

Bahá'í International Community

Inciting Hatred
The Bahá'ís of Semnan
A Case Study in Religious Hatred



A special report of the
Bahá'í International Community
October 2012

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866 United Nations Plaza
Suite 120
New York, NY 10017-1833 USA
<http://bic.org>

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1 Introduction

For more than three decades, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has persecuted Iranian Bahá'ís, who comprise the country's largest non-Muslim religious minority. Since 1979, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been executed, hundreds more imprisoned, and tens of thousands deprived of jobs, education, and the freedom to practice their religion openly.

As of September 2012, more than 110 Bahá'ís were languishing in prison solely because of their religious beliefs—including several who were arrested because they were associated with the provision of informal college-level classes to young Bahá'ís who are banned from Iranian public and private universities.

Whether at the United Nations or before the news media, Iranian government spokesmen have repeatedly denied that Bahá'ís are persecuted. They offer a range of bizarre explanations in support of these denials. They have suggested, for example, that there are only a few Bahá'ís in the country and that any Bahá'ís in prison are there because they were engaged in spying or other anti-state activities.

Yet the government itself has explicitly outlined, in numerous official documents, a policy of oppression that specifically targets Bahá'ís and systematically seeks to marginalize them in Iranian society—a tacit acknowledgement that charges of any illegal activity are patently false.

The most significant of these papers is a secret 1991 document known as the “Bahá'í Question” memorandum. Brought to light by the United Nations in 1993, the memorandum is nothing less than a blueprint for the strangulation of the Bahá'í community. In stark language, it lays out unequivocally that the government's overall objective is to ensure that Bahá'ís are treated in such a way that “their progress and development are blocked.”

This confidential memorandum is endorsed at the highest level—it bears the signature of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. It calls for a series of policy steps against Bahá'ís that aim to restrict their livelihood, counter their religious beliefs and activities, and deprive them of access to higher education. Moreover, it calls for “propaganda institutions” to be established to counter the “propaganda and religious activities of the Bahá'ís.”

The memo's unstated objective is to apply a maximum amount of pressure on the Bahá'í community without attracting undue attention from the international news media and human rights monitors in the way that occurred in the 1980s, when the outright execution and imprisonment of Bahá'ís drew widespread international condemnation.

The case of Semnan

This special report examines the effects of this policy in one north central Iranian city, Semnan. Located about 200 kilometers east of Tehran, Semnan has a population of about 125,000 people. Among them are several hundred Bahá'ís from every walk of life and socio-economic class.

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Yet despite their small number, the Bahá'ís of Semnan have been the focus in recent years of an intensifying persecution, facing an array of economic, physical, and psychological attacks. These include arbitrary arrests and imprisonments, the shutting down of their businesses, cemetery vandalism, denunciations of their faith in school classrooms, distribution of anti-Bahá'í propaganda, and arson attacks on their properties.

While these types of attacks on Bahá'ís are not confined to Semnan, the situation there is noteworthy for its particular intensity and the mobilization and coordination of official and semi-official elements—including the police, the courts, local officials, and the clergy.



An arson attack, using Molotov cocktails, left these smoke stains on the exterior of apartments occupied by two Bahá'í families in Semnan, Iran. This attack occurred at about one in the morning on 25 February 2009.

In October 2011, a Bahá'í International Community report, *Inciting Hatred: Iran's media campaign to demonize Bahá'ís*, examined the extensive government-sponsored media campaign that has in recent years increasingly demonized and vilified the Bahá'í Faith. The report offered a sampling of the official and semi-official anti-Bahá'í propaganda issued during a 16-month period from late 2009 through early May 2011, documenting more than 400 articles, broadcasts or Web pages that falsely portrayed Bahá'ís as the source of every conceivable evil.

The main thrust of this anti-Bahá'í media campaign has been

to brand Bahá'ís as “the other”—“outsiders” in their own land and “enemies” of the state, Islam, and the Iranian people. The goal has undoubtedly been to create such bias against Bahá'ís that the general population will shun them and look upon the Bahá'í teachings as anathema.

This report seeks to document how that anti-Bahá'í media campaign, coupled with government-led efforts to oppress Bahá'ís through constant harassment and by denying them access to education and employment, has played out in one municipality, which is in many ways a microcosm for the situation nationwide regarding the treatment of Bahá'ís and other minorities.

2 A Community Under Fire

At first glance, the alleged crimes that sent Adel Fanaian to prison for six years in May 2012 seem particularly grave. They include “mobilizing a group with the intent to disturb national security” and “propaganda against the sacred regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

But a more careful reading of the court record shows Mr. Fanaian was convicted for participation in activities that, in any other country, would be perfectly legal and even quite praiseworthy. His endeavors included organizing regular worship for his religious community, overseeing the development of morals classes for children and youth, and helping young people obtain a college education.

Mr. Fanaian's severe punishment for his efforts—all aimed at trying to hold together the much-beleaguered Bahá'í community—is but one of a series of harsh prison sentences handed down to Bahá'ís in Semnan in May 2012.

Also in May, three other Bahá'ís in Semnan were sentenced to imprisonment on similar charges. Pouya Tebyanian received six and a half years, Faramarz Firouzian four and a half years, and Anisa Ighani four years and four months. Her husband, Siamak, is already serving time in prison and her incarceration will leave their two young children without resident parents. He had been convicted in 2009 of “membership in illegal groups” and “propaganda activities in favor of Bahaism” for his practice of the Bahá'í Faith. [See page 42.]

Two young Bahá'í women—Roufia Beidaghi and Jinous Nourani—were also recently given one-year prison terms. They have both been sentenced to a notoriously dangerous and overcrowded jail where the sexual assault of younger prisoners is reportedly common.

Over the past four years, Bahá'ís in Semnan have faced raids, arrests, and imprisonments at the hands of government officials; their businesses have been subjected to arson and graffiti attacks or shut down altogether; their cemeteries have been vandalized; their beliefs have been attacked in the media and from the pulpit of mosques. Perhaps most ominously, their children have been denounced in the city's schools.

Since 2005, at least 34 Bahá'ís have been arrested, some 27 Bahá'í-owned businesses have been closed by authorities, and more than a dozen Bahá'í homes and businesses have been hit by arsonists.

This bleak situation is not confined to Semnan. Bahá'ís are facing particularly severe oppression in a number of other cities, including Abadeh, Aligudarz, Bukan, Isfahan, Ivel, Khorramabad, Laljin, Mashhad, Parsabad, Rafsanjan, Ravansar, and Shiraz.

What makes Semnan significant is the depth, breadth and intensity of attacks in a small area, sustained over a number of years. Moreover, the widespread and coordinated nature of the attacks on Bahá'ís in Semnan could only be accomplished with government encouragement and permission. The recent intensification there seems to indicate a new level of activity to enforce more strongly the government's long-established policy of discrimination against Bahá'ís.

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The current phase of persecution against the Semnan Bahá'ís started in late 2008 with reports that a series of widely publicized anti-Bahá'í seminars and rallies had been organized in the city. One, held at the Semnan Red Crescent Society theater, analyzed the supposed link between the Bahá'í Faith and Zionism, a common anti-Bahá'í propaganda theme.

Within weeks of those rallies, on 15 December 2008, the homes of some 20 Bahá'ís were raided by authorities at dawn. Bahá'í materials, computers, and mobile telephones were seized. Nine Bahá'ís whose homes were raided were arrested, one at the time of the raids and eight more later,

all on entirely false or illegal charges relating purely to their peaceful practice of the Bahá'í Faith. “Evidence” gathered in those raids has sent several Semnan Bahá'ís to court and ultimately prison.

A spate of related episodes followed:



Interior view of a mortuary building used to prepare bodies in the Semnan Bahá'í cemetery, after being attacked by arsonists in February 2009.

- Starting in 2009, there have been numerous incidents of arson or vandalism against Bahá'í homes, businesses, and the cemetery. While many of these were undertaken by apparently anonymous individuals, all signs point to official sanction and, likely, the use of plain-clothes agents. These incidents have often been accompanied by the spray-painting of anti-Bahá'í graffiti on buildings with slogans such as “Death to Bahá'ís.”

- Accompanying these attacks have been increased efforts by local authorities to destroy the livelihood of Bahá'ís. This has included a decision in early 2009 by the Chamber of Commerce and some 39 associated trade unions to prohibit the issuing of business licenses or managerial permits to Bahá'ís and to decline to renew existing ones. Most recently, two factories with Bahá'í-ownership interests were shut down in May 2012—causing not only about 17 Bahá'ís but also at least 42 Muslims employees to lose their jobs. Overall, the closure of some 27 Bahá'í businesses has deprived some 110 families of their main livelihood.
- Muslim clerics have been invited to give presentations in Semnan classrooms that insult the Faith. In some cases, Bahá'í school children have been segregated from their classmates. On at least two occasions, Muslim students were encouraged to physically hurt Bahá'í students.
- Intelligence agents have stepped up their surveillance of Bahá'ís in Semnan, following them everywhere, apparently as a form of psychological pressure. This heightened monitoring has reportedly caused Bahá'í children to live in constant fear that their parents will be arrested.

These incidents tell of a systematic effort to goad the population in Semnan into violence so that

the government is able to protest that the activities and beliefs of the Bahá'ís themselves are responsible for stirring up “the people.” This effort is also clearly designed to give authorities a free hand to act with impunity against Bahá'ís, either directly or indirectly.

The Bahá'ís have made wide-ranging efforts to bring all of these injustices to the attention of the relevant authorities and to seek redress. In virtually every case, they have been rebuffed, further evidence that the government condones these attacks.

In recent years, moreover, it appears that the government has begun to experiment with increasingly violent methods. This has come not only in the form of rising arrests and imprisonment but also in the incitement of hatred against Bahá'ís, with a resulting increase in personal attacks, arson, vandalism, and hate graffiti. Such attacks often appear to be initiated by ordinary citizens, although there is considerable evidence of involvement by government agents, either directly or through agitation.

