

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

UPDATE

***Latest developments:
Situation of the Bahá'ís in the
Islamic Republic of Iran***

October 2008

This document presents only the most recent developments in the ongoing oppression that targets Bahá'í citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It covers the months from July to mid-October 2008, as well as detailing some previously unreported incidents that occurred earlier this year.

To complement the latest news given here, please also consult the 2008 edition of our publication entitled *The Bahá'í Question – Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, which reviews the historical and legal background, as well as re-examining the upsurge in persecution against Iranian Bahá'ís during the past four years. It is available online (in PDF) at: <http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/TheBahaiQuestion.pdf>.

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1. Major State-sponsored anti-Bahá'í event

The Bahá'í International Community is very concerned about a disturbing event that took place in Iran on 19 September 2008, the third Friday in Ramadan. On that day, a petition was displayed at the entrance of the most attended prayer in Tehran – the noon-day prayer traditionally led by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, in a large outdoor enclosed area in the capital. Provided for the worshippers to sign, this petition asked for the dissolution of “Baha’ist institutions”.

According to reports from Iran, a large number of officials were around the entrance to ensure that all worshippers signed the petition on their way in. Worshippers were given a pamphlet containing the text of the petition and additional false information about the Bahá'í Faith. The petition was presented as emanating from a group named *The People’s Movement against Baha’ist institutions in Iran*, which stated:

Baha’ism is an organized sect whose leadership is situated within the secure boundaries of the occupying and tyrannical regime of Israel, and its doctrine is based on spreading lies against Islam and Iran. It is spreading the political, cultural and economic goals of international Zionism audaciously and rapidly. The Baha’ist Zionist organization has not only attacked Islam in a cowardly way, but does not even believe in the rules of civility and human virtues. We, the undersigned, in accordance with our civic and Islamic duties, demand that the respected Public Prosecutor deal with all the elements of the [Bahá'í] institutions and dissolve this organization.¹

A few days earlier, announcements had appeared through Iranian news agencies, including the *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)*, informing the public that this anti-Bahá'í petition would be presented for signature in Tehran on that Friday.² The announcement was picked up and widely disseminated in the Iranian media. *The Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA)* reported that similar petitions were being presented and signed in other provinces, as well.³

Fars News was one of the media that issued the announcement. On 16 September 2008, *Fars News* published an article entitled *People of Iran call for the dissolution of Baha’ist institutions*, alleging that the “Bahá'í colonial network has become a strong arm of the world domination in the Middle East against Iran” and that the “Bahá'í World Centre in Israel has ordered Iranian Bahá'ís to convert ten percent of the population to the Bahá'í Faith by 2021”.

The same article included lists of allegations claiming to be the “Bahá'í institutions’ plans” for achieving their goals, both within and outside Iran. Among the alleged plans for outside of Iran, we noted: “international support for the Bahá'ís from powerful nations and organizations (especially the United States and United Nations)”.⁴

¹ Media reports about this (in Persian) can be found at:
<http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8706290408>
<http://www.kayhannews.ir/870630/2.htm#other205>
http://radiozamaaneh.com/news/2008/09/post_6363.html

² See: <http://www2.irna.ir/fa/news/view/menu-151/8706276195151823.htm>

³ See: <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1201091&Lang=P>

⁴ See: <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8706260237>

Another signing was organised on Friday, 26 September 2008, in Qom. *IRNA* reported that the petition was on display at the entrance of the Khomeini Mosque, which encloses the Shrine of Fatima Masoumeh, one the holiest places in Iran for Shiite Muslims. Among those signing were the participants in the annual *Jerusalem Day March*. Held every fourth Friday of Ramadan to support the liberation of Jerusalem, this event involves sloganeering against the “Zionist regime” and the United States.⁵

Already a few months ago, a similar petition had been launched by a movement calling itself *People’s Opposition to the Underground Activities of the Perverse Baha’ist Sect*.

2. Arbitrary arrests and detention

2.1 The Bahá’í leadership

We recently received details about an additional arrest linked to the Bahá’í leadership.

