resident of Gonbad, Golestan Province, was arrested and interrogated. She was informed of her charges as being “propaganda in favor of groups or organizations opposed to the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran” and “deviant educational and propagation activities”. After a full interrogation by a judge, she was ultimately released following payment of a fine of 20 million tomans.

TEHRAN PROVINCE:

- On 4 March 2023, **Mrs. Samira Ebrahimi** (Yazdani) and **Mr. Arsalan Yazdani**, appeared at Branch 2 of the Evin Prosecutor’s Office and defended themselves against the charges raised in the case with the case investigator, Mr. Hajimoradi. Their lawyer was not permitted to attend their defense hearing. The three charges brought against them were, “membership in hostile groups towards the regime”, “engaging in propaganda against the regime”, and “engaging in deviant propaganda and educational activity that contradicts and disturbs the holy Sharia of Islam with regard to media activities”. These accusations made against them in the final defense meeting were different from the accusations that were previously communicated to them, disadvantaging them in their defense.

Ms. Ebrahimi and Mr. Yazdani separately denied the accusations in their written defense in the presence of the investigator. At the end of the meeting, they asked the investigator to

return the equipment confiscated from their homes and workplaces to which Mr. Hajimoradi responded that the return of the equipment is subject to the opinion of the court judge.

Mr. Arsalan Yazdani was previously arrested on 1 September 2021, and after 46 days of detention he was released on bail of 1 billion tomans on 16 October 2021. Mrs. Samira Ebrahimi was arrested on Monday, 10 January 2022, and after 24 hours, she was released after posting bail of 800 million tomans.

FARS PROVINCE

- On 21 November 2022, security agents, without prior official notification, arrested **Ms. Nasim Kashani**, a Bahá'í living in Shiraz, at her home, in order to serve her six-month sentence under tazir law. She was transferred to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz. Earlier, she had been sentenced by Branch 1 of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court headed by Judge Seyyed Mahmoud Sadati to two years in prison and banned from leaving the country, with the cancellation of her passport for two years and daily reporting to the provincial intelligence department for two years. This sentence was finally reduced to six months imprisonment on appeal. The accusations against Ms. Kashani are “propaganda activities against the Islamic regime and in favor of groups in opposition to the regime”, “membership in the mentioned groups”, “propaganda activities” and “connection with governments and world arrogance hostile to the Islamic Republic of Iran by implementing their plans under the guise of Bahá'í organization in Iran”. It was learned on Sunday, 29 January 2023, that after serving half of her six-month sentence, Ms. Nasim Kashaninejad was conditionally discharged from Adelabad Prison in Shiraz.

ISFAHAN PROVINCE

- On 6 May 2023, the court hearing of **Mr. Enayatollah Naimi** was held in Isfahan. Mr. Naimi attended the hearing without a lawyer and requested a date change for the hearing owing to his not having a lawyer. The court disallowed his request, and he was required to represent himself. The baseless charges against him are “propagation activities, and, forming a group or society for the purpose of disturbing national security by forming the Yaran network, and having connection with Bahá'í administration in Israel.” The hearing was held for three hours during which he was subjected to a stream of insults and derision from the judge. Finally, Mr. Naimi was handcuffed and taken directly to prison to serve a previously announced five-year sentence.

After this trial Mr. Naimi was sentenced to a further ten years in prison for the baseless charges of "propaganda against the regime" and an additional five years imprisonment, a fine

of 50 million tomans and 15 years of social deprivation for “forming a group (new Yaran) with the aim of disrupting national security and having connection with the Bahá’í administration in Israel” under the charge of, pursuant to Articles 498 and 500 (bis) of the Islamic Penal Code. This latest sentence is subject to appeal. This new decision takes his total imprisonment sentence to 20 years. This term effectively constitutes a life sentence for Mr. Naimi as he suffers from multiple health problems requiring ongoing medication and regular medical attention.

Mr. Naimi was arrested by security agents on 28 September 2022, and after a search of his home, workplace and orchard on the outskirts of Isfahan, the agents seized some of his personal belongings, including his mobile phone and laptop. He was released from Isfahan prison sometime later after posting bail until the conclusion of these proceedings.

KERMAN PROVINCE

- On 25 October 2022, security agents of the Ministry of Information of Kerman Province entered the home of **Mr. Sobhan Meibodi** and **Mrs. Shomeys Nourani**, a Bahá’í couple, with a search warrant on the charge of “propaganda against the regime” and “disturbance of public opinion”. The security agents searched their home and confiscated some of their personal belongings, including mobile phones, tablets, laptops, closed circuit camera, and some Bahá’í books. The security agents claimed that the confiscated items would be returned to them two hours later, a promise that has not been fulfilled.

In February 2023, Mr. Sobhan Meibodi and Mrs. Shomeys Nourani, were summoned to appear at Branch 2 of the Magistrate’s office and informed that they faced four charges, 1) dissemination of lies through the internet, 2) disturbing public opinion, 3) membership in a group with the purpose of overthrowing the regime, 4) connection with foreign hostile governments. They were charged and released following the posting of bail.

YAZD PROVINCE

- It was learned on 1 March 2023 that **Ms. Fariba Ashtari**, who was serving her sentence in Yazd prison, was given early release from prison before the end of her sentence. She was initially sentenced on 20 June 2020, by Branch 1 of Yazd Revolutionary Court, headed by court advisor Mohammed Reza Dashtipour, to five years in prison for the charge of “membership in groups opposed to the regime of Islamic Republic of Iran”, and one year in prison for the charge of “propaganda against the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in support of anti-regime groups”. In total, she was sentenced to six years in prison under tazir law. On 7 September 2022, Ms. Ashtari was arrested by agents from her home without receiving a summons and was taken to Yazd Prison to serve her sentence.

