

## The Bahá'ís of Iran – A Persecuted Community

(July 2019)

Following the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, members of the Bahá'í Faith—the largest religious minority in the country—have been subjected to a relentless campaign of persecution. This persecution has impacted the lives of generations, from young infants to the frail elderly.

In the words of the former-United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, Iranian Bahá'ís experience persecution “from the cradle to the grave, and beyond.”

Since the mid-nineteenth century, early adherents of the 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. The persecution continued intermittently thereafter with varying degrees of severity and the Bahá'ís were often used as scapegoats.

From the early 1980s, Bahá'ís have suffered under 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—an 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 their 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 fact. In the years that immediately followed, members subsequently 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 offence.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This ban was announced in a statement by the Attorney General, published in the newspaper *Kayhan* on 29 August 1983; 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.”

In response to this announcement, in an open letter dated 3 September 1983, addressed to Iranian authorities, the National 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 Assembly before it voluntarily dissolved itself and the rest of the administrative structures within the country as a demonstration of goodwill towards 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 educational opportunities. 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.

The official policy of the Iranian government against their Bahá'í citizens is summarized in a government memorandum<sup>2</sup> obtained in 1993 by the UN Special Representative on the Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Produced in 1991 by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved 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 restrict the educational, economic, and cultural life of Iranian Bahá'ís. This memorandum remains in effect today.

In 2008, all seven members of the Yárán, or "the Friends"—an ad hoc group tending to the social and spiritual needs of the Bahá'í community in Iran, created because of the ban on Bahá'í administration and with the knowledge and approval of the government—were arrested. They were each sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment and, in 2015, their sentences were belatedly reduced to 10 years, in compliance with amendments to the Iranian Penal Code. They have all been released in 2018, after having completed their unjust sentences.

Iran has, to date, been reviewed twice under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), once in February 2010 and again in October 2014. In 2010, Iran accepted a number of recommendations, 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 recent analysis of the implementation of these

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<sup>2</sup> The text of the 1991 government memorandum can be accessed through the following links:  
Persian original:

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

English translation:

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

recommendations, accepted by Iran in 2010 and 2014, confirmed that not a single one has yet been implemented.<sup>3</sup> 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. The sections that follow provide an overview of the current situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and contain a sample of the latest reported and confirmed cases of persecution.

## **I. Home Raids, Unlawful Arrests, Arbitrary Detentions, and Violations of Due Process**

*In violation of UPR recommendations Rec #138.25: Strengthen its national legislation in accordance with the international treaties that it has ratified. (Burkina Faso)*

*In violation of UPR recommendations Rec #138.28: Make all efforts to guarantee and to protect the rights and freedoms enshrined in the international instruments the country is a party to. (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)*

Since August 2005, more than **1,253** Bahá'ís have been arrested in Iran solely because of their religious beliefs. Sadly, the situation has not improved since the election of President Hassan Rouhani in August 2013. Since he came to power, we have documented at least **521** arrests of Bahá'ís.

Members of the Bahá'í community have been arrested in different localities throughout the country and have suffered ill-treatment at the hands of governmental officials. In nearly all cases, their homes and/or workplaces are searched and the usual items, such as personal belongings, are confiscated, particularly books, photographs, computers, copying machines, and other supplies, as well as items related to the Bahá'í Faith. Many have been 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.

The following cases represent a few examples of the ongoing arrests and home raids:

- On 17 December 2018, Mrs. Ghazaleh Bagheri Tari was sentenced by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran to 5 years of imprisonment under *tazir* law for actions, allegedly, against national security through membership in, and management of, Bahá'í administration.<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Bagheri Tari was initially arrested

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<sup>3</sup> 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](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#vv1u85hTQ0ISXzhR.99>>.