As you may recall, seven Bahá’í leaders have been arbitrarily detained in Evin prison in Tehran for over five months, without any access to legal counsel. On 19 August 2008, Mrs. Tavakkoli, the wife of Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli (one of the imprisoned leaders) was detained after a visit to the Prosecutor’s Office in Tehran. Family members regularly visited the Prosecutor’s Office to enquire about the health of the detainees. They all left at the end of the meeting on 19 August, but Mrs. Tavakkoli decided to return on her own. We do not know what was said on this occasion, but she was arrested, held for four days and then released on 23 August 2008.

As previously reported, the detained leaders were finally permitted to have brief family visits after having been moved out of solitary confinement at the beginning of September 2008. One of the detainees, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, had developed a medical problem that required urgent surgery (according to the prison doctor), but Mr. Rezaie was reluctant to have this operation in the prison hospital. On 7 September, a Bahá’í medical doctor was allowed to examine Mr. Rezaie in prison. He did not agree with the diagnosis given by the prison doctor, and he suggested a CT scan, which was then carried out. Mr. Rezaie’s family was subsequently informed that he does not require surgery, and the scan results were given to Mrs. Rezaie, should she wish to discuss them with their own doctor. When family members were able to see Mr. Rezaie again mid-September, he seemed in better health.

The six other detainees were permitted a second family visit on 18 September 2008. And all seven have received brief visits from their families twice more since then: on 25 September and again on 29 September 2008.

2.2 Other Bahá’ís recently arrested

In the early morning of 29 July 2008, three officials from the Prosecutor’s Office entered and searched the home of a Bahá’í family in Ahvaz (Khuzestan province). These officials claimed that neighbours had lodged a complaint against the couple living there, Mr. and Mrs. Ghanavatian, regarding their “activities against the regime” and “teaching Baha’ism”. While the officials were searching their home, for about two hours, Mr. and Mrs. Ghanavatian were asked to respond in writing to questions about

⁵ See: <http://www4.irna.ir/View/FullStory/?NewsId=171791>

their Bahá'í activities. All Bahá'í materials found in their home were seized (books, CDs, photos, and a personal computer). The couple was taken to a military unit for interrogation. At 2:00 p.m. the same day, a friend was able to secure their bail by submitting his work permit as collateral. We have no details at this time about the charges against them or the trial date.

Mr. Mehrdad Sabetrasekh from Vilashahr (near Isfahan) was arrested and imprisoned on 26 July 2008. After almost two months of arbitrary detention, he was released on bail in September, with the amount of 10 million tumans (US \$10,000) having been submitted as collateral. The charges against Mr. Sabetrasekh are still not known.

On 14 July 2008, Mr. Badiollah Abolfazli, a shop owner from Nashtarood in Mazandaran province, was arrested at his place of work by a Ministry of Information (Intelligence) officer and taken to Sari prison, where he spent 29 days in solitary confinement. During his detention, Mr. Abolfazli was interrogated eight times and subjected to verbal abuse and humiliation. He was questioned extensively regarding Bahá'í administration and activities. At his initial hearing in Tonekabon court on 15 August 2008, Mr. Abolfazli was verbally informed of the charge against him: "initiating actions against the Islamic Republic". He was released on bail the same day, after submitting collateral to the value of 100 million tumans (US \$100,000). His trial date has not been set.

While details are still unknown regarding the re-arrest of Mrs. Simin Gorji of Ghaemshahr (Mazandaran Province), news received recently from Iran indicates that Mrs. Gorji is being detained in solitary confinement. The authorities have requested clothing from her family and stated that she will soon be moved out of the solitary cell.