3 Raids, Arrests and Imprisonments

Since 2005, the number of Bahá'ís who have been arrested, arbitrarily detained, or imprisoned in Iran has risen sharply. At least 610 Bahá'ís have been arrested since August 2004, and more than 110 are currently behind bars.

Such arrests and detention are designed by the government to keep Bahá'ís in a state of insecurity and terror, and the situation in Semnan clearly reflects such an effort.

The sight of government agents pouring out of unmarked cars, and then rushing up to one's front door, has become an all too common scene for Iranian Bahá'ís. In typical raids, up to 12 intelligence officers arrive in unmarked cars at dawn. They reportedly cut telephone lines and then thoroughly search each residence. Agents seize mobile phones, computers, documents, Bahá'í books, and satellite dishes. In a number of cases, property deeds, cash, and business licenses have also been confiscated.

At least 34 Bahá'ís from Semnan have been arrested and detained since 2005. And since 2009, some 22 Semnan Bahá'ís have been sentenced to prison. Most of these individuals are between 20 and 30 years old. The combined total of their sentences amounts to more than 65 years of imprisonment.

As of this writing, five have served their sentences and been released. Eight are currently serving prison sentences—most of them handed down recently—ranging from one to six years. One Bahá'í is serving a period of internal exile upon the completion of his jail term. A further four are released on bail awaiting trial and eight more are sentenced but free pending appeal or awaiting the summons to begin their imprisonment. Several more have been interrogated.

The surge in arrests has been accompanied by heightened surveillance from officers of the branch office of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence. Reports from Semnan say that when Bahá'ís leave their homes, they are followed everywhere. If they go to public places such as the local park, they are approached and interrogated about the purpose of their visit, queried about who they are meeting, and what they plan to talk about. The fear of arrest has become so pervasive that young children reportedly live in a state of constant fear and anxiety, concerned that agents will knock at their doors and take their parents away.

Nine of those arrested were residents of the 20 homes that were raided on 15 December 2008 by government agents, who apparently used the raids to gather “evidence” against them.

One of those arrested that day was Sahba Rezvani. She was tried on 12 February 2009 and charged with “involvement in establishing illegal groups and organizations” and “teaching against the Islamic Republic by establishing courses and classes, distributing educational CDs, and being involved in individual teaching [propaganda] in favor of the perverse sect of Bahaism”—charges which stem wholly from her activities as a Bahá'í. For these alleged “crimes,” she served three years in prison and was released in November 2011.

Of the eight other Bahá'ís whose homes were raided on 15 December 2008, three were given six month sentences.

The case of Pouya Tebyanian—who was recently re-arrested and sentenced to six and a half years in prison—is particularly instructive of the manner in which authorities have doggedly harassed Bahá'ís in Semnan.

On 8 March 2009, he was arrested at his workplace by Ministry of Intelligence agents, who also confiscated two computers belonging to his employer. Mr. Tebyanian—who was 24 years old at the time—was taken back home, where agents conducted another search and confiscated documents and Bahá'í materials. He was held in detention without charge until a trial occurred, the precise date of which is not known.



Facsimile of an 8 July 2009 order of the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Semnan convicting Siamak Ighani of “membership in illegal groups associated with Bahá'ís” and “propaganda activities in favor of Bahaism”—wrongful charges based wholly on his practice of the Bahá'í Faith.

One of the lawyers involved in representing Mr. Tebyanian was told at one point by the judge that “these [people] are unclean and spies and you should not represent them.” Mr. Tebyanian was sentenced to two and half years imprisonment—although an appeals court later reduced the sentence to two years.

However, he was later re-arrested several times. Following one such arrest on 12 March 2011, Mr. Tebyanian was held for more than two months. In October 2011, he was again interrogated for two hours at the local office of the Ministry of Intelligence in Semnan. On 16 April 2012, he was tried on unspecified charges and, in late May 2012, sentenced to six and a half years imprisonment.

There is evidence that the judge who oversaw the case clearly expressed his prejudice against Bahá'ís to the attorneys representing Mr. Tebyanian. At one point, the judge even told the attorneys—who are not Bahá'ís—that if it were up to him, he would have “annihilated all the Bahá'ís.”

4 Arson and Vandalism

Since 2009, arsonists have struck Bahá'í homes or Bahá'í-owned businesses in Semnan at least a dozen times. They have also set fire to buildings at the city's Bahá'í cemetery.

These acts have often been accompanied by the spray-painting of anti-Bahá'í graffiti on Bahá'í-owned buildings and properties or other forms of vandalism.

Incidents include:

- The 1 February 2009 firebombing of a three-story apartment building that housed several Bahá'í families. At around 3 a.m., two Molotov cocktails were thrown at the building, targeting specifically the Bahá'í apartments. One firebomb hit the wall beside a window on the first floor and a second hit the balcony on the second floor. The family members heard the explosions and immediately extinguished the flames.
- On 25 February 2009, the same building was attacked again—also by Molotov cocktails thrown at the windows—and the home of another Bahá'í family in Semnan was also hit by a similar firebomb aimed at the windows. In both cases, the devices did not penetrate the windows and flames were quickly extinguished.
- In the period from March through August 2009, at least three Bahá'í shopkeepers in Semnan had their stores attacked by arsonists, often multiple times. Perhaps the most telling of these episodes concerned the case of Mr. Payman Shademan, whose properties endured a series of assaults, which can all be categorized as hate crimes. On 31 March 2009, Mr. Payman Shademan's car was completely defaced with spray paint while it was parked at his house. The markings include anti-Bahá'í graffiti. A few days later, on 2 April, Mr. Shademan's shop was also spray painted with anti-Bahá'í messages inciting hatred and suspicion. On 23 June, stones were thrown at Mr. Shademan's shop. Then,



The shop of Payman Shademan was hit by arsonists throwing firebombs from motorbikes, setting his store ablaze on 29 June 2009. Although the fire was put out quickly, much of the shop's merchandise was damaged.

on 29 June, attackers on motorbikes successfully set Mr. Shademan's store ablaze, damaging a large portion of his merchandise. A few weeks later, a dead cat was hung on the door of Mr. Shademan's shop—and soon after that the shop was attacked again by arsonists on motorbikes.

- The residence of Mr. Yahya Hedayati and a shop belonging to Mr. Akbar Pourhosseini were attacked by arsonists on 16 February 2010. As with Mr. Shademan, Mr. Hedayati had been the focus of repeated harassment. In April and May 2009, on at least nine occasions, vandals broke his windows and carried out other attacks on his house. On 3 September 2010, a type of explosive or incendiary device was thrown into his home.

Attacks on the cemetery

The Bahá'í cemetery, which serves both Semnan and the nearby town of Sangsar, was also attacked by arsonists and vandals in February 2009. Approximately 50 gravestones were demolished and the mortuary, situated at the cemetery, was set on fire. In addition, anti-Bahá'í graffiti was sprayed on large steel water drums and tanks at the cemetery. The graffiti threatened death to “unclean, infidel Bahá'ís” and included references to “Israel and England.”



The Semnan Bahá'í cemetery after it was vandalized in February 2009. Approximately 50 gravestones were demolished and the mortuary building was set on fire.

In mid-August 2009, a section of the Bahá'í cemetery of Semnan where prayers are recited for the deceased was destroyed by assailants using a front end loader. They also blocked the door of the building in the cemetery where bodies are washed and prepared for burial, using the loader to cover it with soil.

Attacks not confined to Semnan

Throughout Iran, arson, graffiti and vandalism has been increasingly used against Bahá'ís. Cases include:

- In late 2010, at least a dozen Bahá'í-owned shops in the city of Rafsanjan were hit by arsonists. The attacks, which heavily damaged some of the businesses, were accompanied by the distribution of a threatening letter, sent to 20 Bahá'í homes and businesses. Addressed to “members of the misguided Bahaist sect,” the anonymous document demanded that Bahá'ís sign an undertaking to “refrain from forming contacts or friendships with Muslims” and from “using or hiring Muslim trainees.” The Bahá'ís were also told not to teach their Faith, including on the Internet.

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- Previously in Rafsanjan, on 25 July 2008, the car of a prominent Bahá'í was torched and destroyed by arsonists on motorbikes. The owner of the car and 10 other Bahá'í families in the town had received threatening letters from a group calling itself the Anti-Bahá'ism Movement of the Youth of Rafsanjan that, among other things, threatened jihad (holy war) against the Bahá'ís.
- On 7 January 2009, a cleric from Qom visited the village of Khabr in Kerman province and delivered a sermon in which he attacked the Bahá'í Faith and encouraged the people of Khabr to set Bahá'í-owned orchards on fire. The following day about 10 meters of the fence surrounding an orchard owned by Imamali Rasekhi was set on fire. A second attempt to burn Mr. Rasekhi's orchard was made a week later, but only part of its wall (shared with a Muslim orchard owner) was damaged. After the departure of the Qom cleric, a local cleric continued to urge Muslims to attack Bahá'ís—and soon after that anti-Bahá'í graffiti then appeared on walls surrounding the homes and shops of some Bahá'ís from the village.



On 10 June 2008, the Mousavi family of Fars province narrowly escaped injury when an arsonist caused a fire that destroyed a hut near where the family was sleeping.

- On 10 June 2008, an outbuilding on the property of Mr. and Mrs. Mousavi, elderly Bahá'ís living in the village of Tangriz in Fars province, was destroyed by fire when it was doused with gasoline. The Mousavis, along with their two sons who were sleeping close to the building, narrowly escaped injury when the gasoline tank used to start the fire exploded. The Mousavis believe that the perpetrator thought they were all sleeping in the hut when he started the fire. Mr. Mousavi issued a formal complaint against the person they suspected, but the legal office has declined to pursue the case because the suspect swore on the Qur'an that he was not guilty. Out of respect for the Qur'an, the Mousavis dropped the charges.
- On 15 July 2008, Molotov cocktails were thrown into the front courtyard of the home of

Khusraw Dehghani and his wife, Dr. Huma Agahi, in Vilashahr, only months after anonymous threats directly related to her being a Bahá'í forced Dr. Agahi to close her clinic in nearby Najafabad where she had practiced medicine for 28 years.

