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The Bahá'í International Community
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For more information, contact:
Bani Dugal, New York office: 212-803-2500 / mobile: 914-329-3020 or Diane Ala'i, Geneva office: +41 (-22) 7985400 / mobile: +41(-78)-60-40-100

IRAN STEPS UP SECRET MONITORING OF BAHÁ'ÍS

NEW YORK – In an ominous move, Iran's Ministry of Interior has ordered officials throughout the country to step up the surveillance of Iranian Bahá'ís, focusing in particular on their community activities.

The Ministry has requested provincial officials to complete a detailed questionnaire about the circumstances and activities of local Bahá'ís, including their "financial status," "social interactions," and "association with foreign assemblies," among other things.

The Ministry's order came in a letter dated 19 August 2006 and addressed to provincial deputies of the Department of Politics and Security in Offices of the Governors' General throughout Iran.

The 19 August letter, which was recently obtained by the Bahá'í International Community, asks these deputies to order "relevant offices to cautiously and sensitively monitor and supervise" all Bahá'í social activities.

The letter is the latest in a series of threatening documents that outline a secret national effort to identify and monitor Bahá'ís in Iran.

"The emergence of this new letter highlights the gravity of the situation facing Iranian Bahá'ís," said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations.

"This letter further confirms that Iran's government has targeted the Bahá'ís for covert surveillance," said Ms. Dugal. "It also reveals for the first time the type of information the government strives to collect on both

individuals and the Bahá'í community as a whole—information that in most societies would be considered private and highly sensitive.

"The letter also contains elements of misinformation. For example, the letter asks for information on the 'socio-political activities' of Bahá'ís—even though it is well known to authorities that Bahá'ís are entirely non-political in their activities, inasmuch as the Bahá'í sacred writings stress the importance of non-involvement in politics, as well as non-violence."

The 19 August letter follows the release earlier this year of a secret 29 October 2005 letter from the Iranian military headquarters to various Revolutionary Guard and police forces instructing them to "identify" and "monitor" Bahá'ís around the country.

News of the 29 October letter, first publicized by Asma Jahangir, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, in March 2006, stirred alarm among international human rights groups. Ms. Jahangir herself expressed concern that "the information gained as a result of such monitoring will be used as a basis for the increased persecution of, and discrimination against, members of the Bahá'í Faith."

Another letter, dated 2 May 2006, showed the degree to which the government has sought to implement such surveillance at the local level. That letter, from the Trades, Production, and Technical Services Society of Kermanshah to the Iranian Union of Battery Manufacturers, asked the Union to provide a list of members of "the Bahá'í sect" in their membership.

Some observers have compared the government's effort to identify and monitor Bahá'ís to the situation facing Jews at the beginning of the Nazi era. In April, for example, the Anti-Defamation League said the orders issued in the 29 October letter were "reminiscent of the steps taken against Jews in Europe and a dangerous step toward the institution of Nuremberg-type laws."

Throughout the country, Iranian authorities have continued to arrest and detain Bahá'ís throughout Iran in recent months, subjecting them to a "revolving door" sequence of imprisonment and release that is apparently designed to harass and oppress the Bahá'í community.

Over the last two years, at least 129 Bahá'ís have been arrested, released on bail, and are now awaiting trial throughout the country. The bail demands have been high, in most cases requiring the Bahá'ís to hand over considerable sums of money, deeds to property, business or work licenses.

To read the full text of the 19 August 2006 letter in an English

translation, along with a link to the original letter in Persian, go to http://bahai.org/persecution/iran/19-08-06