KHORASAN RAZAVI PROVINCE:

- On 18 July 2023, the hearing of the charges against **Mrs. Sanaz Tafazzoli**, was held in Branch 1 of the Revolution Court of Mashhad, presided over by Judge Mansouri. Mrs. Tafazzoli defended herself against the accusations of “gathering and conspiring to commit a crime against the security of the country”, “propaganda against the regime” and “membership in the group with the intention of disrupting the security of the country”. Mrs. Tafazzoli has been denied access to her own selected lawyer, and the court session was held with the presence of a court appointed lawyer. Nevertheless, the court allowed both her and her lawyer to speak. This was, after eight months of temporary detention in Vakilabad Prison, which was repeatedly extended by Mr. Soleimani, the investigator of Branch 903 of the Mashhad Revolutionary Court. It has been extended every month since April. As mentioned above Mrs. Tafazzoli was denied the right to access a lawyer of her choice. Despite bail being set at 10 billion tomans and the Tafazzoli family being prepared to post such a huge bail, her release on bail has so far been rejected by the investigator.

Mrs. Sanaz Tafazzoli was arrested by officers of the Mashhad Intelligence Department while driving on the street on 22 November 2022 and was taken to the Intelligence Department office. After 38 days of solitary confinement in the Mashhad Intelligence Department she was transferred to Vakilabad Prison and has been detained in this prison since then. During this period, she has been brought to the court only once, in February, to present her final defense. According to the law, temporary detention is ordered by the investigator to facilitate the preliminary investigation process, and according to the Chapter 8 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the final defense is taken after the preliminary investigation is over. It is not clear why the detention order for Mrs. Tafazzoli has been extended after the end of the investigation. The investigator of the case has not given any explanation to her family regarding the successive extensions of her detention order.

The following arrests are connected to the takeover of the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran and burial issues faced by Bahá'ís, the details of which can be found in the next section:

- In the early morning of 1 May 2023, agents of the Ministry of Intelligence raided the home of **Mr. Mansour Amini** (one of the Bahá'ís assisting families with processes and procedures at the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran) and arrested him. Mr. Amini's house was searched and personal items including books, photographs, and the mobile phones of both Mr. Amini and his wife were confiscated. At the time of writing there is no information concerning the charges against him or his whereabouts.

- On 1 May 2023, agents of the Ministry of Intelligence raided the home of **Mr. Ataollah Zafar** (one of the Bahá'ís assisting families with processes and procedures at the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran) and arrested him. At the time of writing there is no information concerning the charges against him or his location. In 2022, Mr. Zafar was imprisoned for three months in Evin Prison resulting from his services to the Bahá'í community at the cemetery.
- On 1 May 2023, agents of the Ministry of Intelligence raided the home of **Mr. Valiollah Ghedamian** (one of the Bahá'ís assisting families with processes and procedures at the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran) and arrested him. At the time of writing there is no information concerning the charges against him or his location.
- On 1 May 2023, agents of the Ministry of Intelligence raided the home of **Mrs. Shadi Shahidzadeh**. Security officers arrested her after searching her house and confiscating books and electronic devices. She is being held in Evin Prison and is now separated from her four-year-old daughter. Mrs. Shahidzadeh is the granddaughter of Mrs. Ezzat Zarghami, who had recently passed away and whose body was being held at the Tehran Bahá'í cemetery awaiting burial. In early April, immediately after the passing of her grandmother, Mrs. Shahidzadeh was following-up on her grandmother's affairs with authorities at the Governor's office, the City Council, and Behesht-e Zahra Organization¹¹ to secure the right to bury her grandmother consistent with Bahá'í burial practices at the Tehran Bahá'í cemetery. At the time of writing there is no information concerning the charges against Mrs. Shahidzadeh.

Mrs. Shadi Shahidzadeh, Mr. Mansour Amini, Mr. Valiollah Ghedamian, and Mr. Ataollah Zafar, despite more than a month since their arrest, remain in the detention center of the Ministry of Intelligence known as Ward 209 of Evin Prison. On Wednesday, 31 May 2023, the court hearing of the charges against Mrs. Shahidzadeh, Mr. Amini, Mr. Ghedamian and Mr. Zafar was held in Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Iman Afshari. Interrogators and security officers were also present in the court. Family members of the detainees were excluded from the courtroom. They have been charged with “membership in illegal Bahá'í organizations”. The court refused to accept bail for their release. Despite the approval of the judge presiding over the case to transfer them to the general prison ward, the interrogators have not yet arranged this transfer and the two most elderly gentlemen, Mr. Zafar and Mr. Amini, are suffering due to the difficult conditions in Ward 209 detention center.

¹¹The Muslim Cemetery Organization in Tehran.

In addition to Mrs. Shadi Shahidzadeh's charge of "membership in the illegal Bahá'í organisation", we see similar charges in the case of Mrs. Armaghan Zabihi Moghadam.

- On 24 September at 2:30 a.m., security agents raided the home of a Bahá'í couple, **Mr. Arash Farahani** and **Mrs. Armaghan Zabihi Moghadam** and after searching their home, arrested them. They were held in the detention center of the Ministry of Intelligence known as Ward 209 of Evin Prison without due process. Mrs. Zabihi Moghadam did not have a proper place to sleep and was required to sleep on the cold floor at night. These sleeping conditions caused her back pain to worsen significantly. She was also deprived of going to the prison yard for fresh air, one of the most basic rights of detainees, even inside this detention center. Additionally, detainees in Ward 209 of Evin Prison are deprived of water and healthy food.