- On 18 July 2008, the house of the Shaker family in Kerman went up in flames, only weeks after their car had been torched. These events came after a series of threatening phone calls.

5 School Children and Students

During a 30-day period from mid-January to mid-February 2007, some 150 incidents of insults, mistreatment, and even physical violence by school authorities against Bahá'í students were reported in at least 10 Iranian cities. Such incidents have continued sporadically around the nation.

The Bahá'í children of Semnan have not been spared these attacks. In the years 2008 and 2009, the following incidents were reported:

- On more than two occasions, Muslim clergymen were invited into classrooms in Semnan in order to give lectures insulting the Bahá'í Faith. This has occurred at various educational levels.
- School authorities on at least two occasions have refused to register Bahá'í children for school.
- Muslim students have been encouraged by their teachers or other school authorities to physically hurt Bahá'í students.
- School authorities have sought to segregate Bahá'í students by forcing them to sit separately from others.

While exact details of what has been said or done in the classrooms of Semnan are difficult to come by, attacks on Bahá'í school children in other places have been marked by a clear effort to pressure students to convert to Islam.

They have been required to sit and listen to the slander of their faith by religious instructors, and they have been taught and tested on “Iranian history” in authorized texts that denigrate, distort, and brazenly falsify Bahá'í religious history.

Bahá'í school children have also been repeatedly told that they are not to attempt to “teach” or discuss their religion with other students.

On 18 May 2008, on the last day in school in Shiraz, every primary school child received a sealed envelope as a “gift” from a publishing company, containing a 12-page color children's booklet that provided an erroneous and misleading version of the life story of the Báb, the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith, presented in a mocking and degrading manner.

These attacks plainly follow the outline of the 1991 Bahá'í Question memorandum.

Under the heading “educational and cultural status,” that document states that Bahá'ís can be enrolled in schools “provided they have not identified themselves as Bahá'ís.” Moreover, it states that Bahá'ís, where possible, “should be enrolled in schools which have a strong and imposing religious ideology.”

The Bahá'í Question memorandum also states that Bahá'í students must be expelled from universities, “either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís.”

On a national level, the effort to deny Bahá'í university students access to education is an ongoing problem. Shortly after the 1979 Islamic revolution, large numbers of Bahá'í youth and children were expelled from school. The expulsions were not systematic, focusing mainly on children who were most strongly identified as Bahá'ís, but they ranged across the entire education system, from primary, through secondary, to the college level, where the ban was virtually total.

In the 1990s, partly in response to international pressure, primary and secondary school children were allowed to re-enroll. However, the government maintained the ban on the entry of Bahá'í youth into public and private colleges and universities until 2004.

Until then, the government used a simple mechanism to exclude Bahá'ís from higher education: it required that all who take the national university entrance examination declare their religion. And applicants who indicated other than one of the four officially recognized religions in Iran—Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism—were excluded.

In late 2003, the government announced it would drop the declaration of religious affiliation on the application for the national university entrance examination. This, Bahá'í youth believed at the time, cleared the way for them to take the examination and to enroll in university in academic year 2004-2005.

However, each year since then, the government has used some type of ploy to prevent large numbers of Bahá'ís from enrolling in university. These have ranged from simply expelling Bahá'ís after they

enrolled to a newer tactic of claiming they cannot be enrolled because their files are “incomplete.”



Facsimile of a student identification card for Minoo Shahriari, who was expelled from Semnan University on 1 March 2009 because she is a Bahá'í. (Source: Iran Press Watch)

In 2006, Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology sent a confidential letter to 81 Iranian universities—including Semnan University—instructing them to expel any student who is discovered to be a Bahá'í. [See page 37.] And over the years, dozens if not hundreds of Bahá'í students have been expelled.

Bahá'í university students in Semnan have faced similar trials. One, for example, was dismissed from the Fazilat Institute of Higher Education in December 2008. In March the following year, a Bahá'í student

in economic studies was expelled from Semnan University. Later that year, three other Bahá'ís were also expelled by order of the university's Security Office one week after the start of the semester. Protesting their expulsion, they were informed that the university had received the order from “a higher authority.”

6 Economic Attacks

Efforts to destroy the economic life of the Bahá'í community have been a facet of the government's persecution since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when the government began dismissing Bahá'í civil servants wholesale—and then moved to systematically revoke the business licenses of Bahá'ís in the private sector. In this manner, thousands of Bahá'ís have lost jobs or sources of livelihood over the last 30 years.

Then, during the 1990s, there was a period of relative security, when government pressure eased.

More recently, however, economic oppression has again risen—and the situation in Semnan offers a case study of how authorities are attempting to starve Bahá'ís out of existence.

A recent case shows the extremes to which authorities are willing to go to eliminate means of livelihood for Bahá'ís in Semnan. On 28 May 2012, Intelligence Ministry agents raided and sealed two factories, with full or partial Bahá'í ownership. One of the factories—which manufactured drapery—employed 51 staff, 36 of whom were not Bahá'ís. The other, a lens grinding factory, had two Bahá'í employees and six others. Such closures demonstrate that, in the ongoing effort to strangle the Bahá'ís economically, the authorities are willing to cause other workers—including Shia Muslims—to face economic hardship as well.

The assault on the livelihood of the Bahá'í community of Semnan began in early 2009 when the Chamber of Commerce of Semnan, along with 39 member trade unions, decided to stop issuing business licenses and managerial permits to the Bahá'ís—and to stop renewing current licenses.

This led to the revocation and confiscation of existing business licenses and permits for Bahá'ís throughout the city. As well, authorities frequently put seals on the doors of Bahá'í-owned shops in the city, indicating they have been officially closed.

As of this writing, at least 27 Bahá'í-run business enterprises, including factories, shops, workshops, and offices have been closed by the authorities, leaving more than 110 Bahá'í families without a source of income.

Among those whose shops were closed this way is Shamil Pirasteh. Her business license was revoked without explanation on 10 March 2009. When officials were asked about the revocation, they said the order came from “higher authorities.”

In another example, the flower shop of Peiman Rahmanian was closed after his business license was revoked in 2009. His father had owned and successfully operated the shop for some 20 years.

At least 27 Bahá'í-run business enterprises, including factories, shops, workshops, and offices have been closed by the authorities, leaving more than 110 Bahá'í families without a source of income.



The clothing store of Shamil Pirasteh was closed by local authorities. Shown here is the official notice affixed to the front door declaring it closed.

Reports indicate that these steps came as a result of pressure that the head of the Basij trade union had placed on these organizations.

Banks have also begun to refuse to extend loans to Bahá'ís who are otherwise well qualified to receive such financial support. Mr. Behfar Khanjani—husband of Shamil Pirasteh—was repeatedly refused loans that would keep him and his wife solvent. At least five other Bahá'ís in Semnan have been refused loans. Mr. Khanjani's apparel store was closed and he was imprisoned in June 2011 for four years.

Recently, some of the Bahá'ís of Semnan were barred from bringing merchandise from elsewhere to the province for trade and sale, gravely limiting or cutting off their ability to generate any income. Those who are still able to operate their businesses report that they are under surveillance and receive phone calls to report to the authorities from time to time. When they do so, they are told the call they received did not come from that office. In other cases they are accused of undermining the government by closing their stores on Bahá'í holy days. They are told that by doing so they are creating public disturbance for which the authorities threaten to shut down their businesses.

Authorities have also harassed Bahá'í farmers in the region. For instance, orders were issued to destroy the acreage which the farmers had obtained, with legal permission, for their own use. In one case, orders were given to destroy the animal stock on these farmlands, which had been purchased by a Bahá'í farmer 17 years previously. On other occasions, authorities have closed and sealed water wells on Bahá'í farms, even though permits for those wells had been legally issued.

There have also been general efforts in Semnan to suppress Bahá'í businesses by encouraging people not to patronize them. Other merchants, such as architects, have been warned against dealing with Bahá'ís in construction, including accepting bids or contracts from them.

All of these measures are in line with the policy outlined in the Bahá'í Question memorandum—and they have also been implemented in other towns and cities throughout Iran.

That this effort at economic strangulation is official and ongoing government policy was proved by the emergence of a secret letter, dated 9 April 2007, from the Public Places Supervision Office of the Public Intelligence and Security Force in the province of Tehran. Addressed to regional



commanders of police and the heads of public intelligence and security forces, that letter instructs them to prevent members of the “perverse Bahaist sect” from engaging in a wide range of businesses. These include “high-earning businesses,” “sensitive business” categories, such as the press, engraving, the tourist industry, car rentals, publishing, hostel and hotel management, photography and film, computer sales, and Internet cafés, and food businesses which might offend Shia concepts of “cleanliness.”

Facsimile of 9 April 2007 letter from the Public Places Supervision Office of the Public Intelligence and Security Force in the province of Tehran. Addressed to regional commanders of police and the heads of public intelligence and security forces, the letter instructs them to prevent members of the “perverse Bahaist sect” from engaging in a wide range of businesses.

7 Incitement to Hatred

At the heart of the campaign in Semnan has been an effort to rouse hatred towards Bahá'ís among the local population. As the rise in attacks on Bahá'ís and Bahá'í properties over the last few years indicates, this campaign has apparently proved effective. Anti-Bahá'í seminars, the distribution of anti-Bahá'í pamphlets, and the broadcasting of anti-Bahá'í rhetoric at Friday sermons in Semnan mosques have all been done with the intention of creating such an atmosphere of suspicion and animosity that the authorities are then free to act against the Bahá'ís with impunity, or so that local citizens are willing to take matters into their own hands.

