

**The Bahá'í International Community's  
United Nations Office**

# **UPDATE**

## ***Situation of the Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic of Iran***

**May 2009**

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This document presents only the latest developments in the ongoing oppression that targets Bahá'í citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It covers the months from January to mid-May 2009.

To complement the most recent news given here, we provide more information on our website (see [http://bic.org/areas-of-work/persecution\\_bahai\\_community](http://bic.org/areas-of-work/persecution_bahai_community)). Our previous *Update* document, covering October 2008 to mid-January 2009, can be found at: <http://bic.org/areas-of-work/persecution/IranUpdate-0209w.pdf>

For historical and legal background, together with a review of the major increase in persecution during the past five years, the September 2008 edition of the publication entitled *The Bahá'í Question – Cultural Cleansing in Iran* can be downloaded in electronic form at: <http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/TheBahaiQuestion.pdf> or obtained in a bound edition from Bahá'í International Community representatives.

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## 1. *All Bahá'í administrative arrangements declared illegal*

The Bahá'í International Community was very concerned to hear that the Iranian government had declared all Bahá'í administrative arrangements illegal and that (according to a press release issued by Fars News<sup>1</sup> on 15 February 2009) “vigorous confrontation with the administrative elements [of the Bahá'í community] will continue until their absolute annihilation”. The same news was issued by IRNA<sup>2</sup> and announced on national network television (Channel 3). Internationally, it appeared on the websites of BBC Persian, Radio Farda<sup>3</sup> and Radio Zamaneh.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, it should be recalled that all Bahá'í institutions were banned by the government some 30 years ago, following the Islamic Revolution. In the absence of a Bahá'í governing council like those in other countries, a group called the “Friends in Iran” (*Yárán* in Persian) was formed – with the full knowledge of the government – to serve as an ad hoc coordinating body for the 300,000 Bahá'ís in Iran. The various governments in power over the years have always been aware of the existence and activities of the “Friends in Iran” and have routinely had dealings with the members of this group, albeit informally in many cases.

In addition to the national group, there were local ad hoc groups known as “Local Friends” (*Khademin* in Persian). Following the announcement in the media mentioned above, the *Yárán* and the *Khademin* expressed their willingness to obey the government, as always, and thus bring to a close their collective functioning.

We previously reported that 20 Bahá'í homes in Semnan had been searched on 15 December 2008. A Bahá'í woman arrested that day, Ms. Rezvani (Fanaiyan) was one of the members of the “Local Friends” in that town. At her court hearing on 12 February 2009, she was charged with “involvement in establishing illegal groups and organizations ‘Semnan *Khademin*’ and “being a member of Semnan’s *Khademin*,” for which she was sentenced to three years in prison. She was also charged with “teaching against the Islamic Republic by establishing courses and classes, distributing educational CDs, and being involved in individual teaching [propaganda] in favour of the perverse sect of Baha’ism”, for which she was sentenced to eight months of imprisonment. Furthermore, the Public Prosecutor’s deputy allegedly stated that there was no appropriate place for Ms. Rezvani in Semnan’s prison due to her insistence on “teaching” her religious beliefs, and he ordered that she be transferred to a prison in Tehran. The transfer took place on 9 May 2009.

This appears to be the first instance of a Bahá'í charged and sentenced on the grounds that the Bahá'í administrative arrangements have been declared illegal.

The authorities have also stepped up their efforts to stop any and all Bahá'í activities that go beyond private, individual acts of faith. Many Bahá'ís who have served as members of the *Khademin*, and others who have been active in the life of the Bahá'í Faith, were summoned to the local offices of the Ministry of Information (i.e. Iran’s intelligence services, hereinafter referred to as the Intelligence Ministry). Officials there pressured them to sign an undertaking that they will not engage with others in any Bahá'í activity whatsoever. Since the beginning of March, over 40 Bahá'ís in 14 different localities have been subjected to this treatment.

<sup>1</sup> a news agency backed by the Iranian government

<sup>2</sup> the Islamic Republic News Agency, another official organ

<sup>3</sup> a Persian-language radio station and website based in the Czech Republic and in Washington D.C. and funded by the US government

<sup>4</sup> an independent Persian-language broadcaster based in the Netherlands

## 2. *Arbitrary arrests and detention*

### 2.1 *The former “Friends in Iran” leadership group*

The seven former members of the “Friends in Iran” have been detained without access to their legal counsel, Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, for over a year now.<sup>5</sup> After their arrests, the detainees were subjected to intensive interrogations and ill-treatment while in custody last year. Since September 2008, when they were moved out of solitary confinement, the seven Bahá'ís have been allowed to receive brief weekly visits from their families<sup>6</sup>. Officials sometimes permit face-to-face visits, but on other occasions the detainees have to stay behind a glass window and use a phone to speak to their loved ones. They remain incarcerated in section 209 of Evin prison in Tehran, which is run by Iran’s Intelligence Ministry.