To date, 23 Bahá'ís are in prison in Iran. Their names and details of their arrest and detention are provided in the table below:

	Name	Date of arrest	Place of arrest	Place of detention	Age	Occupation	Date of trial or ruling	Sentence
1.	Mr. Mansour Manouchehri	19-Sep-2006	Kashan	Kashan	55	Managing director of a factory	04-Mar-07	1 year
2.	Mr. Enayatollah Haghightajou	13-Nov-2007	Shiraz	Shiraz (Intelligence Ministry)	47	Carpenter	Unknown	Unknown
3.	Miss Haleh Rouhi	19-Nov-2007	Shiraz	Shiraz (Zendan Sepah)	26	Iran Radiators employee	29-Jul-07	4 years
4.	Miss Raha Sabet	19-Nov-2007	Shiraz	Shiraz (Zendan Sepah)	33	Self-employed	29-Jul-07	4 years
5.	Mr. Sasan Taqva	19-Nov-2007	Shiraz	Shiraz, (Sepah detention centre)	37	Optometrist	29-Jul-07	4 years

	Name	Date of arrest	Place of arrest	Place of detention	Age	Occupation	Date of trial or ruling	Sentence
6.	Mr. Pouriya Habibi	27-Jan-2008	Tehran	Tehran (Evin)	22	Employee of a private company	No trial	Unknown
7.	Miss Simin Mokhtari	27-Jan-2008	Tehran	Tehran (Evin)	24	Employee of a private company	No trial	Unknown
8.	Mr. Aziz Pourhamzeh	31-Jan-08	Hamadan	Hamadan	55	Optician	No trial	Unknown
9.	Mr. Kamran Aghdasi Yekta	31-Jan-2008	Hamadan	Hamadan	40	Automotive service technician	No trial	Unknown
10.	Mr. Fathollah Khatbjavan	31-Jan-2008	Hamadan	Hamadan	65	Bone-setter	No trial	Unknown
11.	Mrs. Mahvash Sabet	05-Mar-2008	Mashhad	Mashhad	56	Homemaker and former teacher	No trial	Unknown
12.	Mr. Mohammad Ismael Forouzan	17-Mar-2008	Abadeh	Unknown	43	Craftsman of musical instruments	11-Nov-08	1-year of imprisonment and 10 years internal exile
13.	Mrs. Simin Gorji	26-Apr-2008	Ghaem-shahr	Sari	41	Unknown	31-May-07* (Appeal Court)	
14.	Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi	14-May-2008	Tehran	Tehran (Evin)	46	Homemaker	No trial	
15.	Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani	14-May-2008	Tehran	Tehran (Evin)	76	Businessman	No trial	
16.	Mr. Afif Naeimi	14-May-2008	Tehran	Tehran (Evin)	47	Industrialist	No trial	
17.	Mr. Saeid Rezaie	14-May-2008	Tehran	Tehran (Evin)	50	Engineer	No trial	
18.	Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli	14-May-2008	Tehran	Tehran (Evin)	57	Lecturer	No trial	

	Name	Date of arrest	Place of arrest	Place of detention	Age	Occupation	Date of trial or ruling	Sentence
19.	Mr. Vahid Tizfahm	14-May-2008	Tehran	Tehran (Evin)	37	Optometrist	No trial	
20.	Mr. Ali Ahmadi	Unknown	Ghaemshahr	Unknown	-	Unknown	5-Aug-07	10 months of imprisonment and 1 year internal exile
21.	Mr. Changiz Derakhshanian	14 Sept 2005	Ghaemshahr	Unknown	-	Unknown	08-May-07* (Appeal)	5 months
22.	Mr. Foad Naeimi	23 Aug 2005	Sari	Sari	-	Unknown	06-Sept-07 10-Feb-08 (Appeal)	2 1/2 years of imprisonment and 2 years internal exile
23.	Mr. Mehran Bandi	29-May-2008	Yazd	Yazd	-	Owner of computer company	10-Sept-08	3 1/2 years of imprisonment and 3 years internal exile

* On 8 May 2007, the provincial court of appeal of Mazandaran denied the appeal of four Bahá'ís who had been arrested in 2005 in Ghaemshahr and falsely charged with "propagation on behalf of an organization which is anti-Islamic".

3. Follow up to previously reported cases

We have received further information about the following previously reported cases.

Ms. Haleh Roohi, Ms. Raha Sabet and Mr. Sasan Taqva are still serving a four-year sentence connected to their work on a humanitarian project for underprivileged young people in Shiraz. Recently:

- On 31 August 2008, Ms. Roohi and Ms. Sabet were granted a one-week leave to visit their families. This is the second time they had been allowed a temporary release since their incarceration on 19 November 2007. The leave was later extended for another ten days, until 16 September 2008, and then for a further ten days. After having spent a total of 27 days with their families, they returned to prison on 27 September 2008.
- Mr. Sasan Taqva also returned to prison, after having been granted a 45-day medical leave for his knee surgery in July 2008.

