

Bahá'í International Community

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PRESS RELEASE

Baha'í International Community

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New video documents Iranian government's sponsored violence against its own Baha'í citizens

GENEVA – Parva Rahmanian and her family used to run a flower shop in Iran – until the government revoked their business license.

The reason given was simple: as Baha'is, they were “unclean” – and so were their floral designs. The uncleanness of the Baha'is was, to the world's great shock and outrage, the subject of a recent fatwa by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

“We received a letter from the Justice Bureau saying that as a florist one's hands get wet while decorating flowers, and given that Baha'is are considered unclean by the high-ranking clerics..., the work permit was revoked,” says Ms. Rahmanian in a new video released today by the Baha'i International Community.

Ms. Rahmanian's story is one of many personal accounts of persecution faced by Iranian Baha'is featured in the 17-minute video, which is titled “Violence with Impunity” and is available on the BIC's YouTube channel.

The new production, which is available in [English](#) and [Persian](#), is based in part on a recent report of the BIC with the same title, which was released in March. However, the video also features numerous new interviews done over the last six months in the United States and Europe.

“This new video takes the dramatic statistics documented in our earlier report and illustrates them with personal accounts of what it means to live in a country where the very authorities that are supposed to protect your rights are the ones behind your oppression,” said Diane Ala'í, a representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva.

Naim Sobhani, for example, describes what it was like as a child growing up in Iran and having to face vilification from teachers.

“ ‘These Bahai’s are dirty, they are unethical, they are unclean non-believers, do not dine with them, do not socialize with them, do not befriend them,’” he recounts his teachers as saying. “As a child in the elementary school, hearing the teacher saying this sort of things in a classroom to your classmates in the class,” said Mr. Sobhani, who now lives in the United States.

Also featured are several human rights activists.

Mahnaz Parakand, an attorney who defended Baha'is before having to flee Iran herself, talks about how the government uses false charges of espionage to prosecute and imprison Baha'is.

“The only reason they cite for espionage on the part of the Baha’is is that the shrines of the great figures of the Baha’i Faith are located in Israel, which are considered sites of pilgrimage for the Baha’is,” said Ms. Parakand.

“As a Muslim, when I go to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage, does the mere fact that the House of God, the Kaaba, is located in Saudi Arabia mean all Muslims in the world could be spying for Saudi Arabia in their native countries?” she said.

Karim Lahidji, president of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), says Iran’s policy has been “to increase the pressure on the Baha’i community so that in the best case scenario they would relinquish their beliefs.”

The [original report](#) documents a rising tide of violence directed against the Iranian Baha'i community – and the degree to which attackers enjoy complete impunity from prosecution or punishment.

From 2005 through 2012, for example, there were 52 cases where Baha'is have been held in solitary confinement, and another 52 incidents where Baha'is have been physically assaulted. Some 49 incidents of arson against Baha'i homes and shops, more than 30 cases of vandalism, and at least 42 incidents of cemetery desecration were also documented.

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