The former leadership group had been arbitrarily detained for nine months before any charges were publicly announced. Mid-February 2009, Iran’s state-sanctioned media quoted Tehran’s deputy public prosecutor, Mr. Hassan Haddad, and Mr. Ali Reza Jamshidi, judiciary spokesperson, as having stated that the charges were espionage for foreigners, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic. It was reported at the time that the investigation was complete and that the case was moving to indictment. International protest by governments and civil society was strong and widespread, however, and it seems that this caused the Iranian authorities to review their approach.

About a week later, we heard that the indictment was being handled by two different magistrates. The Examining Magistrate of Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court had established the charges, and the case had then been referred to the Examining Magistrate of Branch 2 to prepare the indictment, as Branch 2 handles matters related to charges of espionage. The Branch 2 Examining Magistrate indicated on 25 February 2009 that it would take a minimum of 15 days to draw up the indictment. Both branches are under the Deputy Prosecutor-General for Security.

On 6 March, the Iranian Students News Agency cited the Deputy Prosecutor of Tehran as having stated: “The charges against these individuals are formation of illegal administration and espionage for foreign nations. The case against the seven accused has been prepared, and likely will go to court for indictment next week.” Around the same time, the deputy of Tehran’s Deputy Prosecutor informed the detainees’ families that it would take him about another month to complete his study of the case files, and thus the case would not go to trial before early to mid-April. He also said that the detainees’ legal counsel would be granted access to the files once his review of the relevant documents was complete.

Over two months later, not only had their case not yet been referred to court, but their families were told that an even more serious charge might be added: “spreading corruption on the earth” (*mufsed fel-arz* in Persian).

We are extremely concerned about the possibility of this charge being levelled against the seven Bahá'ís, as it can carry the death penalty in Iran.

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<sup>5</sup> The seven detainees are Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm. All but one of the group were arrested on 14 May 2008 at their homes in Tehran. Mrs. Sabet was arrested on 5 March 2008 while in Mashhad.

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of 16 February, an Islamic Holy Day, when they were given permission to phone instead – family visits were granted on 9 and 24 February, 2, 9, 16 and 30 March, 6, 13 and 20 April and 4 May 2009.

## 2.2 *New arrests and imprisonments*

As previously reported, there were five Bahá'ís in Iranian prisons in 2001, a total that went down to four in 2002-2003, and only two were arrested in 2004. Then the persecution began to intensify again. Since 2005, there have been over 230 arrests, and the number of arbitrary imprisonments continues to rise: during the first four months of 2009, 43 Bahá'ís were taken into custody. As of mid-May, 34 Iranian Bahá'ís were in prison, 88 were free (having posted bail) but awaiting trial, and 77 more were tried and sentenced but then appealed and thus remain free to date, pending appeal.

We report the latest arrests in this section and provide, in attachment to this *Update*, a list of Bahá'ís currently in prison (as of 14 May 2009, with date/place of arrest and other details). Follow up on previously reported cases is given in section 4, below.

In **Babol** on 14 April 2009, Mr. Moshfegh Samandari was arrested after a search of his father's house. We have no other information on this case at the moment.

In **Ghaemshahr** on 2 February 2009, Mr. Saman Sabeti was summoned for interrogation at the local office of the Intelligence Ministry. He was arrested and imprisoned the same day. Mr. Sabeti was a member of the "Local Friends" coordinating the affairs of the Bahá'ís in this town. Some time prior to his arrest, his home had been searched; all Bahá'í materials had been confiscated along with his computer. No further details are available at this time.

### In **Hamadan**:

1. On 2 April 2009, Ms. Sahba Khademideljoo, a 24 year old Bahá'í, was arrested by the Intelligence Ministry. On 10 April, three other young Bahá'ís were also arrested in this town: Ms. Sorour Sorourian, Ms. Samira Ayyoubi and Mr. Payman Aghdasi. All four were released on bail on 11 April 2009.
2. On 14 April 2009, Mr. Faraz Pourhamzeh was summoned for interrogation but was released the same day.

In **Karaj** on 26 April 2009, Mr. Shahram Safajou was approached by Intelligence Ministry agents as he was leaving his house. They had a search warrant and, after searching the residence, they confiscated his computer and Bahá'í materials and took Mr. Safajou away with them. When his wife inquired at the Ministry of Intelligence in Karaj, they informed her that they had arrested him but would not give her any other information. He has been allowed to contact his family briefly since his arrest, but only once thus far.

In **Miandoab** (West Azarbaijan province), Mr. Shahram Chiniyan Miandoab was imprisoned in March (the precise date is not known) for allegedly "having insulted Islam". Mr. Chiniyan Miandoab and his family lived in a two-room dwelling that shares a corridor with their neighbour. Usage of the corridor had resulted in a dispute between the two families. The matter was taken to court, which ruled in favour of Mr. Chiniyan Miandoab. The neighbour knew that this family is Bahá'í and, because of ill will after the ruling, complained to the authorities that the family had insulted Islam. Mr. Chiniyan Miandoab was imprisoned and lashed 70 times. His brother left the house and has not returned since.

### In **Sari**:

1. Ms. Torreh Taghizadeh was arrested on 15 February 2009. Her home had been searched previously by the Intelligence Ministry. She was released on bail on 28 February 2009; no other information has been received about her case.
2. Another Bahá'í woman, Ms. Shirin Foroughian, was summoned to the Ministry on 8 March 2009 and arrested immediately. No further details are available at the moment.