It should be recalled that Mr. Touraj Amini, Mr. Iraj Amini and Mr. Payman Amoui, three Bahá'ís from Tehran, were first arrested at their workplace on 9 March 2008. Two of them, Mr. Iraj Amini and Mr. Amoui, were released on bail the next day, while Mr. Touraj Amini was released on bail nine days later. On 19 August 2008, all three were summoned to an Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran, where they were charged with "teaching Baha'ism, propaganda against the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and insulting the sacred institutions of Islam". Because Mr. Iraj Amini and Mr. Amoui had not submitted property as collateral for bail after the previous

arrest, they were held in custody overnight, until their friends could arrange what was required. All three are once again out on bail, pending trial.

Regarding Mr. Mehran Bandi, arrested and imprisoned in Yazd on 29 May 2008: he was recently tried by an Islamic Revolutionary Court in Yazd. The verdict, issued on 28 August 2008, sentenced him to three and a half years of imprisonment followed by three years of internal exile (to the town of Shahre Babak in Kerman province). Furthermore, the court ordered the cancellation of Mr. Bandi's work permit and banned him from trading in computers for five years after he has served his sentence. During the months that Mr. Bandi was detained, he suffered physical and emotional trauma. As previously reported, he had a heart attack while in custody and was taken to hospital for treatment, then back to the Intelligence Ministry detention centre in Yazd.

In addition to Mr. Bandi, the verdict mentioned Mr. Mohammad-Ali Borna, also from Yazd, finding both men guilty of "meeting and colluding against the internal and external security of Iran", as well as "teaching against the Islamic Republic for the benefit of anti-government groups". The circumstances surrounding Mr. Borna's trial are not known at this time. Whatever sentence may have been previously pronounced against him, Mr. Borna's sentence has now been reduced to a fine of 20 million tumans (US \$20,000). The verdict is subject to appeal within 20 days. It seems that Mr. Bandi will be appealing his sentence.

Regarding Mr. Hormuz Hashemi and Mrs. Mandana Kamali, arrested in Shiraz in late December 2007 and released on bail on 10 January 2008: both were subsequently charged with "insulting the sacred institutions of Islam". Their cases took an unexpected positive turn at their trial on 19 June 2008 in a Public Criminal Court in Shiraz. The court found the two Bahá'ís not guilty in view of the fact that there was no evidence to link them with the charge, as the sacred institutions of Islam had not been insulted in any of the books found in their homes.

Regarding the four Bahá'ís in Semnan found guilty in 2007 of "teaching against the regime" and "disrupting the mind of the public", and fined 2.5 million riyals (US\$ 260)⁶ each: they appealed this verdict. An appeals court in Semnan recently rejected the appeals submitted by three of them – Mr. Goudarz Baidaghi, Mr. Abbas-Ali Ehsani, and Ms. Shahdokht Rafahipour – and confirmed the initial verdict. No details are available about the fourth case.

Finally, we refer to the cases of Mr. Afshin Akrami and four other Bahá'ís living in Karaj and its surrounding areas, arrested on 8 November 2005 and released on bail on 7 December 2005, having each provided collateral in the form of property deeds valued at 10 million tumans (US\$10,000). At his trial (date not known), Mr. Akrami had been charged with "activities against the security of the state through ties with the House of Justice⁷, as well as teaching for the benefit of Westerners and the misguided Baha'ist sect", and sentenced to one year in prison, suspended for a period of four years. An appeals court in Tehran overturned the guilty verdict against him on 28 May 2008. The court accepted Mr. Akrami's denial of the allegations and stated that, in view of the fact that there is no evidence to prove the appellant's "misdemeanours", the charges have been dropped.

⁶ According to an article published in the *Guardian*, the average income for a person working in Iran in 2001 was equivalent to US\$ 60 per month.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/sep/25/afghanistan.terrorism25>

⁷ The Universal House of Justice is the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith.