The campaign in Semnan can be said to have begun with a series of anti-Bahá'í seminars and rallies that occurred in late 2008. Many of these were reported by Iranian news media, which provide the main account of these activities.



The pattern for incitement to hatred against Bahá'ís originates at the highest level of government. In October 2010, for example, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei gave a speech in Qom in which he identified Bahá'ís as enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

On 25 November 2008, for example, the Rasa News Agency published an article stating that Mahnaz Raoufi, author of an anti-Bahá'í book called *The Grim Shadow*, had given an address in Semnan. Held at the Semnan Red Crescent Society theater, the lecture set out to analyze the link between the Bahá'í Faith and Zionism. According to the report, the program began with two short videos purporting to demonstrate the activities and intentions of “the perverse Bahaist sect.”

Ms. Raoufi claims to be a former Bahá'í who converted to Islam. In recent years, she has travelled to various cities in Iran, presenting anti-Bahá'í speeches to groups including schools, youth organizations, and the general public. Her tour follows publication of a series of articles in *Kayhan*, the semi-official newspaper of Iran's Supreme Leader, that purport to be her “memoirs.” Ms. Raoufi has also published several books, given a series of radio interviews, and launched several websites focusing on her books and her interviews.

Another news account indicates Ms. Raoufi spoke again in Semnan in early December 2009 on similar topics. This was followed by a series of raids on 20 Bahá'í homes on 15 December 2009

by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence.

In February 2009, there were more anti-Bahá'í speeches and seminars in the city. Ms. Raoufi again addressed a large gathering, saying that the “Bahaist sect” detests Islam and its holy days, ridicules them, and uses them as propaganda against humanity. The article reports that Ms. Raoufi said this “misguided sect” is financially supported by western countries, including the United States, and, with the cunning disguise of being a compassionate religion, hides its hatred of Islam.

On 20 February 2009, Fars News ran an article titled “Bahaism is a Brainchild of Zionism,” which reported that the Friday prayer leader in Semnan had said “Bahaism” is a product of Zionism and that it had been created to combat Islam.

The article asserted that Hojjatol-Islam Seyyed Mohammad Shah-Cheraghi said “no one should have any kind of interaction, especially business transactions, with this sect because they are against Islam.” He reportedly also said if the Iranian nation so decides, it can eliminate “Bahaism” in Iran as it did with the Pahlavi regime.

This type of demonization of Bahá'ís has a long history in Iran. For more than 150 years, Bahá'ís



A home in Semnan sprayed with offensive graffiti which, when translated into English, reads: “Down with the pagan Bahá'í. Down with America and Britain.”

have been portrayed falsely from the pulpit, in the press, and more recently on radio, television, and even in scholarly publications. But this campaign has been stepped up in recent years, apparently as part of an overall effort to whip up public animosity against Bahá'ís.

Since 2005, for example, the semi-official *Kayhan* newspaper has run more than 200 false, misleading or incendiary articles about Bahá'í teachings, history and activities—including Ms. Raoufi's memoirs. The *Kayhan* articles engage in a deliberate distortion of history, make use of fake historical documents, and falsely describe Bahá'í moral principles in a manner that would be

offensive to Muslims. This effort has been echoed on television and radio.

A 27 October 2005 article titled “Understanding the Roots of Bahaism,” for example, attempts to incite public sentiment by raising time-worn, utterly false allegations that the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths were the creation of colonial powers. “Babism and Bahaism are [merely] notions and are among the religious sects that were created by colonialists to corrupt the noble and pure Islamic ideas...,” the article said.

The media campaign against Bahá'ís extends to the Internet. On 26 May 2008, for example, *Kayhan* reported that a new Internet site dedicated to the “fight against Bahaism” will soon be launched by an “organization of the people.” The article quotes the late Ayatollah Khomeini as saying that it was his duty to warn Iran and all the Muslims in the world to free the country from the control of Zionism, which has appeared in Iran as the “Bahaist sect.”

In December 2008, a new weekly half-hour radio program, titled *Mirage*, began broadcasting on the national radio network, Maref. The program takes the form of round table discussions that are aimed at informing the public, with special focus on the youth, about the “real” Bahá'í Faith. The use of the Internet to disseminate attacks against the Faith increases day by day.

There have been numerous more recent articles, pamphlets, posters, and exhibitions that vilify the Bahá'í Faith and its history.

As noted in the introduction, in October 2011 the Bahá'í International Community issued a report on this campaign, titled *Inciting Hatred: Iran's media campaign to demonize Bahá'ís*. That report offered a snapshot of the official and semi-official anti-Bahá'í propaganda issued during a 16-month period from late 2009 through early May 2011, documenting more than 400 articles, broadcasts or Web pages that falsely portrayed Bahá'ís as the source of every conceivable evil. As the report noted:

They are accused of being agents for various imperialist or colonialist factions; they face continuous but utterly unfounded allegations of immorality; they are branded as social pariahs to be shunned. The propaganda is shocking in its volume and vehemence, its scope and sophistication, cynically calculated to stir up antagonism against a peaceful religious community whose members are striving to contribute to the well-being of their society.

The propaganda is shocking in its volume and vehemence, its scope and sophistication, cynically calculated to stir up antagonism against a peaceful religious community whose members are striving to contribute to the well-being of their society.

A number of the articles or broadcasts cataloged in the 2010-2011 survey emerged from or referenced Semnan. These include:

- A 29 April 2010 report carried by the Fars News Agency, a government-affiliated service, that quoted an education and research expert at the Islamic Propaganda Office of the Semnan province, a Mr. Abdollahyan, as saying: “Having researched and studied Iran’s cultural transformation during the last three centuries, we conclude that the formation of sects like Wahhabism and Bahaism has been a product of British and Russian colonialism.” The report said Mr. Abdollahyan also spoke about the importance of raising the awareness of the people, particularly the youth, strengthening the relationship between the people and the clergy, and the Islamicizing of school and university education as among the ways to confront the enemy’s efforts to divide and exploit the Iranian nation.

- A report, carried by Fars News on 18 May 2010, said that Hojjatoleslam Valiollah Mesbahi, the head of the Islamic Development Organization in the nearby city of Garmsar, also in Semnan province, had warned Muslim youth not to become affiliated with Bahá'ís or other “religious sects,” such as Wahabbism. These two sects are developed and supported financially by the “international arrogance of the Zionist regime,” he said, along with the United States and the United Kingdom. Mr. Mesbahi continued by saying that in the contemporary history of Iran, Bahá'ísm has played a very negative and destructive role. This political group, pretending to be a religious sect, absolutely served the interests of the enemies, he said.
- On 13 February 2011, the Pupils Association News Agency, a government affiliated Web site for students, carried an interview with the Representative of Iran's Supreme Leader in Semnan province. In that interview, he emphasized that the students must avoid becoming involved in recently emerging sects and the Bahá'í Faith. He further said that in the soft war the enemy is aiming to create a divide between students and the clergy. “The enemies' intention is to separate students from their education, families, and the Supreme Leader, and they should be prevented from successfully carrying out their sinister schemes. The enemies of Islam are targeting the educational system and in particular the students,” said the Supreme Leader's representative.

8 Religious Freedom

The few official documents that have surfaced in Semnan—such as the court decisions against those Bahá'ís who have been arrested—plainly show that the only “crime” Bahá'ís stand accused of is their belief in and practice of their religion.

As noted earlier, Sahba Rezvani was arrested after a raid on her house and 19 other Bahá'í-owned homes on 15 December 2008, and then convicted and sentenced to three years in prison.

According to court documents, Ms. Rezvani was convicted of two “crimes”: making “propaganda against the holy regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran” and the “formation of an illegal group.”

The first charge, according to court documents, accused her of “teaching against the Islamic Republic by establishing courses and classes, distributing educational CDs, and being involved in individual teaching [propaganda] in favor of the perverse sect of Bahaism.”

The second charge refers to her membership in an ad hoc group designed to serve the minimum administrative needs of the Bahá'í community of Semnan. Such groups were formed at the local level after all Bahá'í elected assemblies were disbanded in response to a government decree in 1983. These ad hoc committees existed for years with the full knowledge of the government, but were disbanded in 2010 as a concession to the government in relation to the imprisonment of seven national Bahá'í leaders.

Without doubt, the government's charges are illegal and false.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, an international treaty which Iran has signed, clearly upholds the right to freedom of religion or belief:

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”

It continues:

“No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.”

To allege that Bahá'ís have committed a crime by “teaching” their religion is clearly contrary to this covenant.

This allegation is stretched to the point of incredulity when Bahá'ís are convicted and suffer long, harsh imprisonment for “indirect teaching”—that is, simply for being of service to their fellow citizens.

The right to freedom of religion or belief, likewise, is upheld by numerous international treaties

and documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.



For Bahá'ís, freedom to practice their religion encompasses efforts to help others. In May 2006, 54 young Bahá'ís were arrested for offering classes in language skills and basic moral principles to poor and underserved children in and around Shiraz. At left is one such class, held in Katsbas, outside Shiraz.

9 The Bahá'í Question

Ever since the Bahá'í Faith was founded in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century, its members have been the victims of episodic persecution. At least 4,000 of its earliest followers were killed by those who viewed the nascent Faith—known then as the Bábí movement—as heretical to Islam.

Moreover, the use of Bahá'ís as a convenient scapegoat for all the regime's woes is part of a historical pattern of justifying authoritarianism through the construction of imaginary enemies against which the populace must unite in uncritical obedience to their leaders.