**In Semnan:**

As mentioned in section 1, above, 20 Bahá'í homes in Semnan were raided on 15 December 2008, and four of the Bahá'ís who live in these homes were arrested in January. More have since been taken into custody:

1. On 8 March 2009, Mr. Pooya Tebyanian was arrested at his place of work by agents of the Intelligence Ministry, who confiscated two computers belonging to Mr. Tebyanian's employer. The officials took Mr. Tebyanian back to his home, where they conducted a search and confiscated documents and Bahá'í materials. It seems that he has remained in detention since then and was recently sentenced to two and half years' imprisonment, but no details about the trial have been received to date.
2. On 27 April 2009, Mr. Siamak Ighani and Ms. Soudan Tebyaniyan were arrested at their homes by Intelligence Ministry agents. This is Ms. Tebyaniyan's second arrest; she was detained on 18 May 2005, held for two days, subsequently tried and sentenced to 91 days of imprisonment suspended for four years. It is not known whether this second arrest is related to her suspended sentence. Ms. Tebyanian was released on bail on 1 May, Mr. Ighani on 2 May 2009.
3. On 6 April 2009, Mr. Ali Ehsani of Semnan was summoned to the Intelligence Ministry and detained. He was requested to post bail amounting to about US\$50,000, which he did. But the prosecutor in Semnan refused to accept the bail, so Mr. Ehsani remained in prison. His family was not allowed to visit him. Three Bahá'ís who were also incarcerated in Semnan (Mr. Adel Fanaiyan, Mr. Abbas Nourani and Mr. Taherverdi Eskandarian) reported to their families that Mr. Ehsani was being detained in their cell and that his head had been shaved by the prison authorities.

After the search of Mr. Ehsani's home in December 2008, Intelligence Ministry agents went to his medical and dentistry supply shop without an authorized search warrant, confiscated all the goods and sealed the premises. The shop was reopened in February 2009. Mr. Ehsani attempted several times to recover the confiscated goods but was unsuccessful. Following these attempts, he was informed orally by the prosecutor of Semnan that he had been accused of "teaching against the Islamic Regime", "being in possession of satellite dishes" and "selling illegally imported goods". He was told that the first two charges had been levelled against a number of the Bahá'ís whose homes had been raided on 15 December 2008. When Mr. Ehsani requested the accusations in writing, the officials said that they had been ordered not to provide any written charges to Bahá'ís. On 2 May 2009, he was finally released on bail, awaiting trial.

**In Shiraz:**

1. On 21 February 2009, Mr. Keyvan Karami was arrested following a search of his home by four Intelligence Ministry agents, during which his books and computer were confiscated. The authorities told Mr. Karami's family that he will not be released on bail. It seems that he is being held in the same cell as Mr. Farham Masoumi and Mr. Afshin Ahsanian (see below). Since his arrest, Mr. Karami has only been granted one five-minute visit with his family, during which he had to remain behind a glass window.
2. On 15 March 2009, Mr. Farham (Hadi) Masoumi was arrested following a home search and released after having been detained for a few hours. He was summoned to the Intelligence Ministry on 18 March and has been detained again since then.
3. Also on 15 March 2009, officials went to Ms. Haleh Houshmandi's home. She was not there at the time, but they conducted a search, confiscated some items, and left word that she should go to the local office of the Intelligence Ministry. Three days later she went there, was arrested and has been detained ever since. The reason for the arrest was verbally conveyed to her husband as "involvement in illegal activities".

Ms. Houshmandi suffers from severe heart problems and is dependent on medication, which the prison authorities refused to allow her to have. Her family took the matter to court, submitting medical documents to prove her urgent need for the medication. The judge apparently agreed that she be released on bail because of her medical condition, and the Intelligence Ministry finally released her on 25 April.

4. Mr. Afshin Ahsanian was summoned to the Intelligence Ministry on 9 April 2009 and immediately detained. He was released on bail on 25 April. The Ministry also called in Mr. Ahsanian's father for questioning the same day but released him after interrogation.
5. On 25 April 2009, Mr. Vahdat Dana was not home when agents entered his house with a warrant for his arrest. They asked Mr. Dana's wife to call him; he returned home and was arrested just outside his house. He is being held in the local detention centre of the Intelligence Ministry. Mr. Dana was already imprisoned for over a month in 2005.

Cases 2, 3 and 4 (above) involve young people who were among the 53 Bahá'ís from Shiraz arrested in May 2006 in connection with a humanitarian project for underprivileged youth. As you may recall, nearly all of these young Bahá'ís were released after about a week in detention, and their one-year prison sentences were suspended on condition that they participate in Islamic classes, which began in February 2008. Six have since been re-imprisoned. Three are the cases reported above: Ms. Houshmandi, Mr. Masoumi and Mr. Ahsanian. The other three – Ms. Haleh Roohi, Ms. Raha Sabet and Mr. Sasan Taqva – are still serving out their four-year sentences. The two young women were granted a temporary release beginning on 19 April 2009. It seems that Ms. Sabet returned to prison after one week, but Ms. Roohi's temporary release was extended until 9 May 2009. Mr. Taqva was also granted a one-week temporary release in May (exact date not known).