Ms. Zabihi Moghadam's file was eventually transferred to Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Afshari. On 20 December 2022, the judge rejected the bail request and even told Ms. Zabihi Moghadam, "The Laws do not include the situation of Bahá'ís." On 27 December 2022, Mrs. Zabihi Moghadam was transferred from Ward 209 of Evin to Qarchak Varamin Prison.

Mr. Zamani was beaten by security agents in Ward 241 of Evin Prison and after enduring several days in solitary confinement, he was transferred to Ward 350 of Evin Prison and then to the Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary. During their confinement the couple were deprived of the right to contact or meet each other except for 10 minutes on the court day. Their lawyer was also not allowed to access their files to prepare a defense. Initially, in the arraignment, it was said that Mrs. Zabihi Moghadam was not arrested because of her belief in the Bahá'í Faith, but in the court session, one of the charges against her was "membership in the illegal Bahá'í sect".

Below are some other examples of recent home raids, arrests and detentions, and sentencing of Bahá'ís in Iran merely because of their religious beliefs.

- As mentioned above, on 11 December 2022, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet (Shahriari) and Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi (Taefi), former members of the Yaran (Friends) were each sentenced to 10 years in prison by Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, presided over by the Judge Iman Afshari. Their court hearing took place on 21 November 2022. The verdict cited Article 498 of the Islamic Penal Code, which carries a prison term of two to ten years. They were accused of meeting with Bahá'ís in different cities of Iran, participating in Bahá'í religious ceremonies and communicating with Bahá'ís abroad via WhatsApp. Both Mrs. Kamalabadi and Mrs. Sabet were previously imprisoned for 10 years, from 2008 to 2018, along with other former members of the Yaran on similar charges. Both Mrs. Sabet and Mrs. Kamalabadi were arrested on 31 July 2022 by security forces at their homes in Tehran and were transferred to

the detention center of the Ministry of Intelligence known as Ward 209 of Evin Prison.

- It was learned on Monday, 6 March 2023 that 24 female prisoners are being kept in jail for political and security related offenses (prisoners of conscience) in the women's ward of Evin Prison. During their imprisonment, these prisoners have frequently faced issues such as long-term confinement in solitary cells, frequent interrogations, lack of access to medical attention, and deprivation of contact with family. For those in shared cells there is often a failure to observe the principle of separation of crimes and many are kept in cells with offenders indicted for other criminal offenses. Among those prisoners who have spent most of their detention in solitary cells are **Mrs. Mahvash Sabet** and **Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi**. A significant number of prisoners in this ward are reported to be mothers.

Mrs. Sabet is 71 years old and is physically frail, suffering from medical conditions including severe asthma and osteoporosis as well as severe joint pain caused both by her osteoporosis as well as from the effects of injuries sustained during her current and previous imprisonments. Her physical condition was seriously impaired as a result of the emotional and physical impact of the early part of her detention in August and September 2022 during which she suffered 42 days of solitary confinement, interspersed with intense, prolonged and abusive interrogations, whilst at the same time suffering from severe COVID-19 symptoms. During the period of her interrogations, she was forced to sleep on a cold concrete floor in solitary confinement with just a few thin blankets and a small carpet; these conditions also exacerbated her joint pain.

III. Denial of Cultural Rights, including Desecration and Destruction of Bahá'í Cemeteries and Violations of Burial Rights

In violation of third cycle UPR recommendations #26.296, 26.297, 26.298, 26.307, and 26.309.

The desecration and destruction of Bahá'í cemeteries began methodically during post-revolutionary Iran as a means to strip the Bahá'ís of their cultural identity and to erase any ties to the community as a whole. Although, in some cities, Bahá'ís have been given access to land for a modest cemetery, such initiatives on the part of the authorities are not acts of compassion; rather, it is a reflection of their deep-seated prejudice towards the Bahá'ís. Most alarming are their rationales that Bahá'ís should not be buried in Muslim cemeteries because they are considered najis (unclean)¹² and they are

¹² For example, in April 2017, the Bahá'ís in Tabriz visited the director of the *Vadiy-i-Rahmat* ("Valley of Mercy", referring to a cemetery) in Tabriz to ask about the refusal to bury Bahá'ís in the cemetery. The Bahá'ís were told that instructions had been issued by higher authorities, and were advised to wait patiently for a response to a complaint filed earlier. A member of the Islamic Council in Tabriz wrote to the Mayor of Tabriz requesting him to make it possible for the Bahá'ís to bury their deceased in the city. However, in response, the authorities, determining the

not “people of the Book [Qur’an].”¹³ When Bahá’ís are provided property to use as a cemetery, oftentimes officials fail to respect the rights of the deceased Bahá’ís to be buried according to Bahá’í laws.¹⁴ For example, many deceased Bahá’ís from Tabriz and Sanandaj are required to be buried in the Miandoab and Ghorveh cemeteries respectively, which are at least 160 and 90 kilometers away, and take well over an hour to get to. This is because the authorities have barred the use of Tabriz and Sanandaj Bahá’í cemeteries. Ghorveh cemetery itself has also faced vandalism and destruction of its facilities. In several cases, where the authorities have taken over the burial process altogether, the families concerned were only informed of the location of their loved ones after the burials had already taken place. Since the Islamic Revolution, there have been constant attacks against Bahá’í cemeteries in different localities throughout Iran. Vandals have attacked Bahá’í cemeteries with total impunity, destroying graves and causing extensive damage.¹⁵

More recently, in April 2021, the authorities banned Bahá’ís from burying their loved ones on land previously allocated to them in Tehran’s Khavaran cemetery. This land, which was assigned to the Bahá’ís after the previous Bahá’í cemetery of Tehran was confiscated and destroyed in 1981, has sufficient burial space for several more decades. However, agents from the Security Office of the Behesht-e Zahra Organization, which manages Khavaran, banned the community from using these plots. The only recourse that was available to the Bahá’ís was to bury their loved ones in the narrow gap between existing graves or to use a mass burial site known to be the burial place of thousands of political prisoners killed in the early years of the Islam revolution, including at least 50 Bahá’ís. A [similar attempt was made two years ago](#), but the Bahá’ís refused out of respect for the dead and their bereaved families.