4. *Violence and intimidation*

We recently received information about a previously unreported arson attack. At 1:00 a.m. on 8 July 2008, an attempt was made to set fire to the home of the Imani family in Rafsanjan (Kerman province). A burning rubber tyre was wedged against the front door of the house, effectively locking the family inside, as out a window Mr. Ahmad Imani saw two men on motorbikes hurriedly riding away. Fortunately, some Bahá'í neighbours quickly came to extinguish the burning tyre. No one was hurt and there was no serious damage. The police were informed without delay, and a patrol unit arrived an hour later to investigate the incident. No arrests have been reported.

More Bahá'í homes and vehicles in the same town came under attack after an anti-Bahá'í sermon by the Imam who was leading Friday prayer in Kerman. According to a report published on 10 September 2008 in a Khorasan newspaper⁸, the Imam (Sayyed Yahya Jafari) warned the Muslim worshippers against “anti-Islamic activities” by a number of “perverse sects” in Kerman province. He reportedly said that the promotion and spread of “sects such as Baha'ism, Wahhabism and Babism” are part of an American conspiracy and that “the teachers within these sects are Zionist spies”. This Imam is also a representative of the Supreme Leader.

In Kerman province, Bahá'ís have been singled out for abuse in at least 23 violent or threatening incidents during the past three months. We have received details for the following cases:

1. During the night of 30 - 31 August 2008, an unknown motorbike rider came to the home of a Bahá'í family in Rafsanjan and repeatedly threw stones at the house, breaking three windows. Mr. Soheil Naeimi lodged a complaint at the local court against a group calling itself *Anti-Baha'ism Movement of the Youth of Rafsanjan*. As you may recall, Mr. Naeimi had received a threatening letter from this group in June 2008 and, on 25 July 2008, arsonists on motorbikes had destroyed his car. But the judge ordered that no further action be taken because the membership of this group is not known.
2. Three cars belonging to Bahá'ís were vandalized on two successive days in Rafsanjan in September. On 6 September 2008, the rear windscreen of Mr. Masoud Meibodi's parked car was smashed while he was attending a Bahá'í gathering. The same evening, while Mr. Hasan Misaghian was at a different Bahá'í gathering in the same town, his parked car was vandalized – someone poured acid on it, damaging the paint. The following morning, 7 September, a motorbike rider smashed the rear windscreen of Mr. Mahboub Bandi's car while it was parked outside his home. All three incidents were reported to the police. The police replied that, unless they were given names of suspects, it would not be possible to identify the perpetrators.
3. Mr. Parham Heydari from Rafsanjan received a threatening phone call for having extended hospitality to two of his non-Bahá'í friends, who had come to Rafsanjan from a smaller town for medical treatment. An anonymous caller telephoned Mr. Heydari's home from a pay phone at 1:00 a.m. the night following their arrival, asking about the identity of the visitors and the purpose of their visit. Mr. Heydari refused to answer. The caller said: “What happened to Mr. Naeimi wasn't a good

⁸ The article (in Persian) can be found at:

http://www.khorasannews.com/news.aspx?12_17077_06_16659.XML

lesson for you Bahá'ís?" (We do not know the exact date of this phone call, but it must have been made after 25 July 2008, as that was the day when Mr. Soheil Naeimi's car was destroyed by arsonists, as mentioned under point 2, above). Mr. Heydari responded that burning Bahá'í vehicles and homes would not intimidate the Bahá'ís. The anonymous caller then threatened Mr. Heydari further, saying: "We will burn *you!*" Mr. Heydari reported this phone call to the police. When he went to the police station to follow up, the officer in charge told him to take his complaint to the Intelligence Ministry.

4. On 4 October 2008 at around 3 a.m., a Bahá'í-owned wedding boutique on the main street of Rafsanjan was set on fire by an unknown arsonist on a motorbike. A neighbour was disturbed by the noise and, when he went out to investigate, he saw that the shop was on fire and immediately informed the fire department and the police. He also informed the Bahá'í owner, Mr. Payman Faghan. Although the shop was not completely destroyed, it was severely damaged.