#### In **Tonekabon** (Mazandaran province)

1. On 1 March 2009, Intelligence Ministry agents came to the homes of Mr. Payam Haghghat, Mr. Vali Ghadiri and Mr. Ramin Ghadiri, who were all members of the "Local Friends" coordinating group in this town. The Ministry agents presented search warrants, entered and searched the homes. Some materials and computers were confiscated, but no one was arrested. Mr. Ramin Ghadiri was summoned for questioning on 23 April 2009. No other details are known for the moment.
2. On 21 April 2009, Mr. Michel Ismaelpour was arrested. The Intelligence Ministry officials who arrested him did not have a warrant; they told him he would be detained for ten days. He has since been released on bail; the exact date and conditions are not known.

#### In **Yazd**:

1. On 1 March 2009, Mr. Rostam Behifar and Mr. Peyman Roohi were officially summoned to the local office of the Intelligence Ministry and arrested. Mr. Behifar was one of the members of the "Local Friends" group coordinating the activities of the Bahá'ís in Yazd. On 11 December 2008, his home had been searched and all Bahá'í materials found there had been confiscated.
2. On 30 March 2009, three Intelligence Ministry agents raided and searched the home of Mr. Behnam Rouhanifard. The agents confiscated his computer. Apparently, they were trying to locate equipment used by Mr. Rouhanifard to produce and duplicate Bahá'í music CDs, but they were unsuccessful. The agents had a search warrant and a copy of a previous court verdict against Mr. Rouhanifard (one year of imprisonment, suspended for four years). The verdict had been related to Mr. Rouhanifard's duplication of Bahá'í music CDs and the distribution of these materials abroad.

We would further note that many Bahá'ís have been called in for questioning without being officially arrested. For example, on 4 April 2009, 10 Bahá'ís in Mashhad were summoned to the local office of the Intelligence Ministry for interrogation and then released. On 22 April, three more Bahá'ís in the same town were summoned to the Intelligence Ministry for interrogation and released the same day. They were asked to sign an undertaking not to engage in any Bahá'í activities, but they declined to do so. In Ghorveh (Kurdistan province on 26 April 2009), another Bahá'í was summoned to the local offices of the Intelligence Ministry for interrogation; it seems he, too, was released after questioning.

### **3. Arson and other violent attacks**

Members of the Bahá'í community in Iran often face harassment and intimidation from officials, anonymous callers, unknown individuals or small groups. The same or other individuals attack and vandalize Bahá'í homes, farms, vehicles, and Bahá'í cemeteries. Many attacks occur in series affecting a number of Bahá'ís living in the same locality.

In the latest series reported, violent incidents targeted half a dozen members of the community and the Bahá'í cemetery in **Semnan** from February to April 2009. The violence began at three a.m. on 1 February 2009 with an arson attack on a three-story apartment building that houses related Bahá'í families. Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at the building: one hit the wall beside a window on the first floor; the other one hit the balcony on the second floor. Awakened by the explosions, the residents extinguished the flames.

On 25 February 2009, the same apartments were attacked again by arsonists with Molotov cocktails during the night, and the home another Bahá'í family (who are in-laws of those targeted in the first attack) was also hit by a Molotov cocktail thrown at the windows.

The same day, the president of the clothing union and his colleagues went to the clothing store belonging to one of these Bahá'ís and gave her a letter indicating that her business license had been revoked. She and her husband appealed to many government agencies, but to no avail. She was told to empty the store or it would be sealed. On 10 March, agents of the Public Places Supervision Office sealed her store.

On 15 March, unknown individuals spray-painted anti-Bahá'í graffiti on the walls and doors of at least nine Bahá'í apartments in Semnan, as well as on shops run by four other members of the community.

Prior to the incidents, these members of the community had (along with many others in Semnan and elsewhere) received anonymous threatening phone calls. In one case, the callers identified themselves as "Followers of the Twelfth Imam", told the family to leave Semnan, and warned them that if they did not leave, they would be set ablaze "just like the cemetery". The Bahá'í cemetery in Semnan was attacked during the afternoon of 15 February 2009. Some 50 gravestones were demolished and the mortuary (situated at the site) was set on fire. In addition, the attackers wrote graffiti on large steel water drums and tanks near the cemetery, which included insults degrading the Bahá'í Faith, death threats against "unclean, infidel Bahá'ís" and references to Israel and England.

Also in Semnan:

- On 31 March 2009, unknown individuals completely defaced with spray paint a car owned by a local Bahá'í. A few days later, on 2 April 2009, his shop was spray-painted with slogans inciting hatred and suspicion against Bahá'ís. He reported these incidents to the police.

- On 23 April 2009, the windshield on a car belonging to another member of the community was broken and a note was left in the car indicating that this was being done because he is a Bahá'í. He immediately reported the incident to the police, who did not take any action to investigate.
- On 24 April 2009, the windshield on yet another Bahá'í's car was broken, as well. He heard the noise, came out of the house to investigate, and the vandals ran away.