Now, in a coordinated effort between the Ministry of Intelligence, and the Behesht-e Zahra Organization, they have asserted management and control over the Bahá’í cemetery and have been imposing increasingly difficult and unreasonable demands upon the Bahá’ís when attempting to bury

Bahá’ís to be *najis* (“unclean”) based on the fatwa of the religious jurists, stated that the people were opposed to the burial of the Bahá’ís in the public cemetery.

¹³ In the early 1980s, the Mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Kazem Seifian, instructed cemetery directors to prohibit the burial of Bahá’ís in Muslim cemeteries. In one letter dated 12 December 1981, the mayor said, in part, “Many simpletons have been misled by this sect and many Muslims have wasted their time arguing with them [the Bahá’ís]. It [“Bahá’í sect”] is therefore, not an officially recognized religion and these individuals [i.e., the Bahá’ís] must be buried in the section of the cemetery that is allocated to those people who are not of the Book.”

<https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/bahais-must-be-buried-part-cemetery-reserved-those-who-are-not-people-book>

In another letter dated 27 December 1982, the mayor said, “In view of the approval given by Sharia Judge Hojjat al-Eslam Mohammadi Gilani and to prevent contamination of the environment and to maintain cleanliness [purity], it is permissible to construct in the cemetery a facility where individuals who are not of the Book can be washed in the cemetery.”

<https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/permission-build-washing-area-cemetery>.

¹⁴ Bahá’í teachings require that the bodily remains of a deceased be buried in a location that is less than an hour’s journey from the city in which he or she died.

¹⁵ For more historical information, see the Bahá’í International Community’s report *Situation of the Bahá’ís in Iran with respect to their cultural rights*, November 2016:

<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/srculturalrights-1116.pdf>.

their deceased loved ones. Since the takeover, Masoud Momeni, a Ministry of Intelligence agent who in April 2021 had wrested control of the Bahá'í-owned cemetery in Tehran, has been forcibly burying Bahá'ís in the Khavaran mass gravesite in an egregious attempt to erase the historical identity of both the political prisoners as well as the Bahá'í community. The legal complaints and actions of the Bahá'ís against this unjust situation have been ignored by officials and the courts, and thus far have yielded no results.

Since asserting control of the cemetery Mr. Momeni has overseen the following series of actions:

- Confiscation of the Bahá'í cemetery office.
- Dismissal of Bahá'í personnel.
- Illegal and arbitrary change of the name of the Bahá'í cemetery to Khavaran Cemetery.
- Illegal change of burial policy to double-person graves in spite of the spacious size of the Bahá'í cemetery and its capacity for many, many years to come. Additionally, the double-layered burial is inconsistent with the former practice of the Bahá'í cemetery and precludes the tree planting and gardens characteristic of the existing Bahá'í cemetery.
- Hindering burials in some cases.
- Hindering the placing of gravestones as previously practiced.
- Imposing extra burial fees over and above those paid by other minorities. For example, other minorities are able to collect the bodies from homes or hospitals and, without paying any fee to Behesht-e Zahra or any other entity, proceed with their burial ceremonies and their particular beliefs.
- Interference in obtaining burial permits and receiving of the bodies, forcing families to obtain a letter of approval for burial in the Bahá'í cemetery from Mr. Momeni himself.
- Refusal to allow physical completion of over 140 graves since October 2021.
- Imprisonment of one of the members of the Bahá'í cemetery committee (Mr. Zafar) for a period of three months and threats of imprisonment made against other members of bereaved families.
- Insistence on burying the dead within 48 hours after death, even though Behesht-e Zahra permits the dead to be kept in a morgue cool room for up to six days.

On 30 March, Mr. Momeni unilaterally proceeded to bury the body of Mr. Behzad Majidi without his family being present and without Bahá'í ceremony or rites in Khavaran plot. The family of Mr. Majidi and the individuals who assist their fellow Bahá'ís at the cemetery made representations to the authorities concerning his action, seeking to prevent further burials, which prevented any further similar burials in the short term. On 28 April, at 6:00 a.m., Mr Momeni proceeded to bury the bodies of Mrs. Firouzeh Akhtar-Khavari and Mrs. Ezzat Zarghami in the same manner and in the same location at the mass grave site without notifying those families. No copies of any documentation giving him permission to justify his actions has been provided to the families. On 29 April 2023, Mr. Momeni buried a further two bodies at the mass grave site without permission of the families of the

deceased, Mrs. Maryam Moinipour, Mrs. Dorna Molaie (Babaie). In the case of Mrs. Moinipour and Mrs. Dorna Molaie (Babaie), both bodies were buried in a single grave.

Prior to the burial of Mrs. Ezzat Zarghami, her granddaughter Mrs. Shadi Shahidzadeh approached the authorities to seek clarification of the burial arrangements and for approval to bury her grandmother in the Bahá'í cemetery consistent with established practice and with full Bahá'í burial rites. Mr. Momeni proceeded to bury Mrs. Zarghami without notifying the family on 29 April 2023. Mrs. Shahidzadeh was arrested on 1 May 2023 for pursuing her rights and remains in detention (See above for further details of her arrest).

Also, on 1 May 2023, three of the individuals who assist Bahá'í families with processes and procedures at the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran were arrested; Mr. Mansour Amini, Mr. Ataollah Zafar, and Mr. Valiollah Ghedamian. (See above).