- on 21 October 2017, after Intelligence agents raided a celebration in connection with a Bahá'í holy day in Tehran, and was released 23 days later on a 200 million tuman bail (approximately US\$47,504).
- On 9 January 2019, Mr. Moin Mohammadi, resident of Yazd, was arrested by the authorities and his home was searched. He is charged with engaging in environmental activities.
  - On 19 January 2019, Ms. Kimia Mostafavi (Imani) and Ms. Kiana Rezvani were arrested by the authorities and their homes were searched. They were subsequently released on bail from Kerman Prison on 24 January 2019.
  - It was learnt in January 2019 that Mrs. Yekta Fahandej was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment. She was first arrested in March 2014 after her house was raided by Ministry of Intelligence agents. After enduring 56 days in custody, she was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment under *tazir* law. Her sentence was subsequently reduced by the Court of Appeals to 2 years of imprisonment and 3 years suspended sentence. After the decision was overturned by the Supreme Court, the file was submitted to Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz, which sentenced Mrs. Fahandej to 11 years of imprisonment under *tazir* law.
  - It was learnt in January 2019 that two of the Bahá'ís, who were arrested while participating in the training session in Andisheh, Karaj, had minor involvement in environmental activities. However, during interrogations, it became clear that the main reason for their arrest was because of their affiliation with the Bahá'í community. Background: On 16 September 2018, the authorities raided a class on environmental preservation at the home of Mr. Ramin Sedghi, in the small city of Andisheh near Karaj and Tehran. After confiscating the items belonging to those present, and thoroughly searching Mr. Sedghi's house, the authorities arrested Mrs. Maryam Ghaffarmenesh (Rajabi), who was teaching the class, as well as Mrs. Jamileh Pakrou (Mohammad-Hosein). Mr. Kiarash Salmanzadeh was also arrested in lieu of his daughter, Mahsa Salmanzadeh, until such time as she returns from her travels and presents herself to the authorities. That same day, the authorities went to the home of Mr. Peyman Manavi, and after searching his house, arrested him as well. All of those arrested were transferred to Evin Prison. On 29 September 2018, Mr. Peyman Manavi, Ms. Jamileh Pakrou, Mr. Kiarash Salmanzadeh, and Mr. Payam Shabani, were temporarily released on bail.
  - It was learnt in January 2019 that the sentences of the nine Bahá'í prisoners in Baharestan, Isfahan—Mr. Afshin Bolbolan, Mr. Saham Armin, Mr. Milad

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<sup>4</sup> *Tazir* (discretionary punishment): Punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.

Davardan, Mr. Anoush Rayeneh, Mr. Farhang Sahba, and Mr. Ali Sani to 6 years of imprisonment under *tazir* law, and Ms. Foujan Rashidi, Ms. Sepideh Rowhani, and Ms. Bahareh Zaini to 4 years' imprisonment each—were upheld without change by the Court of Appeal.

- On 2 February 2019, Mrs. Roya Hoseinzadeh, resident of Manjil, was arrested and sent to Rasht Prison. After two days in custody, on 4 February 2019, she was released on a 50 million tuman bail (approximately US\$11,884).
- On 17 March 2019, the home of Mr. Ataollah Daneshgar in Isfahan was searched by the intelligence agents and all of his Bahá'í materials were confiscated.
- On 17 March 2019, the home of Mr. Bahman Behamin in Baharestan, Isfahan, was searched by intelligence agents and all of his musical instruments and Bahá'í materials were confiscated.
- On 7 April 2019, the Court of Appeal in Fars Province sentenced Mr. Mahboub Habibi and Mr. Pejman Shahriari to 6 months, and Mr. Kourush Rowhani to 3 months and 1 day of imprisonment. On 7 May 2019 they were sent to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz.
- On 30 April 2019, the authorities went to the homes of Mr. Bahram Eskandari, Mr. Ardeshir Fanaian, and Mrs. Yalda Firouzian, residents of Semnan. After searching their homes and confiscating the usual items, all three were arrested. By way of background, Mr. Fanaian was also arrested and sentenced to 9 months imprisonment in October 2013 for teaching and propagating the Bahá'í Faith.
- On 5 May 2019, seven Bahá'ís from Bushehr, who were arrested in February 2018 and subsequently released on bail, were each sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment under *tazir* law by the court in Bushehr. Their names are: Farrokhlegha Faramarzi, Asadollah Jaberi, Emad Jaberi, Farideh Jaberi, Pouneh Nasheri, Minou Riazati, and Ehteram Shaikhi (wife of Asadollah Jaberi).
- It was learnt in June 2019 that Mrs. Negin Tadrissi, resident of Isfahan, who had been arrested in November/December 2017 in connection with the celebrations of a Bahá'í holy day, was tried and sentenced in May/June 2019 by the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Isfahan to 5 years of imprisonment for alleged “collusion and assembly against national security.”
- Mrs. Sofia Mobini, resident of Tehran, who had been arrested in October/November 2017 in connection with the celebrations of a Bahá'í holy day, was tried and sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment by Branch 26 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court for alleged “formation and management of an illegal Bahá'í group with intent to disturb national security.”