In another case in Yazd, on 30 September 2008, Mr. Shadpour (first name not reported) received a threatening letter from an acquaintance to whom he had given some Bahá'í materials. In the letter, the man claimed that he had enough material to prove that Mr. Shadpour was planning to convert him and that the Iranian government eagerly welcomes anyone lodging a complaint against Bahá'ís. He said that unless Mr. Shadpour deposited the sum of 100 million tumans (US \$100,000) into his personal bank account within a week, he would report him to the authorities and cause him serious harm. A few days after receiving this letter, the blackmailer telephoned Mr. Shadpour demanding the money. When Mr. Shadpour replied that he was not going to pay, the man affirmed that he would carry out his threat. We are awaiting news of further developments in this case.

5. *Difficulty obtaining information from Iran*

As noted in a previous *Update*, Iranian Ministry of Information (Intelligence) officials summoned Bahá'í administrators in 21 different localities last year and unsuccessfully pressured them to sign an undertaking. All those known to be administering Bahá'í affairs were called in during August – September 2007 for this purpose, including of course the seven administrators at national level, who are now in prison. The Ministry officials tried to make them renounce all their rights, explicitly including anything that might be done to them – all "legal, judicial, and public consequences" – of claims, regarding human rights, made outside the country by Bahá'í representatives.

In recent months, it has become much more difficult for us to obtain information from Iran. Since late last year and throughout 2008, 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 many individual cases to UN mechanisms and to others in the international community.

In cases involving imprisonment or violent attacks such as those reported above, family members have found a way to transmit information to us. With only a few exceptions, however, for the cases presented in the following section the reports received are sketchy, details are lacking, and it is extremely difficult to obtain more. Nevertheless, we feel it is important to provide the information that we have received, if only to indicate the widespread, targeted nature of the abuse.

6. Denial of access to employment

Members of the Bahá'í minority continue to suffer from employment and work-related restrictions. As mentioned above, our ability to report on cases has been severely reduced since late last year. One report took such a long time to reach us that it concerns events from over a year ago (23 July-22 August 2007). These previously unreported cases are similar to other incidents that occurred during the same period:

- During that whole month, the Public Places Supervision Office in Kashan (Isfahan province) regularly checked the work premises of Bahá'ís, as well as other religious minorities, using any pretext to harass and intimidate members of these minorities.
- The bank accounts of at least eight Bahá'ís in Yazd, who were Bahá'í administrators and/or prominent members of the community, were monitored and controlled.
- A Bahá'í working in a real estate agency in Shiraz was fired from his job at a meeting held by prominent individuals and representatives from other real estate agencies. At the meeting, baseless allegations were made against Bahá'ís (strongly denied by the individual), and an anti-Bahá'í brochure published by the City Council and the Police was distributed to participants. A discussion ensued as to whether they could continue to employ Bahá'ís in light of these allegations. The participants concluded that dealing with Bahá'ís is against Islamic law.

More recently, sketchy reports from several localities cited additional (previously unreported) cases where measures had 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. In Kerman, for example, eight shops owned by Bahá'ís and located in a shopping arcade were locked and sealed off by the Public Places Supervision Office on 25 August 2008, on the pretext that the owners did not have work permits. Anti-Bahá'í material was distributed to all the shops in this arcade.

Only two of the reports contained the names of the individuals affected:

1. In July 2008, the landlord of a shop rented by a Bahá'í was summoned several times by the Intelligence Ministry in his town (location not mentioned) and ordered to evict the Bahá'í as soon as possible. Mr. Adel Samimi, the Bahá'í lessee, asked the landlord to grant him more time to find alternate premises. However, due to the pressures exerted by the Ministry on the landlord and his family, Mr. Samimi was forced to evacuate the shop before another location could be found. The landlord was not willing to sign a paper stating that the evacuation had been ordered by the Ministry, as he feared possible consequences. The landlord's son told Mr. Samimi that repeated summons to the Ministry had caused his father such anxiety and distress that his hands were shaking upon his return each time.
2. A Bahá'í young man in Ghaemshahr, Mr. Arian Barzegar, was recently fired from his job in a food store on instructions from the Public Places Supervision Office (date not given). The shop owner was contacted by the Office and informed that Mr. Barzegar can no longer work in the food store because he is a Bahá'í.