On Friday, 2 June 2023, a number of Bahá'ís in Tehran were forbidden from entering the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran to hold a funeral ceremony for the deceased Bahá'í, Mr. Abbas Manavi, who was recently buried by security agents in the Khavaran mass grave site without the family's consent or knowledge. The Bahá'ís were obstructed from entering the mausoleum by police officers. The Bahá'ís were told that they have no right to hold a prayer ceremony at the Bahá'í mausoleum. A few of the Bahá'ís videotaped this action, but the police forced them to delete the videos and images. Finally, only the family of the deceased was allowed to attend the grave, and the rest of the attendees held the memorial ceremony and prayers outside the cemetery behind the locked gates.

More recently, the family of the late Mirza Agha Adibi, who was recently forcibly buried in the mass grave section by security agents, had announced the holding of a memorial service on 20 July 2023. On that day, when the family and friends went to the cemetery at 9:00 a.m., they found the cemetery gate locked, and the mourners were even prevented from entering the cemetery section where Mr. Abidi was buried. The gathered family and friends, numbering approximately 300, were forced to hold the ceremony outside on the street.

Below are some other examples:

- Since 28 June 2022, some restrictions have been imposed by the Bonyad-e-Mostazafan Foundation on the Arak Bahá'í cemetery. The Bahá'ís in Arak were contacted by the Bonyad-e-Mostazafan and were told that they were no longer permitted to bury their dead in the Bahá'í cemetery of Arak. They then asked as to what they should do with their dead and were told to contact the Foundation if such a situation arises. The Bahá'ís from Arak have reported that after the burial of Mr. Hemmat from Saveh, the Bonyad-e-Mostazafan had once again stated that the property had been confiscated and that the Bahá'ís had no further right to bury their dead in that place.

On 7 June 2023, a real estate agency in Arak informed one of the Bahá'ís that the parcel of land on which the Bahá'í cemetery stands has been put up for auction. To date, no official

notice of an impending auction has been seen. The Bahá'í cemetery in Arak—which was originally owned by the community until its confiscation along with other Bahá'í properties in 1980—has been in continuous use by the Bahá'í community of Arak and the surrounding areas for 120 years and is a plot of 4,000 square meters with about 250 graves. In 2008, an abridged deed was issued for the cemetery in the name of the Mostazafan Foundation (Foundation for the Poor).

- On 25 April 2023, it was learned that two agents from the Ministry of Intelligence had been installed full time in the Bahá'í cemetery in Karaj (Zarnan). Although the agents insist that they are not there to create restrictions, it appears that they are preparing to attempt to take over management of the cemetery in the same manner as they have at the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran.
- It was learned on 9 June 2023 that the Bahá'ís in Gorgan had become aware that a number of graves in the Bahá'í cemetery had been destroyed and that someone was claiming that he had purchased the cemetery plot and holds its deeds. The Bahá'ís sought information from the police and filed a complaint through the public prosecutor's office. The public prosecutor was informed that the land had been confiscated by the Foundation for the Poor in 1980. However, the mere existence of the graves of the deceased Bahá'ís attested to the original ownership of the land. It appears that the cemetery parcel had been sold by the Foundation for the Poor.

IV. Economic Persecution and Confiscation of Property

In violation of third cycle UPR recommendation #26.318.

Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the government commenced a systematic campaign to deny Bahá'ís the right to work and employment in violation of Article 23.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Part III and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In hundreds of cases, the authorities have taken measures to make it nearly impossible for Bahá'ís to earn a living. Incidents include arbitrary shop closures, unjust dismissals, the actual or threatened revocation of business licenses, and other actions to suppress the economic activity of Bahá'ís.

More recently, the authorities have found a new way to limit the livelihoods of Bahá'ís by confiscating their properties, farmlands, and personal homes. A recent ruling by the Constitutional Court has now formalized these confiscations and “legitimized” the actions of the authorities.

On 4 November 2019, the Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution decided to confiscate all properties belonging to Bahá'ís in the Village of Ivel. In its ruling, the court referred to age-old and discredited conspiracy theories regarding the Bahá'ís and their supposed collusion with the Shah

(who was deposed in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution) and other international actors and “enemies” of the Islamic Republic. It is worth noting that these properties were in the possession of the Bahá’ís since the mid-1800s.

On 1 August 2020, Branch 54 of the Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution in Tehran rejected the appeal and issued a final and binding order upholding the previous decision of the Special Court handed down on 4 November 2019, which determined that the ownership of the lands belonging to the Bahá’ís of Ivel to be illegal.

In a final decision on 13 October 2020, Branch 8 of the Court of Appeals of Mazandaran, citing the 1 August 2020 decision, also ruled that the ownership of lands of the 27 Bahá’ís of Ivel were illegal and there was no error made in law, thus enforcing the *Sitád-i-Ijrá’iy-i-Farmán-i-Imám* (the Execution of Imam Khomeini’s Order, known as EIKO), to forcibly confiscate and sell the lands owned by the Bahá’ís.¹⁶ Following this order, the case was then closed.

These unjust rulings set a precedent with wide-ranging effects throughout the country with the potential to cause mass displacement of the Bahá’í community through a systematic confiscation of their properties.