Another arson attack had occurred earlier in 2009 in a different locality. On Ashura, the Islamic day of mourning, which fell on 7 January this year, a cleric from Qom had come to the village of **Khabr** (in Kerman province) to give a sermon. He attacked the Bahá'í Faith, encouraged the people of Khabr to set orchards owned by Bahá'ís on fire and to take other kinds of action that would pressure Bahá'ís into leaving the village. The following day, about ten metres of fencing surrounding an orchard owned by a local Bahá'í was set on fire. A week later, a second attempt was made to burn this orchard, but only part of its wall (shared with a Muslim orchard owner) was damaged. After the departure of the cleric from Qom, a local cleric continued provoking Muslims against Bahá'ís. Anti-Bahá'í graffiti then appeared on walls surrounding the homes and shops of some Bahá'ís from the village.

It is very difficult for members of the community to obtain recourse in cases such as these, as the property rights of individual Bahá'ís are generally disregarded in Iran.

Since 1979, officials have confiscated a large number of private and business properties, homes and farms belonging to Bahá'ís throughout the country. Some cases were taken to court, but the judgements demonstrated that the authorities continue to consider the Bahá'í Faith as an illegal movement and to legitimise human rights violations against Iranian citizens who are members of the community. Moreover, Bahá'í homes are frequently searched by officials who confiscate all possessions related in any way to Bahá'í activities.

#### ***4. Follow up on previously reported cases***

We recently received the following additional information about previously reported cases involving a total of 33 Bahá'í detainees, who either have recently been released on bail or are in the process of trial, sentencing and appeal.

1. Mr. Payam Aghsani
2. Mr. Didar Raoufi
3. Mr. Aziz Samandari
4. Ms. Jinous Sobhani

*arrested on 14 January 2009 in Tehran, detained in Evin prison:*

On 11 March 2009, these detainees were released after having each been required to post an exorbitant sum for bail: 700,000,000 Iranian Rial (±US\$73,450). During their arbitrary detention, they had been granted only a few family visits. The arrest of Ms. Sobhani drew media attention, as she had been employed in two of Mrs. Shirin Ebadi's organizations. The authorities had used this fact to further malign both the Bahá'ís and Mrs. Ebadi.

5. Mr. Nima Hagar

*arrested in Tehran on 1 February 2009, detained in Evin prison:*

On the day of his arrest, Mr. Hagar had been picked up by three men in an unmarked car to be taken to prison for interrogation. He was blindfolded until he got to his cell, then held in solitary confinement. His wife and his mother were permitted to visit him once. Mr. Hagar was released on bail on 11 March, after having posted the same excessively high bail as the other Tehran detainees mentioned above.

6. Mr. Shahrokh Taef  
*arrested on 14 January 2009 in Tehran, detained in Evin prison:*

Mr. Taef, who was held in solitary confinement for two months, was finally released on bail on 17 March 2009. He was required to post the same exorbitant amount as the other five Bahá'ís from Tehran (±US\$73,450).

7. Mrs. Farzaneh Ahmadzadeh  
8. Ms. Emilia Fanaiyan  
9. Ms. Taraneh Sanaie  
10. Ms. Shahnaz Saadati  
*arrested in Ghaemshahr on 10 January 2009:*

These four Bahá'í women were released on bail on 3 February 2009, after having provided business licenses as collateral.

11. Mr. Ali Ahmadi  
*taken into custody on 19 May 2008 to begin serving a prison sentence of ten months:*

Mr. Ahmadi was released on 3 February 2009 after having served out his prison sentence. He must subsequently start a period of one year in exile.

12. Mr. Farhang Samadani  
13. and his wife, Mrs. Elham Rohani  
*originally arrested in Yazd in 2005:*

At their appeal hearing on 8 November 2008, their sentences were reduced to 91 days imprisonment, suspended for five years. Mr. Samadani had originally been sentenced to one year and Mrs. Rohani to six months in prison.

14. Ms. Shabnam Ghazaei  
15. Ms. Negin Rezaei  
*both from Shiraz, arrested on 15 January 2009 in Tehran:*

Detained in Evin prison since mid-January, these two young Bahá'í women were recently released on bail (the precise date is not known).

16. Mr. Mohammad Reza Kandi  
*arrested and imprisoned in Sari in April 2008:*

Mr. Kandi went to trial and was sentenced in December 2008 to seven months of imprisonment. He appealed the judgement against him, but his appeal was denied and he commenced serving his prison term on 25 April 2009.

17. Mr. Kamran Aghdasi Yekta  
*sentenced in Hamadan to one year imprisonment on 19 June 2008:*

It seems that Mr. Yekta was released on 17 January 2009, but no other details are known.

18. Mr. Masoud Ataiyan  
*arrested on 18 November 2008 in Ghaemshahr:*

Mr. Ataiyan was released on 15 February 2009, but no information is available regarding the conditions of his release.

