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BAHÁ'Í *United Nations Office*
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY 866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120, New York, NY 10017 USA
Telephone: 1-212-803-2500, Fax: 1-212-803-2566, Email: uno-nyc@bic.org

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

Iranian government campaign against Baha'is shows new facets

Gravestones in the Baha'i cemetery near Najafabad, Iran, were left in a heap by a bulldozer that destroyed the burial ground some time between 9 September and 10 September 2007.

NEW YORK, 21 September 2007 – The bulldozing of a Baha'i cemetery in Iran

last week is the latest in a series of incidents in a government-led campaign of hatred against Baha’is.

The destruction of the cemetery by individuals using heavy equipment occurred between 9 September and 10 September near Najafabad, on the outskirts of Isfahan. What happened there is nearly identical to what happened in July in Yazd, where another Baha’i cemetery was extensively damaged by earth-moving equipment.

The list of anti-Baha’i incidents is growing, as are human rights violations against other groups in Iran.

In Najafabad, a few days before the destruction of more than 100 Baha’i graves, threatening letters were delivered to some 30 Baha’i families. In May, in Mazandaran province, the unoccupied homes of six Iranian Baha'is were set on fire. In June, in Abadeh, vandals wrote hateful graffiti on Baha’i houses and shops.

Since May, Baha’is in at least 17 towns have been detained for interrogation. Six new arrests have been reported. In Kermanshah, a 70-year-old man was sentenced to 70 lashes and a year in prison for "propagating and spreading Bahaism and the defamation of the pure Imams." In Mazandaran, a court has once again ruled against three women and a man who are charged with "propagation on behalf of an organization which is anti-Islamic.”

All these events are results of the Iranian government’s long campaign to incite hatred against Baha’is, a spokeswoman for the Baha’i International Community said today.

“This should be a cause for concern among human rights activists everywhere,” said Diane Ala’i, the representative of the Baha’i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva.

She appealed to the world to hold the Iranian government accountable for its actions and to help prevent the situation from deteriorating into further violence. Baha’is in Iran number about 300,000 and represent the largest religious minority in the country.

“Put in a historical context, these kinds of attacks too often have been a prelude to campaigns of oppression and violence that are far worse.

“While some of these incidents may seem to be minor, the fact that such events are increasingly commonplace and reported as occurring in virtually every region of Iran shows that the persecution of Baha’is remains official government policy, and therefore is something for which Iran must be held accountable,” she said.

“The graffiti in Abadeh included slogans such as ‘Death to Baha’is, the mercenaries of America and England,’ ‘Hezbollah despises the Baha’is,’ ‘Baha'is – mercenaries of Israel’ and ‘Baha'is are unclean’ – phrases that relate directly to government propaganda that has been disseminated in Iranian news media in recent years,” Ms. Ala’i said.

She noted that other groups in Iran are also suffering human-rights violations.

“In recent months, the Iranian authorities have been carrying out a widespread crackdown on civil society, targeting academics, women's rights activists, students, and journalists,” said Ms. Ala’i.

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