The mass confiscation of Bahá’í-owned property in Ivel, Mazandaran Province, follows an official Iranian directive which instructs local authorities in another city in the same province to “conduct strict controls” on the Bahá’ís in the city by “monitoring their operations”. The directive, dated 21 September 2020, adopted a “detailed plan” to ensure that the Bahá’í community is “rigorously controlled”, including their “public and private meetings” as well as “their other activities”. The document was issued by the Commission on Ethnicities, Sects and Religions in Sari, which operates under the aegis of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, a body chaired by Iran’s president and responsible for security matters.¹⁷

In addition, Iranian authorities systematically seal Bahá’í-owned shops, giving spurious reasons for doing so, many of which have remained closed for years now. Official documents prove that these abuses are not isolated cases but are, in fact, a matter of established government policy. In particular, a letter from Tehran’s *Amaken* (Public Places Supervision Office)¹⁸ dated 9 April 2007 confirms orders to the commanders of police and heads of intelligence and security throughout its province that members of the “perverse Bahaist sect” must be prevented from engaging in certain occupations.

¹⁶ The Execution of Imam Khomeini’s Order (EIKO) is a parastatal agency controlled by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

¹⁷ The leaked document was first revealed by the League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/iran-leaked-document-reveals-plans-to-intensify-suppression-of-baha>

¹⁸ *Amaken* (Public Places Supervision Office): Is reportedly responsible for the enforcement of accepted moral codes in places of work and other offices.

¹⁹ The letter stipulates that Bahá'ís must be denied work permits and licenses for over 25 kinds of specifically-listed businesses and are barred from any other “high-earning businesses”.

Furthermore, with the adoption of this governmental policy, applicants applying for business licenses are required to fill out and sign a form asking them to declare their religion. The authorities attempt to actively and pre-emptively deny legal recourse to those already subject to mistreatment under discriminatory regulations. Moreover, since 2006, various trade associations, unions, and business organizations have been instructed to compile lists of Bahá'ís in every type of employment under their purview.²⁰

Below is a more recent example of a worrying pattern that is emerging regarding mass confiscation of Bahá'í-owned properties. A pattern, which if continued can potentially displace a large number of Bahá'í families in Iran.

- At 6:00 a.m. on 2 August 2022, up to 200 Iranian government and local agents sealed off the village of Roshankouh, in Mazandaran Province, where a large number of Bahá'ís live, and used heavy earthmoving equipment to demolish homes. Six homes were destroyed and over 20 hectares of land were confiscated. The homes of Mr. Keyhan Ghanbari, Mr. Sasan Alavi, Mr. Omid Ghanbari, Mr. Ghavamoddin Sabetian, Mr. Hadi Chalangari, and Mr. Arman Gholinejad were destroyed. The home of Mr. Gholinejad was fully demolished. These agents did not succeed in destroying Mr. Behzad Zabihi's house due to the inability of heavy vehicles to enter that section.

From the moment the security forces arrived, they blocked the entry and exit roads of this village and prevented the residents from entering and exiting. Pepper spray was used to disperse people and gunshots were heard during the operation. Anyone who tried to challenge the agents was arrested and handcuffed. Agents confiscated the mobile devices of those present and prohibited filming, and neighbors were warned to stay in their homes and barred from filming or photographing the events taking place. In addition to destroying the homes of the Bahá'ís of Roshankouh Village, the authorities installed robust metal fences to restrict access of the Bahá'ís to their own homes and properties. This action has been taken without a court ruling or prior warning.

¹⁹ Letter dated 9 April 2007 from the Public Intelligence and Security Force F.A.A. [F.A.A., Headquarters of Intelligence and Security] in the province of Tehran—Public Places Supervision Office, to the Commanders of Police Forces of the Provincial Regional Municipalities—Heads of the Public Intelligence and Security Force; <<https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/measures-restrict-involvement-bahais-many-business-categories>>.

²⁰ For example, in May 2006, the Trade Affairs Association Manufacturing & Technical Services of Kermanshah sent a letter to the Battery Resellers Trade Union, directing it “to provide this Association with the list of the names of the members of the Baha'i sect who are members of your Union.” <<https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/requesting-names-bahais-battery-trade-kermanshah>>.

Mr. Farid Alavi, a Bahá'í, was arrested by security forces during this operation in Roshankouh Village. Mr. Hoseini, an elderly Bahá'í, was also beaten by security forces during the demolition of his home. One of the elderly women of the village fainted due to the sudden arrival and harsh treatment by government agents, and after several hours, she was taken to hospital.

General information on Roshankouh including maps and air photographs is available on this link <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/term/roshan-kouh> showing incontrovertibly their proof of rightful possession for decades.

Their Muslim neighbors have prepared and signed an affidavit stating that the properties of these Bahá'is have been in their families for generations, disputing claims by Government agents that Bahá'is have illegally built their homes on State land.

- On 29 August 2022, several police officers from the commercial and economic security division of the Ministry of Industries, Mines and Trade, and *Tazirat*,²¹ along with two agents of the Ministry of Intelligence, went to the residence of Mr. Shahram Fallah with a warrant to search his auto parts warehouse in Kerman and his personal vehicle. Although he had all the proper legal documentation for his business, both his van and stock were confiscated and he has been called to appear before the commercial and economic security police and *Tazirat*.
- On 28 July 2022, it was learned that since the passing of legislation for granting loans to young couples, Bahá'is have often had difficulties in benefitting from this legislation. The Central Bank has subsequently announced that Bahá'í couples do not qualify to receive this loan.
- On 14 May 2022, a person in charge of the marriage loan department in the Central Bank located in the security and information department, stated through the internal bank telephones that based on a new government regulation promulgated in the past couple of months, marriage loans are not granted to Bahá'is. Accordingly, after making inquiries with the Personal Status Registration Office and after verifying the Bahá'í identity of the individuals, their names were removed from the loan list.
- On 24 November 2022, the business premises of Mr. Manouchehr Monzavian were sealed in Arak. Mr. Monzavian has owned a workshop and optical shop for many years where he manufactures optical lenses and glasses along with his son Mr. Shamim Monzavian. On 24 November 2022, he was told that his proposal to move his business premises from the basement of his building to an upper floor would result in the permanent closure of his business. He was told that if he remained in the basement his business license would continue

²¹ *Tazirat*: Government department of discretionary punishments.

for another 4 years. For many years he has been harassed and from time to time denied a business license. He has previously been ordered to close his shop but until now it had never been formally sealed.