19. Ms. Nasrin Rahimi  
20. Ms. Mehrangiz Hosseini  
*arrested in Hamadan in 2008:*

These two Bahá'í women were charged with “teaching the Bahá'í Faith”, taken to court on 24 October 2008 and sentenced to one year of imprisonment. They have not yet been taken back into custody, pending appeal.

21. Mr. Behrouz Rashedi
22. Mr. Parviz Saifi
23. Mr. Shahreza Abbasi
24. Mr. Mozafar Ayyubi

*arrested, detained, tried and sentenced in Hamadan:*

This was the case where charges had been dropped against four Bahá'ís in Hamadan (originally found guilty of “teaching against the government of Iran”) at an appeals court hearing on 15 March 2008. However, the appeals court verdict was then referred to another appeals court in Hamadan on orders from Ayatollah Shahroudi, the Head of Iran’s Judiciary, and the original guilty verdict was upheld. We recently heard that on 6 October 2008, Mr. Rashedi, Mr. Saifi and Mr. Abbasi were sentenced to one year of imprisonment, suspended for five years. Mr. Ayyubi was sentenced to three years of exile to Khash and required to begin his term of exile immediately.

25. Mr. Badiollah Abolfazli  
*of Tonekabon (Mazandaran province), sentenced on 28 December 2008:*

Mr. Abolfazli began to serve out his two year prison sentence on 2 March 2009. The charges laid against him were “being an active member of the Bahá'í community”; “teaching Baháism and being involved in activities against the Islamic Republic”; and “teaching Muslims secretly by providing them with Bahá'í materials”.

26. Mr. Foad Agah  
*from Isfahan, arrested and released on bail in January 2008:*

Mr. Agah has been taken to trial (date not known). It seems that he was charged with “teaching against the Islamic regime” and sentenced to one year in prison, suspended for four years on the grounds that he is young (21 years old), is not a prominent Bahá'í and has no criminal record.

27. Ms. Shirin Foroughian  
*of Sari, arrested and detained on 8 March 2009:*

It has been reported that Ms. Foroughian was released on bail on 18 March, but no information has been received about the conditions of her release.

28. Mr. Adel Fanaiyan
29. Mr. Abbas Nourani
30. Mr. Taherverdi Eskandarian  
*of Semnan, originally arrested in 2005:*

On 4 January 2009, these three Bahá'ís began to serve sentences of six months imprisonment, after their appeals had been denied. On 19 March 2009, they were granted a temporary release for four days to be with their families for the New Year.

31. Ms. Simin Gorji  
*of Ghaemshahr (Mazandaran province), arrested and imprisoned in 2005, tried, sentenced to five months in prison, re-imprisoned in 2008 to serve out her sentence, released on 3 April 2008, re-arrested on 26 April 2008 and released on bail on 29 October 2008:*

Mrs. Gorji has been sentenced to one year’s imprisonment, following her third arrest. She has appealed the judgment against her and is not currently in prison, pending this appeal.

32. Ms. Sima Eshraghi  
 33. Mr. Jalayer Vahdat  
*of Mashhad, arrested on 26 January 2009:*

Very recently, we heard that these two Bahá'ís have been released on bail, but we do not yet have any other details.

## **5. Denial of access to education**

### **5.1 Incidents targeting Bahá'í school children**

We find it particularly intolerable that Bahá'í students in primary, middle and high schools throughout Iran have been subjected to harassment, vilification and severe psychological pressure during the past four years – and these abuses were committed by those who should rightfully hold their trust: their teachers and school administrators.

A report received recently from Iran lists 77 incidents of intimidation and harassment targeting Bahá'í children and adolescents in primary and secondary schools between September 2008 and February 2009. The incidents include, for example:

- 20 cases where Bahá'í students were insulted by teachers in class and by school administrators (in Isfahan, Tehran, Karaj, Rasht, Fardis, Vilashahr and Shiraz)
- four cases where Bahá'í students were expelled from school (in Karaj and Kashan)
- two cases where Bahá'í students were refused enrollment in schools (in Tehran and Karaj)
- seven cases where Bahá'í students were threatened with expulsion if they “teach” [speak about] their Faith (in Isfahan and Shiraz)
- five cases where Bahá'í students or their parents were forced to sign an agreement not to “teach” their Faith in schools (in Karaj, Rasht, Isfahan)
- five cases where anti-Bahá'í seminars were held in schools (in Isfahan and Shiraz)
- four cases where anti-Bahá'í material was distributed in schools (Isfahan, Karaj and Shiraz)
- four cases where Bahá'í students were forced to participate in Muslim religious functions (in Isfahan and Karaj)
- six cases where Bahá'í students and parents were summoned to the Intelligence Ministry and security offices of schools (in Rasht, Isfahan, Karaj, Tehran and Roodehen).

The Bahá'ís in Iran indicate that many more incidents have gone unreported. We heard separately about a case where a cleric who was attending an elementary school class in Vilashahr expelled a fourth grade Bahá'í student. After saying that she was seriously misinformed as to the true nature of her beliefs, he told her that she should change her religion without telling her parents. (This is not the only reported case where Bahá'í children, while at school, were urged to hide or to change their beliefs by authority figures.)