During the 20th century, periodic outbreaks of violence against Bahá'ís continued, with the government often using them as a scapegoat. In 1933, for example, Bahá'í literature was banned, Bahá'í marriages were not recognized, and Bahá'ís in public service were demoted or lost their jobs. In 1955, the government oversaw the demolition of the Bahá'í national center in Tehran and many Bahá'í homes were plundered after a radical cleric began broadcasting anti-Bahá'í rhetoric on national radio.



Muslim leaders and members of the Shah's army destroyed the National Bahá'í Center with pickaxes in Tehran in 1955 after a radical cleric began broadcasting anti-Bahá'í rhetoric on national radio.

While most of these previous episodes of persecution were the response of a secular government to pressures of the religious clergy and the political factions they influenced, the coming of a genuine theocracy in 1979 changed everything for the worse for Bahá'ís.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian Bahá'ís have faced a government-sponsored, systematic campaign of religious persecution in their homeland. In its early stages, more than 200 Bahá'ís were killed and at least 1,000 were imprisoned, solely because of their religious beliefs.

In the early 1990s, the government shifted its focus to social, economic, and cultural restrictions aimed at blocking the development of Iran's Bahá'í community. Such measures included efforts to deprive Bahá'ís of their livelihood, to destroy their cultural heritage, and to prevent their young people from obtaining higher education.

The government's long term strategy to destroy the Bahá'í community without attracting undue international attention was cruelly outlined in a secret 1991 memorandum that explicitly aimed at establishing a policy regarding "the Bahá'í question."

Drafted by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, the document calls for a series of social and economic measures that are nothing less than a blueprint for the strangulation of the Bahá'í community.

Stamped "confidential," the document was prepared at the request of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the then President of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. The memorandum was signed by Hujjatu'l Islam Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani, Secretary of the Council, and approved by Mr. Khamenei, who added his signature to the document.

The memorandum came to light in 1993, when it was released in connection with a United Nations report on Iran's human rights.

The memorandum specifically calls for Iran's Bahá'ís to be treated in such a way "that their progress and development are blocked," providing conclusive evidence that the campaign against the Bahá'ís is centrally directed by the government.

The document indicates, for example, that the government aims to keep the Bahá'ís illiterate and uneducated, living only at a subsistence level, and fearful at every moment that even the tiniest infraction will bring the threat of imprisonment or worse.

The memorandum says, for example, that all Bahá'ís should be expelled from universities; that they shall be denied "positions of influence," and instead only be allowed to earn "a modest livelihood as is available to the general population"; and even that they are to be denied "employment if they identify themselves as Bahá'ís."

The memorandum also spells out the conditions under which Bahá'ís can be arrested and imprisoned, offering a rationale for such arrests without raising undue international attention. The docu-



The 1991 secret memorandum on the "Bahá'í Question." The full document is reproduced on page 34.

The document indicates that the government aims to keep the Bahá'ís illiterate and uneducated, living only at a subsistence level, and fearful at every moment that even the tiniest infraction will bring the threat of imprisonment or worse.

ment states that Bahá'ís “will not be arrested, imprisoned, or penalized without reason.” While that may at first glance seem reasonable, the upsurge in arrests and imprisonments that have followed make clear that the real issue is to ensure that when Bahá'ís are arrested, some sort of charges—which are inevitably false—will be attached, giving the appearance of due process.

In the years since the memorandum was written, the Iranian Bahá'í community has experienced increasing persecution in the manner it outlines. Bahá'ís have been detained, imprisoned, and charged with “spying,” among other false accusations. They have been denied access to education and to sources of livelihood. And they have been stripped of all influence in Iranian society and deprived of their right to religious freedom.



In 2008, seven national-level Bahá'í leaders were arrested and ultimately convicted of spying and other false charges. As of this writing, they are serving 20-year sentences—the longest of any current prisoners of conscience. The seven are, seated from left, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Saeid Rezaie, and, standing, Fariba Kamalabadi, Vahid Tizfahm, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, and Mahvash Sabet.

Efforts to “block” the development of the Bahá'í community have included the razing of Bahá'í sacred sites. In recent years, contrary to increasing demands among Iranians for equality among all citizens, the government has instead intensified its repression.

In 2008, the government arrested and imprisoned the entire national Bahá'í leadership on false allegations that they were spying for Israel and other wrongful charges. As of this writing, they are serving 20-year sentences, the longest sentences of any current prisoners of conscience in Iran.

10 Conclusion

This report has sought to document the degree to which the Iranian government has over the last four years dramatically intensified the persecution of Bahá'ís in one Iranian city.

Against a Bahá'í community of just a few hundred individuals, the government or its agents in Semnan have launched a series of attacks that encompass virtually every tactic used in the oppression of Iranian Bahá'ís around the country for the last 30 years.



The Bahá'ís of Semnan have faced arrests—at least 34 since 2005—along with more than a dozen incidents of arson, repeated incidents of vandalism against the Bahá'í cemetery, and periodic abuse directed against Bahá'í children in the schools since 2009. They have endured a well-publicized campaign of hate speech, constant surveillance by state security agencies, and coercion aimed at halting their community worship. And,

like their co-religionists throughout Iran, the Bahá'ís of Semnan have also had their shops and businesses unjustly closed down by local officials and they have witnessed their youth struggle against a national policy that deprives them of access to higher education.

The fact that such attacks are often carried out by semi-official elements or agents in plainclothes, moreover, reflects part of an overall strategy by the government to flout international standards of justice without overtly calling attention to itself.

In all of these aspects, the situation in Semnan represents a microcosm of what is happening to Iranian Bahá'ís nationwide, an example by which the outside world can observe how Iran is systematically and methodically implementing its overall plan to eliminate the Bahá'í community as a viable entity in the country.

The Bahá'ís of Semnan have made wide-ranging efforts to bring the injustices they face to the attention of the relevant national or regional authorities, and to seek redress. These representations have been to no avail, except for two cases in which Bahá'í families were finally allowed to bury loved ones in the Bahá'í cemetery after urgent appeals.

There have been Bahá'ís in Semnan since the earliest days of the Bahá'í Faith. Many well-known early adherents have come from the region. They are, moreover, well-known to their neighbors as

honest and peace-loving people. The question must be asked, then: why does the Iranian government so fear the Bahá'ís that they are willing to orchestrate such an intensive and well-coordinated campaign against them, especially in a small community like Semnan? Why shouldn't the Bahá'ís

The question must be asked, then: why does the Iranian government so fear the Bahá'ís that they are willing to orchestrate such an intensive and well-coordinated campaign against them, especially in a small community like Semnan?

of Semnan expect to be treated with equality, in accord with the promises of tolerance and justice that are said to be guaranteed to all citizens in the Islamic Republic by the Iranian Constitution?

By bringing this situation to light, the Bahá'í International Community hopes that those outside Iran—who remain the last line of defense for Bahá'ís and

other oppressed minorities in that country—will voice their concern over Iran's continued flagrant violations of international human rights standards. The Bahá'í International Community also hopes that the Iranian government, itself, might come to realize that its persecution of innocent Bahá'ís—who are pledged to non-violence and non-partisanship and who only desire to contribute to the betterment of the society around them—is a futile and counterproductive effort.

Appendix I – Chronology of Events

Here is a chronology of some of the major incidents related to the persecution of Bahá'ís in Semnan since 2005:

2005

May

- Eight Bahá'ís arrested.

June

- Eight Bahá'ís summoned to appear before the office of the Public Prosecutor.

2006

April

- One Bahá'í sentenced to six months in prison.

September

- Eight Bahá'ís denied appeal.

2007

August - September

- Appeals Court confirms fining of three Bahá'ís in Semnan.

July

- Bahá'ís summoned for questioning.

August

- Police asked all advertising agencies not to work with Bahá'ís because goods sold by them should not be promoted. Efforts made by Bahá'ís to restore their right to advertise were not successful.

December

- Four Bahá'ís charged and fined.

2008

August

- Bahá'í student expelled from university three weeks before graduation.

November-December

- At least two anti-Bahá'í rallies. One analyzed the supposed link between the Bahá'í Faith and Zionism, beginning with two short videos about the “Bahaist sect.”

December

- Homes of 20 Bahá'ís in Semnan raided. Bahá'í materials, computers and mobile telephones seized. Nine Bahá'ís from this group were ultimately arrested on false or illegal charges.
- A Bahá'í student dismissed from the Fazilat Institute of Higher Education.
- In early 2009, the Chamber of Commerce of Semnan, along with 39 member trade unions, decided to no longer issue business licenses and managerial permits to the Bahá'ís, and not to renew current licenses.

2009

January

- Two Bahá'ís' appeals rejected.

February

- Apartment building that houses several Bahá'í families attacked by arsonists. Same building struck again three weeks later.
- Two Bahá'í homes attacked by arsonists.
- Bahá'í cemetery invaded. Fifty gravestones demolished, mortuary set on fire.
- One Bahá'í charged with being a member of the illegal Bahá'í administrative agency.
- Anti-Bahá'í seminar held at which attendees were told that the “Bahaist sect” detests Islam and its holy days, ridicules them and uses them as propaganda against humanity.
- Friday prayer leader announced “Bahaism” is a product of Zionism, created to combat Islam.

March

- One Bahá'í's car and shop defaced with anti-Bahá'í graffiti. Stones later thrown at his shop and a dead cat hung on his door. Same shop also set on fire by attackers on motorbikes.
- One Bahá'í arrested.
- A business license of one Bahá'í revoked without explanation. When officials were asked about the revocation, they said the order came from “higher authorities.”
- One shop raided.
- University student in economic studies expelled from Semnan University in her first semester.
- Anti-Bahá'í graffiti sprayed on walls and doors of apartments belonging to at least nine Bahá'ís in Semnan.
- One store sealed.

April

- Three Bahá'ís arrested.
- One Bahá'í sentenced to two and a half years imprisonment.
- Two Bahá'ís' cars vandalized.

May

- Bahá'í family faced difficulty burying their deceased family member.
- A Bahá'í's house was attacked.