## II. Economic Persecution

*In violation of UPR recommendation Rec. #138.88: Continue its national policy to promote equal opportunities and treatment with respect to employment. (Sri Lanka)*

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. Since January 2005, over **1,203** specific incidents of direct economic persecution against Iranian Bahá'ís have been documented by the Bahá'í International Community. This represents a minimum number, given the difficulty of obtaining accurate information about human rights violations in Iran. 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.

Since 2014, Iranian authorities have intensified their discriminatory policies and practices towards members of the Bahá'í Faith through different measures of economic disruption. In many cities, for example, the authorities systematically seal Bahá'í-owned shops, giving spurious reasons for doing so. 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)<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 organisations have been instructed to compile lists of Bahá'ís in every type of employment under their purview.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Amaken* (Public Places Supervision Office): Is reportedly responsible for the enforcement of accepted moral codes in places of work and other offices.

<sup>6</sup> 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://iranbahai persecution.bic.org/archive/measures-restrict-involvement-bahais-many-business-categories>>.

<sup>7</sup> 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

Since President Rouhani came to power, there have been at least **871** documented incidents of economic persecution or discrimination. The most egregious being the closure of two homes for the elderly, details of which are below:

- On 27 June 2019, a number of agents from the *Amaken* Office in Karaj attempted to close two nursing homes of the Bahá'í community. The nursing homes have been running for approximately 20 years with an official licence from the Welfare Organization, under the management of a Bahá'í. As a result of encountering serious objections by the occupants and staff, the authorities demanded that the manager appear at the Public Prosecutor's Office on 30 June. Upon presenting at the Prosecutor's Office on the appointed day, the manager was told in a brief meeting that the case was with the Department of Health and that the matter would be followed up by them.

On 3 July 2019, agents from the Department of Health and Welfare returned to the nursing home with a warrant from the Prosecutor's Office with an intent to transfer the elderly to another location and seal the premises. However, owing to the resistance of the occupants, they again, did not succeed.

There are a total of 42 elderly residents in care in two nursing homes. Both establishments have received notification of transfer of the residents to other welfare centres. All the residents are Bahá'ís.

About 15 of the residents are disabled and unable to move. There are 15 permanent employees, who are all Bahá'ís, in the two nursing homes. There are also a few casual staff members, who are not Bahá'ís, who are utilized from time to time on a daily basis to carry out tasks such as cleaning, physiotherapy, massage, etc.

During the manager's meeting with the Welfare Organization at their office, they were asked for the names of the residents and the contact numbers for their families, saying, "Because this matter has been publicised, it is best that you do not continue operating. According to the order of the Prosecutor's Office, the places will be vacated." The authorities have decided to gradually contact the families of the residents and move them to other welfare centres.

The manager stated to them that some of the relatives of these elderly people are resident abroad. The manager also pointed out, "What will you do about the ruling of the issue of najis, which was ordered by Mr. Khamenei?<sup>8</sup> Mixing elderly Bahá'ís with others in welfare centres is in contradiction to his order." In response, the manager was told, "We will try to designate a special place and rooms for them." The manager then retorted

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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>>.

<sup>8</sup> *Najis*: Religiously unclean or dirty.

“This treatment is clearly discriminatory action, which is ethically contrary to moral principles and is in violation of human rights.”

A few other recent examples of economic persecution on religious grounds are shared below:

- It was learnt in December 2018 that a letter was sent from the National Chief Deputy Prosecutor General addressed to the Deputy Prosecutor General on Political and Social Affairs concerning the sealing of Bahá'í-owned businesses. The letter states that “The sealing of shops that are properly licenced, in the absence of any criminal wrongdoing, and solely for the reason of being owned by Bahá'ís, has no legal merit.” See Appendix 1 for a provisional English translation of the letter.
- It was learnt in January 2019 that the renewal of the business licence of Mr. Farshid Daymi, a resident of Birjand, who has a long history of selling computer equipment, was recently denied owing to him being a Bahá'í.
- It was learnt in February that on 10 November 2018, the Commanding Office of the Security and Intelligence Disciplinary Police of Omidieh filed a complaint against nine shop owners in Omidieh by the names of Mr. Ali-Reza Afshar, Mr. Farhad Afshar, Mr. Hamed Afshar, Mr. Saied Afshar, Mr. Kamal Afshari, Mr. Nadim Azizi, Mr. Amin Behbahani, Mr. Mustafa Ebadi, and Mr. Arsalan Farzaneh, for “propaganda of misguided Bahá'í ideology through closure of shops.” The judge, subsequent to hearing the defence on 26 November 2018, relied on the fact that the “mere act of closure of shops does not substantiate propaganda of misguided ideology, nor can it be considered propaganda against the sacred regime,” and issued a writ of non-prosecution. Since the complainant did not file an appeal within the usual allotted time (20 days after the issuance of the decision), the case was closed and, ultimately, on 6 January 2019, the relevant shops were unsealed.
- It was learnt in May 2019 that authorities raided the home of Mr. Heshmatollah Ehsani in Mazgan, Kashan, and took all his rosewater producing equipment.
- It was learnt in May 2019 that following pressure from the Intelligence Office on the Ghaghchi family in Kermanshah, Mr. Sasan Ghaghchi, the second son of the family and brother of Saman, was summoned to the Intelligence Office, where he was interrogated and intimidated for about eight hours. The questions were mainly related to the inventory of goods that the authorities had confiscated from his shop and warehouse and which is now in government possession.
- It was learnt in July 2019 that the *Amaken* Office in Shahinshahr sealed three of the hairdressing salons owned by Bahá'ís, despite some of them having valid licences, and asked Mrs. Mitra Tashakkori, one of the most experienced hairdressers, to leave town as soon as possible.



### III. Denial of the Right to Education

#### A. Access to higher education

*In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.111: Adopt provisions to prevent all forms of discrimination against women and girls and, in particular, promote access to higher education for members of the Bahá'í community and other religious minorities. (Chile)*

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.<sup>9</sup> 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 a student has identified as a Bahá'í, 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 such as vocational training schools 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 some recent examples:

- On 9 January 2019, the authorities at Azad University in Sama, Andisheh, summoned Ms. Shirin Baninejad, a fifth term student in applied computer science, and

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<sup>9</sup> 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>>.

informed her that she had been expelled from university a month before. Ms. Baninejad was about to complete her associate degree.

- It was learnt in January 2019 that Ms. Shadi Shoghi, a student of Najafabad University of Applied Science and Technology, was expelled from the University after four terms of study for being a Bahá'í.
- It was learnt in January 2019 that Mrs. Elmira Sayyar Mahdavi, an undergraduate student in photo-advertising, was expelled from Karaj University of Applied Science and Technology during her third term for being a Bahá'í.
- It was learnt in January 2019 that Ms. Sama Nazifi, a student in architecture at Azad University in Shahriar, who was a top student last year, was expelled from the university for being a Bahá'í.
- It was learnt in January 2019 that Mr. Badi Safajou, a student in chemical engineering at Azad University of Sciences and Research in Tehran with a high grade point average of 3.7 (out of 4.0), was expelled for being a Bahá'í during his seventh term. There was a great deal of support for him from students, university professors, and faculty members, who expressed their sentiments in hundreds of comments.

A poll, titled “Expulsion of a Bahá'í student,” was initiated on the Instagram account of Azad University, which has approximately 95,000 members. The poll asked participants to indicate if they were in favour of or against the expulsion of Mr. Safajou from university. In the poll, 81% of participants expressed that they were against his expulsion. The polling page was deleted after nine days, by order of the security authorities. Relevant documentation in Persian may be provided upon request.

It has been observed that, because of their positive disposition and popularity among their fellow students and professors, other Bahá'í students who are expelled from university also receive similar reactions from students and professors.

- It was learnt in February 2019 that Mr. Sepehr Shahidi Ghamsari, a fifth term student of civil engineering at the Institute of Higher Education in Sina, Karaj, was expelled because he was a Bahá'í.

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

*In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.221: Ensure the freedom of religion and belief for all citizens of Iran. (Romania)*

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)<sup>10</sup> and they are not “people of the Book [Qur'an].”<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 kilometres away, and take well over an hour to get to. In several cases, where the authorities have taken over the burial process, the families concerned were only informed after the burials had already taken place. Moreover, there have been at least **79** attacks against Bahá'í cemeteries in different localities throughout Iran since August 2005. Vandals have attacked Bahá'í cemeteries with total impunity, destroying graves and causing extensive damage.<sup>13</sup>

## V. Incitement to Hatred

*In violation of UPR recommendations Rec. #138.50: Continue its policies and initiatives aimed at the promotion of dialogue, cooperation and tolerance*

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<sup>10</sup> 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 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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>>.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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>>.