In some schools in Isfahan, Vilashahr, Tehran, Roodehen and Karaj, the principals informed the parents of Bahá'í students that a new circular had been issued by the school security office demanding disclosure of information about all the family members of each Bahá'í student, and stating that it was necessary for Bahá'í students to be identified using an official “identity form for students of other religions”. All school principals in Karaj received a list of Bahá'í students and were requested to confirm the names of those listed for their schools.

This is part of the government's ongoing campaign to identify and monitor all the Bahá'ís in Iran. The information has since been used, for example, to bar admission to university for students known to be Bahá'ís (see section 5.2, below).

Finally, several additional incidents were recently reported from Isfahan, where:

- A pamphlet entitled *Freedom and Dress Code* was distributed in a school for girls. A historical section of this pamphlet alleges that the British, Jews and Bahá'ís conspired to make “removal of the veil” compulsory and that the Bahá'ís were assigned to implement this plan in Iran.
- During a sermon given in a school, a cleric attacked the Bahá'ís as constituting “a greater enemy of Islam than America or Israel”. Moreover, he falsely affirmed that Bahá'ís were responsible for the destruction of Shiite Holy Places in Iraq. The Bahá'í students present were not permitted to respond.
- The principal of a middle school informed Bahá'í students that their school had received a circular banning Bahá'í students from participation in team sports, and threatened all of them with expulsion if they were to “teach” their Faith.

## 5.2 Denial of access to higher education

It should be recalled that for decades the government had maintained, as a requirement for entrance to public and private universities in Iran, that Bahá'í students renounce their Faith. The authorities are well aware that Bahá'ís will not do so, as a matter of principle. Because of this, an entire generation was denied access to higher education.

In 2004 and 2005, Bahá'ís were finally able to take the national university entrance exam without having to declare their religious affiliation. Over 800 Bahá'ís took the exam for academic year 2006-2007. Well over half passed the exam, but less than 300 were able to register. One by one, those who did begin their studies were identified as Bahá'ís and expelled. For academic year 2006-2007, 480 Bahá'ís passed the exam; 289 were admitted; by January 2007 over 160 of them had been identified as Bahá'ís and expelled.

During the same period, official efforts to identify members of this religious minority generated an even simpler way to seal off access to university for students who are now known to be Bahá'ís. Students who took the national entrance exam for 2007-2008 were instructed to go to a specific website to obtain their results. All those who had previously been identified as Bahá'ís were diverted to a page with the following URL (note the final words): [http://82.99.202.139/karsarasari/87/index.php?msg=error\\_bah](http://82.99.202.139/karsarasari/87/index.php?msg=error_bah), where they received the message: “Error: ‘Incomplete File. Forward correspondence to the Education Assessment Organization c/o P.O. Box 31535-3166, Karaj’”. Many students have written and appealed, using every available means of recourse, but not a single case has been decided in favour of a Bahá'í.

Meanwhile, expulsions continue. On 3 March 2009, three Bahá'í students were expelled from Sahand University in Tabriz. In response, a group of students from the university issued an open letter in defence of the three Bahá'ís. The letter states:

As a group of students from Tabriz Sahand University, we condemn the entire array of unlawful measures against this religious community. These measures contradict the explicit text of Paragraphs 3 and 8 of Article 3 and Article 14 of the Constitution (access to higher education and the right of people to participate in determining their political, economic and social destiny, and protecting the human rights of non-Muslims). Also, these measures violate Paragraph 2 of Article 2 of the Covenants on Economic and Cultural Rights (Universal Higher Education) of the United Nations. We condemn the expulsion of three of our classmates and demand that officials reconsider their view of this segment of Iranian society. During the New Year, we hope to work on the progress and success of our nation together with our Bahá'í classmates, untrammelled by considerations of religious belief.

We previously reported another letter of protest, signed by some 75 non-Bahá'í students at a university in Kerman. This letter demanded that a Bahá'í who had been expelled be granted her right to continue her education and that the university administration explain on what

legal grounds she was being denied that right. It has since been reported that a student who is a member of the Mobilisation Resistance Force (*Basij*) wrote to the signatories, warning them of the dangers of supporting a Bahá'í and recalling that the Qur'an forbids association with or befriending of non-Muslims. One non-Bahá'í classmate wrote to the university administration to inform them of the threats made by the *Basiji*. This classmate also asked the *Basiji* student to identify where in the Qur'an it states that only a specific group have the right to education, then reminded him of the negative consequences of his unjust comments regarding the expulsion, and invited him to a public debate.

It seems that yet another Bahá'í student was expelled from university on 1 March 2009: a young woman from Tehran, who had been able to begin her studies at Semnan University. No other details are known at this time.

## **6 Denial of access to employment**

We were previously able to report detailed information about the Iranian government's strikingly well organized, widespread and systematic plan of action conducted to deny Bahá'ís the right to employment. In hundreds of cases over the past five years, officials have taken measures to make it impossible for Bahá'ís to earn a living.

During the past year, however, it has been much more difficult for us to obtain information from Iran. We have been receiving reports more sporadically, with less detailed information (names, dates, precise locations, etc.). This situation is preventing us from providing confirmed information on individual cases to UN mechanisms and to others in the international community.