June

- Bahá'í-owned store set on fire by arsonists.

August

- Large section of Bahá'í cemetery destroyed. Attackers also blocked door to cemetery building with soil.

September

- Bahá'í burial service raided; mob shouted insults and threats.
- Mob gather in front of Semnan city hall and the provisional governor's office shouting "Death to Bahá'í."

October

- Three Bahá'í students expelled from Semnan University.

2011

September

- Three Bahá'ís interrogated.

October

- Two Bahá'ís sentenced respectively to a one year imprisonment and three years exile from Semnan and six years imprisonment.
- Sentences upheld for two Bahá'ís.

November

- One Bahá'í sentenced to a one year imprisonment.
- One Bahá'í completed sentence.
- Four Bahá'ís imprisoned away from home at Evin prison in Tehran.

December

- One Bahá'í sentenced to a one year imprisonment and deprived of business license for five years.
- Two Bahá'ís interrogated.
- One Bahá'í sentenced to seven years imprisonment.
- Businesses of at least 12 Bahá'ís shut down.

2012

January

- One Bahá'í sentenced to three years imprisonment.

- One Bahá'í detained one day, released with 15-day ban on leaving city.
- One Bahá'í interrogated.
- Two Bahá'ís released, one re-arrested.

April

- Two Bahá'ís tried.
- Business of one Bahá'í sealed.

May

- Two Bahá'í-owned factories shut down by authorities.
- Two young Bahá'í women being kept in a section of Semnan prison with 38 other prisoners, the majority of whom are drug addicts.
- A Bahá'í man is sentenced to six and a half years in prison plus an earlier six months added to the new sentence. Another is sentenced to four and a half years in prison.
- A Bahá'í man is summoned to begin serving a term of six years in prison.
- Efforts undertaken by a Bahá'í woman for her husband to be granted medical leave from prison are unsuccessful. The wife herself has been sentenced to four years and four months in prison. The couple have a seven-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son. If both parents are forced to serve their sentences concurrently, there will be no one to care for their children.

June

- A Bahá'í-owned aluminium doors and windows manufacturing business sealed. Its owner is in prison.

July

- One day after the commemoration of a Bahá'í holy day, a number of business owners in Semnan—as well as Aligoudarz, Isfahan, and Mashhad—were summoned to the Public Places Supervision Office. Officials objected to the closure of their business on the holy day, asserting that doing so constituted propagating the Faith. A number of businesses were shut down in Semnan as a result of this action.
- The mother of a one-and-a-half month old baby summoned to begin her sentence.

Appendix II – Related Documents

The following documents, in the original Persian with an English translation following, show conclusively that the persecution of Bahá'ís in Semnan and elsewhere in Iran is official government policy. Many were once secret but were obtained and released by the United Nations or human rights organizations. Included are:

- The 1991 “Bahá'í Question” memorandum. Obtained and released in 1993 by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Iran, this confidential memorandum is endorsed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. It outlines the Islamic Republic’s plan to block the progress and development of Iranian Bahá'ís.
- A 2006 letter from Iran’s Ministry of Science, Research and Technology instructing some 81 Iranian universities to expel any student who is discovered to be a Bahá'í. Semnan University is number 20 on the list.
- A 9 April 2007 letter to police commanders around Tehran that calls for tight restrictions on Bahá'í businesses.
- An 8 July 2009 court order convicting Semnan resident Siamak Ighani of “membership in illegal groups” and “propaganda activities against the regime” for his practice of the Bahá'í Faith.

English translation of the 1991 “Bahá'í Question” memorandum outlining the Islamic Republic’s plan to block the progress and development of Iranian Bahá'ís. See page 23.

[TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

[Text in square brackets added by translator]

In the Name of God!

The Islamic Republic of Iran

The Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council

Number: 1327/....

Date: 6/12/69 [25 February 1991]

Enclosure: None

CONFIDENTIAL

Dr. Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani

Head of the Office of the Esteemed Leader [Khamenei]

Greetings!

After greetings, with reference to the letter #1/783 dated 10/10/69 [31 December 1990], concerning the instructions of the Esteemed Leader which had been conveyed to the Respected President regarding the Bahá'í question, we inform you that, since the respected President and the Head of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council had referred this question to this Council for consideration and study, it was placed on the Council's agenda of session #128 on 16/11/69 [5 February 1991] and session #119 of 2/11/69 [22 January 1991]. In addition to the above, and further to the [results of the] discussions held in this regard in session #112 of 2/5/66 [24 July 1987] presided over by the Esteemed Leader (head and member of the Supreme Council), the recent views and directives given by the Esteemed Leader regarding the Bahá'í question were conveyed to the Supreme Council. In consideration of the contents of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the religious and civil laws and general policies of the country, these matters were carefully studied and decisions pronounced.

In arriving at the decisions and proposing reasonable ways to counter the above question, due consideration was given to the wishes of the Esteemed Leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran [Khamenei], namely, that “in this regard a specific policy should be devised in such a way that everyone will understand what should or should not be done.” Consequently, the following proposals and recommendations resulted from these discussions.

The respected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the Head of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, while approving these recommendations, instructed us to convey them to the Esteemed Leader [Khamenei] so that appropriate action may be taken according to his guidance.

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

A. General status of the Bahá'ís within the country's system

1. They will not be expelled from the country without reason.
2. They will not be arrested, imprisoned, or penalized without reason.
3. The government's dealings with them must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked.

B. Educational and cultural status

1. They can be enrolled in schools provided they have not identified themselves as Bahá'ís.
2. Preferably, they should be enrolled in schools which have a strong and imposing religious ideology.
3. They must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís.
4. Their political (espionage) activities must be dealt with according to appropriate government laws and policies, and their religious and propaganda activities should be answered by giving them religious and cultural responses, as well as propaganda.
5. Propaganda institutions (such as the Islamic Propaganda Organization) must establish an independent section to counter the propaganda and religious activities of the Bahá'ís.
6. A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country.

C. Legal and social status

1. Permit them a modest livelihood as is available to the general population.
2. To the extent that it does not encourage them to be Bahá'ís, it is permissible to provide them the means for ordinary living in accordance with the general rights given to every Iranian citizen, such as ration booklets, passports, burial certificates, work permits, etc.
3. Deny them employment if they identify themselves as Bahá'ís.
4. Deny them any position of influence, such as in the educational sector, etc.

Wishing you divine confirmations,

Secretary of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council

Dr. Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani

[Signature]

[Note in the handwriting of Mr. Khamenei]

In the Name of God!

The decision of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council seems sufficient.

I thank you gentlemen for your attention and efforts.

[signed:] Ali Khamenei

Persian text of 2006 letter from Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology instructing Iranian universities to expel any student who is discovered to be a Bahá'í. See page 13.

جمهوری اسلامی ایران
وزارت علوم، تحقیقات و فناوری

محرمانه

مدیریت محترم حراست:

۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲- دانشگاه ارومیه ۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۲۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۳۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۴۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۵۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۶۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۷۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۸۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۰- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۱- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۲- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۳- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۴- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۵- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۶- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۷- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۸- دانشگاه اصفهان ۹۹- دانشگاه اصفهان ۱۰۰- دانشگاه اصفهان

موضوع: ممنوعیت تحصیل افراد بهائیان در دانشگاهها

باسلام

احتراماً، به آگاهی میرساند، براساس مصوبه شماره ۱۲۳۷/م.س. مورخ ۶۹/۱۲/۶ شورای عالی انقلاب فرهنگی و اعلام مراجع ذیصلاح امنیتی، لذا، خاص بهائیان چنانچه در حین ورود به دانشگاه و یا حین تحصیل مشخص گردد که بهائیان هستند، می بایست از دانشگاه اخراج گردند. لذا ضروری است نسبت به جلوگیری از ادامه تحصیل یا اشتغال سراسری بهائیان اقدام لازم و مستعجل گردد. نتیجه را به این مرکز منعکس فرمائید.

امیر رازی
مدیرکل حفاظت مرکزی
۱۳۸۶

English text of 2006 letter from Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology instructing Iranian universities to expel any student who is discovered to be a Bahá'í. Semnan University is number 20 on the list.

[PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION FROM Persian]

[Translator's notes appear in square brackets [].]

Date: [?]/[?]/1385 [2006] [Emblem]

Number: [Illegible] In the Name of God Islamic Republic of Iran

[Illegible]: M/2/3/9378

Ministry of Science, Research and Technology

[Unidentified emblem]

Confidential

The esteemed management of the Security Office,

[The 81 universities addressed in this letter are listed below.]

Subject: Banning of the education of Bahá'ís in universities

Greetings,

Respectfully, we inform you that in accordance with decree number 1327/M/S, dated 6/12/69 [25 February 1991], issued by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and the notification of the responsible authorities of the Intelligence [Office], if Bahá'í individuals, at the time of enrolment at university or in the course of their studies, are identified as Bahá'ís, they must be expelled from university. Therefore, it is necessary to take measures to prevent the further studies of the aforementioned [individuals] and forward a follow-up report to this Office.