The Public Places Supervision Office has been mentioned several times in this section. This is the Office that promulgated explicitly discriminatory regulations last year, prohibiting Bahá'ís from working in over 25 specified trades.

7. Denial of access to education

7.1. Primary and secondary school education

We recently received reports from different parts of Iran about high school officials denying Bahá'í students entry to their schools for the current school year. We are able to provide names for only three of these cases, as follows:

- A high-school student from Shiraz, Ms. Farnaz Rouhani, was denied entry to her school when school officials found out that she is a Bahá'í. She was expressly told that the school does not accept religious minorities. Subsequent efforts made by the family to enrol their daughter have been fruitless.
- A student in Isfahan, Ms. Ghazal Rezapour, was refused registration at her high school – the one she had been able to attend the previous year despite the fact that school officials had already been aware of her religion. When her parents contacted the Security Office of the Education Department, they were told that her enrolment had been refused because she had explicitly declared herself as a Bahá'í on her registration form. Had she not done so, they claimed, she would have been accepted.
- For two years in succession, a Bahá'í student from Karaj (near Tehran), Mr. Samim Mirhosseini, passed the entry exam for gifted students but was barred from entry to the special middle school set up for these pupils. Last year, he was refused entry by the school principal because of his religion. This year, his enrolment was blocked through different means: the exam results given for him were lower than required to qualify, but all of his teachers agreed that he was one of the top students in the class and that his marks must have been reduced because he is known to be a Bahá'í.⁹

In other cases, Bahá'í parents have been obliged to pay unofficial fees so their children can be registered at school. For the security of these young people and their families, we will not be providing their names. Three cases are briefly mentioned here as examples:

- A high-school student was refused entry to the school he had attended the previous year, as it had become known that he is a Bahá'í. He protested, was told to contact the Security Office of the Education Department, and the family spent days going from one office to another. Then the principal asked the parents for 100,000 tumans (approx. US \$100) to allow his enrolment, which they paid.
- Another Bahá'í student from the same high school was permitted enrolment after his parents had paid an unofficial fee of 250,000 tumans (approx. US \$250).
- A high-school student in a different town was refused entry to a school near his home due to his being a Bahá'í. The school principal referred him to another school, which accepted to enrol him provided he sign an undertaking not to mention his religion and to pay the sum of 200,000 tumans (US \$200).

⁹ In a previous *Update*, we reported on the new policy that seems to have been implemented in this case. As you may recall, the parents of a Bahá'í student were told by a sympathetic school administrator that all school principals in Marvdasht had received verbal instructions to give students of “the Bahaist sect” and other religious minorities at most only a passing grade in their school examinations – regardless of their actual level of performance. It seems likely that this new directive was verbally transmitted to school administrators in other localities, as well.

Finally, we can report that in August 2008 a young Bahá'í student in Shiraz was expelled from the national judo team and prevented from participating in international competitions, after having won the junior national judo championship. A team official told the young Bahá'í that the president of the Judo Federation is a commander in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards. Following appeals and investigation of this decision, it was discovered that the Iranian Physical Education Office had (orally) advised all sports institutions and federations that Bahá'ís are allowed to participate in competitions inside Iran but were not permitted to coach, referee or represent Iran on national teams.

7.2. Higher education

You will no doubt recall the October 2005 letter from Iranian military headquarters to police and intelligence agencies, ordering them to identify and monitor all Bahá'ís. After nearly three years of official efforts to identify members of this religious minority across the country, one of the results has been to seal off access to university for students who are now known to be Bahá'ís.

Students who took the national university entrance exam this year 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, where they received the message: “Error: ‘Incomplete File. Forward correspondence to the Education Assessment Organization c/o P.O. Box 31535-3166, Karaj”.