*between different cultures and religions of the national minorities of Iran.  
(Armenia)*

*Rec #138.53: Strengthen and expand interreligious and intercultural dialogue.  
(Lebanon)*

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 institutionalised incitement to hatred.

The materials 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.

Since January 2014, there have been more than **39,361** articles, videos, or web pages appearing in government-controlled or government-sponsored media featuring anti-Bahá'í propaganda. 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 the 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), QudsOnline, 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*.<sup>14</sup>

On 26 March 2018, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei issued, via his website,<sup>15</sup> 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.” An English translation of the entire decree is included in Appendix 2 to this document. Below are some other recent examples of incidents involving incitement to hatred:

- It was learnt in June 2019 that a sign was displayed in a shop in Gonbad-e Kavous indicating that the Bahá’ís were forbidden to enter. A photograph of the sign is included in Appendix 3.
- It was learnt in June 2019 that efforts were made in Shiraz on the occasion of mid-Shaban on 8 April 2019 to invite people to a question and answer meeting against the Bahá’í Faith and to post related banners and promote an anti-Bahá’í magazine in Shiraz.<sup>16</sup> The pamphlets were, however, discarded by most shop owners. After making these efforts, the relevant officials returned to the shop owners, whether Bahá’í or not, and requested them to pay for the cost of printing the magazines.
- It was learnt on 21 July 2019, that Twitter had closed the accounts of a number of Iranian news outlets, including, Young Journalists Club (YJC), run by state broadcaster IRIB, state-run IRNA, and Mehr for their harassment of Bahá’ís. These are among the news outlets that have a history of regular, coordinated, and targeted attacks on the Bahá’í community and its members in Iran.

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<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> <<http://www.leader.ir>>.

<sup>16</sup> 15th Sha’ban, one of months of Muslim calendar, of 255 A.H. (After Hijrat) according to Shi’ah Islam marks the birthday of the twelfth Imam, who is called Mahdi, and is believed to be the redeemer of Islam. This day is a holy day of festivity for Shi’ah Muslims.

## Appendix 1

### **Provisional English translation of the letter from the deputy prosecutor general to provincial prosecutors regarding not sealing Bahá'í-owned shops**

**In the Name of God**

**Judiciary Attorney General**

Honourable Deputy Prosecutor General on Political and Security Affairs,

Respectfully, in reference to the inquiry number 1856/1396/140, dated 2/12/1396 [21 February 2018], your query was raised at the meeting of the Scientific Working Group of the Attorney General. The view of the Working Group after consultation is hereby released.

*Query:*

In reference to letter number 14344, dated 3/4/1396 [24 June 2017], from the honourable deputy minister of interior on security and disciplinary affairs, which indicates that in recent months the sealing of Bahá'í-owned shops has caused the members of this perverse sect to continually pursue this matter and seek the unsealing of their businesses, pursuant to Section (b) of Article 28 of the Guild Union Act, which allows the closure of trade units for certain number of days, given the continuous follow-ups as well as the national dimensions of the issue, it is appropriate to make a decision in regard to the continuation or cessation of the sealing of the said trade units.

*Consultative decision:*

The sealing of shops that are properly licensed, in the absence of any criminal wrongdoing, and solely for the reason of being owned by Bahá'ís, has no legal merit. Should there be any concerns, they have to be considered at the time of issuance of licence in the context of relevant regulations.

[signed:] Muhammad Mosaddegh  
Chief Deputy Prosecutor General

## Appendix 2

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### **Provisional translation of the decree issued on the website of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei concerning association and dealing with Bahá'ís**

6 Farvardín 1397 [26 March 2018]

<http://www.leader.ir>

[Emblem] The Office of the Supreme Leader Website

#### **New Enquiry (Farvardín [March/April])**

[This website provides answers to various religious enquiries. The following question relates to Bahá'ís:

##### **Association and dealing with Bahá'ís**

- Q. What is the judgment about association and dealings with a Bahá'í?  
A. **You should avoid any association and dealings with this  
perverse and misguided sect.]**