Asghar Zári'í [Asghar Zarei]

Director General of the Central Security Office

[Signature]

[The list of 81 universities]

1. University of Arák [Arak]
2. Urúmiyyih [Urmia] University
3. University of Isfahán [Isfahan]
4. Ílám [Ilam] University

5. Al-Zahrá [Alzahra] University
6. Bú-'Alí Síná [Bu Ali Sina] University
7. University of Bírjand [Birjand]
8. Imam Khomeini International University
9. Payám-i-Núr [Payame Noor] University
10. University of Tabríz [Tabriz]
11. Tarbiat Modares [Lecturer Training] University
12. Tarbiat Moallem [Teacher Training] University of Tihrán [Tehran]
13. Ádharbáyján [Azerbaijan] Tarbíyat-i-Mu'allim [Teacher Training] University
14. Sabzivár [Sabzevar] Teacher Training University
15. University of Tihrán [Tehran]
16. Persian Gulf University
17. Rází [Razi] University
18. Zábul [Zabol] University
19. Zanján [Zanjan] University
20. Simnán University [Semnan]
21. University of Sístán and Balúchistán [Sistan and Baluchestan]
22. Shahr-i-Kurd [Shahrekord] University
23. Sháhídh [Shahid] University
24. Shahíd Bá-Hunar [Shahid Bahonar] University of Kirmán [Kerman]
25. Shahíd Bihishtí [Shahid Beheshti] University
26. Shahíd Chamrán [Shahid Chamran] University of Ahváz [Ahvaz]
27. Shíráz [Shiraz] University
28. Isfahán [Isfahan] University of Technology
29. Amírkabír [Amirkabir] University of Technology
30. Sháhrúd [Shahrud] University of Technology
31. Khájih Nasirú'd-Dín-i-Túsi [Khajeh Nasir ad-Din Toosi] University of Technology
32. Sahand [Sahand] University of Technology of Tabríz [Tabriz]
33. Sharíf [Sharif] University of Technology
34. 'Allámiy-i-Tabátábá'í [Allameh Tabatabaei] University
35. Iran University of Science and Technology
36. Gurgán [Gorgan] University of Agricultural

- Sciences and Natural Resources
37. Firdawsí [Ferdowsi] University of Mashhad [Mashhad]
 38. University of Káshán [Kashan]
 39. University of Kurdistán [Kurdistan]
 40. University of Gílán [Guilan]
 41. Luristán [Lorestan] University
 42. University of Muhaqqiq Ardabílí [Moha-
ghegh Ardebili]
 43. University of Mázinarán [Mazandaran]
 44. Shahíd Rajá'í [Shahid Rajaei] Teacher Train-
ing University
 45. Valíyy-i-'Asr [Vali-e-Asr] University of Rafsan-
ján [Rafsanjan]
 46. Hurmuzgán [Hormozgan] University
 47. University of Art
 48. University of Applied Science and Technology
 49. University of Yazd
 50. Dámghán [Damghan] University of Basic
Sciences
 51. Yásúj [Yasuj] University
 52. Isfáhán [Isfahan] University of Art
 53. Khurramshahr [Khorramshahr] University of
Nautical Sciences and Technology
 54. University of Qum [Qom]
 55. University of Maláyir [Malayer]
 56. Shumál [Shomal] University
 57. University of Science and Culture
 58. Irshád [Irshad] University of Damávand
[Damavand]
 59. Khátam [Khatam] University
 60. University of Tafrish [Tafresh]
 61. University of Bujnúrd [Bojnurd]
 62. Gulpáygán [Golpaygan] School of Engineer-
ing
 63. School of Economic Affairs
 64. Non-profit Khayyám [Khayyam] Institute
 65. Non-governmental and non-profit Sajjád
[Sadjad] Institute, Mashhad [Mashhad]
 66. Non-governmental and non-profit Shahíd
Ashrafi Isfahání [Shahid Ashrafi Isfahani]
Institute
 67. Non-governmental and non-profit 'Allamiy-i-
Muhadath-i-Núrí [Allameh Mohadas Noori]
Institute
 68. Non-governmental and non-profit Institute
of Tabaristán [Tabarestan]
 69. Non-profit Institute for Development and
Rural Advancement of Hamidán [Hamedan]
 70. Nautical and Marine Science Centre of
Higher Education of Cháhbahár [Chahbahar]
 71. Institute of Higher Education of Marághih
[Maragheh]
 72. University of Islamic Sects
 73. Jund-i-Shapúr [Jundishapur] Institute of
Higher Education of Dizfúl [Dezful]
 74. Shíráz [Shiraz] University of Technology
 75. Sajjád [Sadjad] Institute of Higher Education,
Mashhad [Mashhad]
 76. Mufíd [Mofid] University of Qum [Qom]
 77. Varámín [Varamin] University of Agricultural
Sciences and Natural Resources
 78. Institute of Higher Education for Occupation
 79. Najafábád [Najafabad] Institute of Higher
Education
 80. Iran Institute of Higher Education for Tech-
nology Research
 81. Imam Khomeini Research Center

A 9 April 2007 letter to police commanders around Tehran that calls for tight restrictions on Bahá'í businesses. See page 16.

[TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

Date: 19/1/1386 [9 April 2007]

From: The Public Intelligence and Security Force, Tehran — Public Places Supervision Office

To: Esteemed Commanders of County Police Forces — Heads of the Public Intelligence and Security Force;

Subject: Review of the eligibility of individuals belonging to small groups and the perverse Bahaist sect
Greetings,

May peace be upon Muhammad and His family! With respect, and based on the instructions received from the Head of the Public Intelligence and Security Force (NÁJÁ) — Public Places Supervision Office (number 31/2/5/30/14, dated 21/12/85 [12 March 2007]) and with due attention to the increase in the number of requests from the perverse Bahaist sect to obtain work permits and their rightful and legal presence in the crafts industry once they have acquired their work permit; it is necessary, for the benefit of the ongoing monitoring and supervision of their activities and in order to halt — as much as possible — their extensive presence throughout sensitive and important craft organizations and also individuals from small groups requesting work permits, for measures to be taken with due consideration for the below points based on instruction number 100/7/30/14, dated 17/2/82 [8 May 2003] (Final Review Commission), which determines the cases to go before the Commission.

a. Perverse Bahaist Sect

1. Take measures to identify Bahá'í individuals working in craft businesses and collect statistics broken down by (their distribution and type of occupation).
2. Their activities in high-earning businesses should be halted, and only those work permits that would provide them with an ordinary livelihood should be allowed.
3. Issuing of [work] permits for the activities of the mentioned individuals in sensitive business categories (culture, propaganda, commerce, the press, jewellery and watchmaking, coffee shops, engraving, the tourist industry, car rentals, publishing, hostel and hotel management, tailoring training institutes, photography and film, [illegible] Internet, computer sales and Internet cafés), should be prevented.
4. In accordance with the religious canons, work permits will not be issued to the followers of the perverse Bahaist sect in business categories related to Tahárat [cleanliness] (1. catering at reception halls, 2. buffets and restaurants, 3. grocery shops, 4. kebab shops, 5. cafés, 6. protein [poultry] shops and supermarkets, 7. ice cream parlors, fruit juice and soft drinks shops, 8. pastry shops, 9. coffee shops)

First page of an 8 July 2009 court order convicting Semnan resident Siamak Ighani of "membership in illegal groups" and "propaganda activities against the regime" for his practice of the Bahá'í Faith. See page 3.


 دفتری جمهوری اسلامی ایران

تاریخ: ۱۳۸۸/۰۷/۰۸

شماره:

پیوست:

فلا تتبعوا الهوى ان تعدلوا

دادنامه دادگاه

پرونده کلاسه ۸۸۰۹۹۸۲۳۱۶۹۰۰۰۵۶ شعبه دادگاه انقلاب اسلامی شهرستان سمنان دادنامه شماره ۸۸/۴/۱۷-۸۸۰۹۹۷۲۳۱۷۳۰۰۱۷۰ شماره بایگانی: ۸۸/۹۸

متهم: آقای سیامک ایقانی فرزند ظهورا... به نشانی سمنان گلستان یاسمن اول شرقی پ ۷ با وکالت خانم نسرین ستوده به نشانی: تهران یوسف آباد خ ۲۲ پ ۳ ط همکف

اتهام: الف: عضویت در گروه و جمعیت‌های غیرقانونی وابسته به بهائیان خصوصاً "قبول سمت ناظم در جمع خادمین سمنان ب: فعالیت‌های تبلیغی علیه نظام و به نفع بهائیان

گردشکار: به موجب کیفرخواست شماره ۸۸/۶۹/۰۰۰۵۶ مورخ ۱۳۸۸/۲/۲۰ دادسرای عمومی و انقلاب سمنان که آقای سیامک ایقانی فرزند ظهورا... به اتهام عضویت در دسته و گروه با هدف بر هم زدن امنیت کشور تحت تعقیب قرار گرفته، پرونده امر جهت رسیدگی به شعبه اول دادگاه انقلاب اسلامی سمنان ارجاع شده است. دادگاه پس از جری تشریفات قانونی و تعیین وقت مقرر بتاريخ ۸۸/۴/۹ دادرسی را آغاز نموده و با انجام تحقیقات لازم، استماع اظهارات نماینده محترم دادستان و مدافعات متهم و اخذ آخرین دفاع و رسیدگی مکفی بپیرامون مفاد کیفرخواست، ختم رسیدگی را اعلام نموده و با استعانت از محضر خداوند سبحان بشرح ذیل مبادرت به انشاء رای می نماید.