It was learned on 7 February 2023 that Mr. Manouchehr Monzavian was required to appear before a judge after authorities claimed he had removed the seal on his optical business premises. Mr. Monzavian was able to demonstrate that at the time the seal was removed he was absent from Arak and in Bandar Abbas. Officials claimed his son had removed the seal which was strongly denied. The judge has reserved his decision pending further reports from the Medical Council.

TEHRAN PROVINCE

- On 7 January 2023, Mr. Manouchehr Sotounzadeh, a well-known and respected figure in the optometry guild was summoned by the Ministry of Intelligence Office in Tehran to appear before them in person on the following day. Upon his arrival, he was interrogated and was asked questions about his and other Bahá'í-owned optometry businesses.
- It was learned on 19 March 2023 that four business owners Mr. Kambiz Moradipour, Mr. Hamid Mobin, Mr. Masrour Khalili, and Mr. Sohrab Mobin were summoned for questioning by the Ministry of Intelligence. Mr. Moradipour, who had previously been summoned by the Ministry of Intelligence Office with the sealing of his shop, was again summoned to the Federal Investigation Bureau operating under the Ministry of Intelligence in Kermanshah. He was further interrogated about what they claimed was an unauthorized closure of his business operations. Mr. Hamid Mobin, Mr. Masrour Khalili, and Mr. Sohrab Mobin were similarly questioned about their business operations.
- It was learned on 19 March 2023 that Mr Amir Elahian from Kerman was dismissed from his work because of being a Bahá'í. He is now being threatened by Ministry of Intelligence Officers.
- On 29 April 2023, 12 businesses belonging to 18 Bahá'ís in the cities of Sari and Shahrekord were sealed by command of the Public Places Supervision Office due to the closure of the businesses to commemorate Bahá'ís Holy Days during the Ridván Festival. When the Bahá'ís enquired of their trade unions and the city's premises department why their shops were sealed, some of them were referred to the Intelligence Office. There, they were asked to give a written undertaking that whenever they want to temporarily close their business premises, it must be with the coordination and permission of the relevant guild. The Shahrekord Bahá'ís are still pursuing the reopening of their businesses with the judicial authorities.

- It was learned on 13 May 2023 that businesses sealed by authorities on 14 December 2019 remain sealed in Bandar Lengeh despite repeated efforts to have their businesses reopened. The businesses were sealed following a raid by security agents on the business premises and homes of a number of Bahá'ís in that city. The businesses that were sealed at that time and the experiences of their owners are as follows:
 - The carpentry and building materials businesses owned by Mr. Mowhebatollah Sabet, Mr. Foad Noughnejad and Mr. Erfanollah Noughnejad, which had operated for more than 35 years and employed six Bahá'í employees, were sealed.
 - The optometry businesses located in Bandar-e Kong owned by Mr. Vahid Zeraatkar and Mr. Ahmad Sabet, which had operated for 11 years and 15 years respectively, were sealed.
 - The home of Mr. Erfanollah Noughnejad's was searched and all their mobile phones, computers, books, and Bahá'í portraits were confiscated and the doors to rooms in the residence and the entrance door was sealed preventing the family from entering their own home for nine days.
 - Mr. Vahid Zeraatkar's residence was searched and all their mobile phones, laptops, cameras, books, documents and photos were confiscated.
 - Mrs. Noushin Hakimi, the wife of Mr. Erfanollah Noughnejad, was arrested and she was held in temporary detention in Bandar Abbas for about 20 days and released after posting bail of 40 million tomans.
 - All the Bahá'í residents, except children under the age of 15 were summoned to the Security office of Bandar Lengeh and interrogated and the bank accounts of 23 of the local Bahá'ís were blocked.

V. Denial of the Right to Education

A. Access to higher education

In violation of third cycle UPR recommendations #26.229 and 26.302.

Iranian Bahá'ís have long been denied access to higher education. It is an official policy of the government to expel individuals from universities and vocational training institutions as soon as they are identified as members of the Bahá'í community. The 1991 government memorandum concerning “The Bahá'í Question”, produced by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, specifically called for Iran's Bahá'ís to be treated such “that their progress and development shall be blocked.” The document indicated, for example, that the government aims to keep the Bahá'ís illiterate and uneducated, living only at a subsistence level. The section that defined the “educational and cultural status” of adherents to the Bahá'í Faith includes the instruction that “[t]hey must be expelled from

universities, either in the admissions process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís.”

In addition, other government documents have been identified that indicate that this discriminatory treatment represents formal and settled official state policy. Chief among these is a communication sent in 2006 by the Central Security Office of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and addressed to 81 Iranian universities, the names of which were listed.²² The letter instructed these universities to expel any student that was found to be a Bahá'í at the time of enrolment or during their studies. Even during the academic year, university authorities have summoned students and demanded that they identify their religion. Whenever students have been identified as Bahá'ís, they have been expelled.

The authorities are well aware that Bahá'ís, as a matter of principle, will not deny or lie about their religious affiliation. Every year, hundreds of Bahá'í students are denied enrolment to universities and other institutions of higher education under the pretext of having an “incomplete file”. These young Bahá'ís participate in the national examination and receive high scores making them eligible for entry into university, and yet, they are denied the right to education only because they are Bahá'ís.