In cases involving imprisonment or violent attacks such as those reported in the sections above, family members have found a way to transmit information to us. For dozens of other cases involving denial of access to employment or education, details are lacking, and it is impossible to obtain more.

Nonetheless, sketchy reports from different localities continue to cite new (previously unreported) cases where measures have been taken against Bahá'ís to cancel their work permits, lock up and seal off their work premises, report their businesses to government organizations in order to have them blacklisted, pressure landlords to evict Bahá'í leaseholders or employers to fire their Bahá'í employees. The Public Places Supervision Office is often mentioned in such reports. As you will recall, this is the Office that promulgated explicitly discriminatory regulations in 2007 prohibiting Bahá'ís from working in over 25 specified trades. Ever since, the Office has been systematically taking measures against Bahá'ís in these trades, forcing them out of business and depriving them of their livelihood.

## **7. Incitement to hatred based on religion or belief**

The massive upsurge in acts of persecution, harassment and discrimination specifically targeting members of the Bahá'í community during the past four years was preceded and is being accompanied by organized efforts to incite hatred against them. Articles, pamphlets, posters, exhibitions – far too numerous to report – vilify and malign the Bahá'ís, portraying their Faith (and its history) in ways that are clearly intended to be highly offensive to Muslims. We will note only four of the latest cases received.

On 23 January 2009, *Ashuray e Ebrat-ha* (a newspaper based in Isfahan that is distributed to the worshippers at Friday prayers) falsely alleged that the Bahá'ís of Isfahan had held a demonstration to protest against restrictions imposed on them to prevent them from teaching

or promoting their Faith. The article claimed that this demonstration, in Engelabe Square in Isfahan on 15 January 2009, had been provoked by anti-Islamic-Revolution, Persian-language, satellite television channels operating outside Iran. Furthermore, it warned the authorities to be mindful of the serious dangers posed by the Bahá'ís in Isfahan and to take action against them. In fact, a series of demonstrations had been held on 15 January 2009 in eight cities in Iran, including Isfahan, Tehran and Kermanshah, to protest against the economic situation in Iran and the recent emergence of the so-called “Economic Mafia”. These demonstrations were organized by a group called “The National Movement of ‘We are’ [We Exist]”.

Ten thousand copies of an Islamic pamphlet containing an anti-Bahá'í section (entitled *Peik-e-Rahnama* [message of guidance]) were recently distributed in Rafsanjan in Kerman province and throughout Kerman. The pamphlet makes offensive and degrading comments about the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents. It is addressed to Muslim youth, asking them why they allow Bahá'ís to be so bold as to “teach” the tenets of their Faith – and it castigates Muslim youth for having set aside their own religious books in favour of reading Bahá'í books. The pamphlet further states that Bahá'ís are unclean and that Iranians should demonstrate their hatred towards them.

On 21 February 2009, Fars News quoted from the Friday sermon given the previous day in Semnan. Hujjatu'l-Islám Sayyed Mohammad Shahcheraghi, the Imam Jum'ih (Friday prayer leader) of Semnan, had apparently stated that “Bahaism was born out of Zionism to fight against Islam” and that Iran's Prosecutor General had written to ask that the people of Semnan be warned about the “misguided sect” and encouraged to fight against the Bahá'ís. Shahcheraghi also asserted that “no one should have any kind of interaction, especially business transactions with this sect because they are against Islam”. Then he added that, just as Iran had been extremely successful in political, social and economic arenas and in overthrowing the Pahlavi regime, it would also successfully eliminate the Bahá'ís.<sup>7</sup>

Fars News also reported that on the same day (20 February 2009), Hujjatu'l-Islám Sayyed Khalil Mohaghegh, Imam Jum'ih of Shoshtar, had stated that the Bahá'ís had refused to cooperate with the regime of the Islamic Republic since the time of the Islamic Revolution. He is quoted as having said: “We have to closely watch the activities and the meetings of this sect because they are trying to overthrow the [regime]. This matter should be dealt with in a serious manner by the security agencies.” The Imam Jum'ih referred to Article 20 of Iran's Constitution, pointing out that all the [recognized] religious minorities are free to have their own activities, but: “This sect's dangerous beliefs do not have any basis in religion, and they have a long-term plan to destroy all [religions]”. He warned his congregation that “these sects have to be controlled and fought” because of the danger they pose to the country and its youth.<sup>8</sup>

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The Bahá'ís have been persecuted throughout their history in Iran, but the oppression greatly increased after the Islamic Revolution. The civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of Iranian Bahá'ís are violated throughout the country.

As mentioned in the introduction, further information and background can be found in the September 2008 edition of *The Bahá'í Question – Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, which can be

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8712020689>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8712020639>

downloaded at: <http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/TheBahaiQuestion.pdf> or obtained in a bound copy from Bahá'í International Community representatives.

Related information is also regularly posted at:  
[http://bic.org/areas-of-work/persecution\\_bahai\\_community](http://bic.org/areas-of-work/persecution_bahai_community)  
and <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/iran-update/>

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