۷۱، ۱۰، ۲۰ «رای دادگاه»

حسب کیفرخواست صادره از دادسرای عمومی و انقلاب سمنان به شماره ۸۸/۶۹/۰۰۰۵۶ مورخ ۱۳۸۸/۲/۲۰ آقای سیامک ایقانی فرزند ظهورا... ۴۱ ساله، شغل فروشنده عینک، باسواد، متأهل، فاقد سابقه کیفری، آزاد به جهت تودیع وثیقه، اهل و مقیم سمنان، شهرک گلستان یاسمن اول شرقی پ ۷ عضو گروهک فرقه ضاله بهایی با وکالت خانم نسرین عبادی، نسیم غنوی و نسیم منفرد متهم است به الف: عضویت در گروه و جمعیت‌های غیرقانونی وابسته به بهائیان خصوصاً "قبول سمت ناظم در جمع خادمین سمنان ب: فعالیت‌های تبلیغی علیه نظام و به نفع بهائیان. توضیحاً اینکه پس از گزارش‌های متعدد مردم متدین و حزب اللهی به مراجع ذی ربط مبنی بر فعالیت‌های تشکیلاتی و تبلیغ سازماندهی شده اعضای فرقه ضاله بهائیت در سطح جامعه اسلامی جهت جذب و تحکیم میانی فرقه مذکور و نگرانی شدید مردمی از این موضوع وزیر محترم اطلاعات طی نامه ای از دادستان محترم کل کشور وضعیت گروه موصوف را استعلام که ایشان با توجه به نظر مبارک حضرت امام راحل، مقام معظم رهبری و مراجع عظام تقلید طی نامه ای در پاسخ به وزیر محترم اطلاعات به این شرح پاسخ دادند که: در رویه و کارنامه و پیشینه شبکه و تشکیلات سیاسی-اطلاعاتی «بهائیت» نه در زمره احزاب و جمعیت‌های قانونی دارای مجوز فعالیت بوده و نه در لیست احصاء شده ادیان الهی جای گرفته و نه منطبق با تعریف اقلیت‌های مذهبی هستند. مستندات و امارات و قرائن برست آمده حاکی از آن است که تشکیلات مزبور با دشمنان خارجی ملت ایران در ارتباط مستقیم بوده و

English translation of 8 July 2009 court order convicting Semnan resident Siamak Ighani of “membership in illegal groups” and “propaganda activities against the regime” for his practice of the Bahá'í Faith. See page 3.

[PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

[Translator's notes appear in square brackets [].]

[Emblem]

Islamic Republic of Iran

Do not follow (your) low desires, lest you deviate

Date:

Number:

Enclosure: Justice Administration

Case Reference: 8809982316900056, Branch [1] of the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Semnan

Court Order No. 8809972317300170-17/4/88 [8 July 2009], Archival Reference No. 88/98

Accused: Mr. Siyamak Iqani [Siamak Ighani], son of Zuhuru'[llah], [address], represented by Mrs. Nasrin Sotoudeh, [address]

Charges: A) Membership in illegal groups associated with Bahá'ís, specifically his position as the chairman of the local Friends in Semnan; B) Propaganda activities against the regime and in favor of the Bahá'ís.

Procedural Synopsis: According to the indictment number 88/69/00056, dated 20/2/1388 [10 May 2009], of the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office in Semnan, Mr. Siyamak Iqani, son of Zuhuru'[llah], was charged and legally pursued for membership in groups with the intention of disturbing national security. The file was brought before Branch 1 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Semnan for review. Subsequent to completion of routine legal procedures and the setting of a hearing date for 9/4/88 [30 June 2009], this court proceeded with a trial, in which, after due investigation and consideration of the submissions of the respected Prosecutor, and after the defence put forth by the accused and the final submissions of the defence and the careful examination of the elements of the indictment, this court concluded the trial and, by relying on the Almighty God, rendered the following decision.

Decision of the Court

According to the bill of indictment number 88/69/00056, dated 20/2/88 [10 May 2009], issued by the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office in Semnan, Mr. Siyamak Iqani, son of Zuhuru'llah, 41; optician; educated; married; no previous records; released on collateral; native and resident of Semnan, [address]; member of the Guruhak of the perverse Bahaist sect; represented by counsel Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, Nasim Ghanavi [Nasim Ghanavi], and Nasrin Munfarid [Nasrin Monfared] [may be the same as Nasrin Sotoudeh] stands charged for: a) membership in illegal groups associated with Bahá'ís, specifically his position as the chairman of the Khadimin [local Friends] in Semnan; and b) propaganda activities against the regime and in favor of the Bahá'ís.

As a result of numerous reports to the authorities by pious and Hizbu'llahi [party of God] individuals concerning organized propaganda activities of the members of the perverse Bahaist sect within the Muslim community with the intention of recruiting [new members] and fortifying the said sect—thus causing great concern within the community—the respected Minister of Intelligence wrote a letter to the Chief Public Prosecutor and reported to him the situation concerning the said group. [The Chief Public Prosecutor] in turn reflected on the views of the late Imam [Khomeini], as well as those of the Supreme Leader and other sources of authority, and responded to the esteemed Minister in the following manner:

“The records and the activities of the political and espionage network of ‘Bahaism’ indicate that neither are they a legal and official political party authorized to operate nor do they fit in the definition of religious minorities. Documented facts and circumstantial evidence indicate that the said group has been in direct contact with foreign enemies of the people of Iran and has long-lasting and established ties with the Zionist regime. By creating an administrative system and networks under various pretexts in the fields of teaching, annunciation, economics, education, and charity work, they attempt to gather intelligence with the intention of devastating the structure of people's belief systems. Therefore, according to the laws and guidance provided previously (i.e., ban of all administrative activities of the said faction), this is to reiterate that the administrative activities of the perverse sect (Bahaism) are considered illegal and unofficial in every aspect; their connection to Israel, as well as their opposition to Islam and the Islamic regime, is clear, and their threat to national security is documented and proven. It is necessary, therefore, that any replacement administrative structure be confronted according to the guidelines as if it were the actual administration. Needless to say, any show of leniency or carelessness [by the authorities] in this matter would jeopardize public and national interests and would serve the objectives of foreign elements and Zionists and their supporters. This is a [moral] obligation before the Threshold of Almighty God.”

Considering that the said group in Semnan has, similar to its practice in other parts of the country, formed a local administrative group known as the Khadimin, under whose direction tens of illegal classes and groups were formed, the Central Ministry of Intelligence Office, subsequent to seeking input from the esteemed Provincial Prosecutor, searched the accused person's house, where, according to report number 81/KH/2200, dated 2/2/88 [22 April 2009], a total of 696 items including

booklets, compact discs, brochures, and other propaganda material related to spreading Bahaism were discovered.

Furthermore, at different stages of the investigations, the accused person has made voluntary admission, both to the officers and at the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office in Semnan, to his identity as a Bahá'í, to his membership in the Khadimin in Semnan and his position as the chairman, and to his activities in propagating Bahaism.

Subsequent to forwarding the file to the Revolutionary Court, a trial date was immediately set, at which point a hearing was held with the presence of the respected prosecutor, the accused, and one of his lawyers, Nasrin Sotoudeh, who defended his case for four hours in court. On the basis of the following evidence:

1. Statement of the esteemed director general of the Ministry of Intelligence Office in Semnan, reference 81/KH/2200, dated 2/2/88 [22 April 2009], pertaining to the discovery of 696 items related to propagating and spreading the perverse sect of Bahaism and the accused person's unfounded excuse that he kept these items at home for personal use—given that there were unreasonably multiple copies of many of the booklets—there is no doubt that these items were used towards [fulfilling] the goals of the central administration of this sect. Furthermore, the accused's admission during the interrogations at the Ministry of Intelligence to his meetings and consultations with the group known as Yaran-i-Iran [Friends in Iran*] in Semnan and Tehran also confirms the allegations;
2. Direct admission by the accused person, during the course of investigation and ultimately in the hearing, confirming his membership in the Khadimin in Semnan and as chairman of the group. [*Translator's Note: the Khadimin in Semnan is a group that operates under the direction and supervision of the Friends in Iran. This group has five members who are responsible to organize and coordinate matters related to the Bahá'ís in Semnan, and the chairman has the main responsibility.*] Furthermore, the accused's statement that this group was merely responsible for taking care of the personal affairs of the Bahá'ís in Semnan is not acceptable, given that personal affairs such as marriages and burials of their dead are only a small and insignificant part of the group's responsibilities; the most important part of the said group's function was organizing and forming committees, classes, and various training courses with the objective of devising plans to attract non-Bahá'í children and youth to this perverse sect;
3. Direct admission by the accused person during the course of investigation and ultimately in the hearing to propagating Bahaism, and his unfounded excuses (i.e., "Information about Bahaism was given to others when they asked me about it and wanted me to explain questions about Bahaism to them. There were many different reasons why they were curious.") Furthermore, [the court heard] unsound reasoning by the defense counsel, indicating: "He [the accused] only responded to ques-

* In 2008, the seven members of this national-level ad hoc group were arrested. All are currently in prison serving 20-year sentences. See photograph on page 25.

tions and clarified misunderstandings.” This shows that not only did he engage in propagation but also received training for clarifying misunderstandings with regard to Bahaism;

4. A photograph of the agents’ car that was taken by his worker at the time of the accused’s arrest also confirms the illegal activities of the said sect;

5. On the basis of the indictment issued by the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor’s Office of Semnan, as well as the facts and other circumstantial evidence in the case file, the court is convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that the accused is guilty of the charges.

Therefore, pursuant to Articles 10, 47, 499, and 500 of the Islamic Penal Code, the court sentences the accused to two years’ imprisonment under Ta’zir law for his membership and his role as chairman of the Khadimin in Semnan, which is a group against the regime. As for propaganda activities in favor of Bahaism, which, according to a letter written by the Chief Prosecutor, is considered an enemy of the regime, the accused is sentenced to one year’s imprisonment under Ta’zir law, taking into account pretrial time in custody. All items related to propagating Bahaism discovered at the residence of the accused will be confiscated. With respect to propaganda activities against the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the court noted that the accused person emphatically denied such attempt; therefore, on the basis of the fundamental principle of presumption of innocence and lack of evidence before the court to prove otherwise, and on the basis of Article 37 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Article 177, Paragraph A, of the Criminal Procedural Act of the Public and Revolutionary Courts, the court considers the accused not guilty. This verdict was issued in the presence of the defendant and can be submitted to the courts of appeals in the Province of Semnan within 20 days of its issuance.

Muhammad Zangu’i [Mohammad Zangoui]

Prosecutor of Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Semnan

A copy of the order will be provided to the accused and his lawyers.

[Stamp/Signature]

Inciting Hatred
The Bahá'ís of Semnan
A case study in religious hatred

A special report of the
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866 United Nations Plaza
Suite 120
New York, NY 10017-1833 USA
<http://bic.org>