Below are more recent examples:

- It was learned that between 3 and 22 August 2022, throughout Iran, at least 100 Bahá'í students received the message “Incomplete File” in their National University Entrance Examination results and were denied enrolment to higher education due to being Bahá'ís. After entering their personal details on the site of the Educational Assessment and Evaluation Organisation (*Sanjesh* organization), they were referred to a page that only informs them of their “Incomplete File” without providing any details.²³
- On 13 October 2022, a young female student from Baharestan was faced with the “Incomplete File” notification after participating in the National University Entrance Examination. Whilst coming from an extended Bahá'í family, her mother had previously distanced herself from the Bahá'í community. The young woman's acceptance into university has been made conditional upon her mother publicly recanting her faith in widely circulating newspapers.
- It was learned on 5 May 2023 that when Ms. Sama Rastegar—a student at the Open University of Hafez Institute of Higher Education in Shiraz, studying in the fifth semester of the English language and literature course—was enrolling in the next semester, she was

²² A scanned copy of this letter and a provisional English translation are available at the following link: <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/bahais-must-be-expelled-university>.

²³ *Sanjesh*: The National Educational Measurement and Evaluation Organization (EMEO) of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

summoned to the Hirasat of the university (the Security Office of the intelligence service that has an office in every university and government organization). After a number of meetings, they insisted that she write “Islam” in the questionnaire as her religion, or she would be expelled. When she refused to do so, she was expelled from the university.

VI. Incitement to Hatred

In violation of third cycle UPR recommendations #26.167, 26.310, and 26.314.

The upsurge in human rights violations against the Bahá’ís in Iran since 2005 has been preceded and accompanied by efforts to incite hatred, distrust, intolerance, and even violence against them. Some officials have openly encouraged the persecution, and some members of the clergy have preached sermons against the Bahá’í Faith and its adherents. National and provincial budgets have included allocations for “educational” programmes to “confront” the Bahá’í Faith, and official organs have been established and dedicated to that purpose. This is institutionalized incitement to hatred.

The materials espousing hatred towards Bahá’ís present a wide range of completely false allegations. Incitement to hatred against the Bahá’ís has long been a mainstay of campaigns by the government to promote religious orthodoxy. Members of the Bahá’í community across Iran receive threatening telephone calls, text messages, and anonymous letters, and they encounter anti-Bahá’í pamphlets in shops, schools, and other public places. In many localities, graffiti is spray-painted in and on Bahá’í cemeteries, houses, shops, orchards, and vehicles. Without fail, these secondary sources of slander contain the very same malicious lies and incendiary language found in media affiliated with and controlled and sanctioned by the government as listed below.

Given the numerous methods that are used to disseminate information, it is difficult to provide the exact number of articles, videos, or web pages appearing in government-controlled or government-sponsored media featuring anti-Bahá’í propaganda. Nevertheless, these platforms have been producing hundreds of thousands of pieces of disinformation reaching millions of Iranians. In all cases, the dissemination was sponsored and/or approved by the State. Since August 2016, hundreds of influential figures, including clerics, religious figures, academics, editors, and government representatives have publicly issued speeches, articles, or written declarations against the Bahá’ís. Such statements have been published on websites of various media organizations affiliated with the Iranian government that regularly attack the Bahá’ís. They include Aftab News, Basij News, Fars News, Ferghe News, Hawzah News, Iranian Quran News Agency (IQNA), Quds Online, Rasa News, and Shabestan News.

Moreover, because Iranian Bahá’ís have long been denied access to all means of communication with the public, they cannot counter the lies and misinformation propagated about them and their religion, which, in many cases, come from those who give the Iranian people guidance in spiritual matters.

When Bahá'ís have tried to contact newspapers and other media requesting right of reply, they have been ignored, or else mocked for having thought that they would be granted the means to deny published allegations or to present their own point of view. This refusal is in total contradiction with Article 5 of Iran's Press Law.²⁴

On 26 March 2018, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei issued, via his website,²⁵ a new religious decree (*fatwa*) concerning “association and dealing with Bahá'ís”. He stated that, “[y]ou should avoid any association and dealings with this perverse and misguided sect.”

Below are some recent examples:

- Recently some false accusations against the members of the Bahá'í community are being reported and spread in the Ferghe News channel as follows:
 - The role of Bahá'ís in the disturbance of Tehran universities.
 - Some centers located on the outskirts of Tehran universities are affiliated with the “Bahá'í movement” and played an active role in organizing the recent riots.
 - The reports obtained indicate that about 350 cafes and most of the women's hair salons located on the outskirts of these universities have become a place to coordinate and organize gatherings for the recent disturbances in Tehran's universities. They further state that some of these places, which lack any supervision, and sometimes the necessary legal permits, are managed by active members of the “Bahá'í sect”.
 - During the recent disturbances in the country, the Bahá'ís have played a major role and entered into conflicts. According to some reports, in provinces such as Mazandaran, the majority of the rioters were affiliated and organized by Bahá'í “elements”.
- On 2 November 2022, the Iranian TV news channel repeatedly showed the subtitle “A Basiji member was killed by a Bahá'í”. This claim is patently false.
- A teacher at a local kindergarten informed the grandfather of one of their students that at the same time as the raids against the homes of Bahá'ís were taking place in late July and early August 2022, several agents from the Ministry of Intelligence arrived at the kindergarten, distributed several Bahá'í books and publications among the staff and, while filming the proceedings, asked the staff to falsely state that Bahá'ís had brought and distributed those books amongst the teachers.

²⁴ Article 5: The press are lawfully permitted to acquire and disseminate domestic and foreign news aimed at enhancing public awareness by taking into consideration the best interests of the community and by observing the provisions of the existing law. *Press Law* (Ratified on 19 March 1986) And Its Executive By-law (31 January 1987) With amendments of 18 April 2000.

²⁵ <<http://www.leader.ir>>.