The students nevertheless continued their determined efforts to gain access to higher education. An account from one of them was published on 4 September 2008 on the website of *Akhbar-Rooz*.¹⁰ Extracts in English translation are provided below:

Mr. Holakou Rahmanian, a 19-year-old Bahá'í (...) studied mathematical physics in a pre-university program during the final year of high school and, through hard work and perseverance, prepared for the National Entrance Examination. He ranked 76th nationwide [in 2007] and was certain that with this level of achievement he would be able to enter any university and study the subject of his choice. He writes that, to his disbelief, he found the word “Failed” in front of his name on the Internet site of the Educational Measurement and Evaluation Organization (EMEO). He immediately went to this organization in Tehran and then to their office in Karaj, where he was told that he had failed because he was a Bahá'í. He... made several visits to related authorities and filled out various forms, but, after he had confirmed that he was a Bahá'í, his entrance exam grades were annulled. (...) [H]e participated in the same examination for the 2008/2009 school year, but when he searched for his grades, the phrase “Incomplete File” appeared in front of his name. Again he visited EMEO and [again] was told that his problem was his beliefs... all his efforts and visits to various organizations have been useless so far (...). *Source: Human Rights Activists in Iran.*

Many others are also appealing through government and human rights organizations. We know of at least a dozen cases and can provide details for four at this stage:

- Ms. Mahsa Mahrami first met with the office of the Educational Measurement and Evaluation Organization (EMEO) in Tehran. The officials there informed her that her case “had a specific problem” and recommended that she visit the EMEO office in Karaj. She did so with her cousin, whose case was similar. The secretary

¹⁰ Available in Persian at <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/news.jsp?essayId=16967> .

who received them mentioned the names of many other Bahá'ís who were on the same list, and when the EMEO official came to greet them, he asked if they were Bahá'ís. He then stated that EMEO had received “representatives from the offices of Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, the United Nations, and human rights organizations” to discuss the matter and that “this ‘Incomplete File’ is absolutely baseless”. But when Ms. Mahrami asked about the source of the instructions not to allow Bahá'ís to attend university, the official replied, “This is a question for your administrative body that is currently in jail,” and he added, “If you had not publicized that you are Bahá'ís, you would be able to study in the university.”

- Mr. Sepehr Forouhari from Karaj and Mr. Ardeshir Fanaiyan from Semnan took their documented cases to the Court of Administrative Justice. In one case, the court ruled that the student “meets the criteria as defined by the bill reference 1337/M/S-6/12/69 [25 February 1991] ratified by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution and is thus considered to have failed and has no valid argument to prove that there has been a violation of the guidelines”. We assume that this must refer to the guidelines in the 1991 memorandum that we have often mentioned in this context, which includes directives denying higher education to anyone known to be a Bahá'í.¹¹ In the other case, the court stipulated more cryptically: “candidates must meet general and specific criteria and conditions as stated in the booklet” and that “if it becomes evident that the candidate does not meet the requirements, his/her results will be considered null.” It seems that being declared to have an “incomplete file” means that a student does not meet the requirements, and that such a case cannot be appealed.¹²
- Mr. Shadi Ismaeli took the entrance exam for the current academic year, received her results (unlike many other Bahá'í students), and was accepted to study agricultural engineering at the University of Maragheh in East Azarbaijan province. On 16 September 2008, she went to this university and filled in the registration form, putting “Bahá'í” in the space for the obligatory declaration of religion. She submitted the form to the university registration office and received food vouchers and access to her dormitory. About 15 minutes after leaving the office, she received a phone call asking her to come back because her file was “incomplete”. She returned and was told that her registration could not be processed. When she asked why, the staff member on duty told her: “You and I both know the reason. Regrettably, we are unable to enrol you unless *Sanjesh*¹³ approves”. Ms. Ismaeli contacted *Sanjesh* to obtain its approval, but her case was turned down. She was told that registrations of other students “with the same problem” (other Bahá'ís) had not been approved, either.

Even the token number of Bahá'í students enrolled in post-secondary institutions during the past few years cannot count on being permitted to complete their studies. On 4 August 2008, three weeks before graduation, a Bahá'í accountancy student at Fazilat University in Semnan was summoned and questioned about the alleged fact

¹¹ The text of the 1991 government memorandum can be accessed through the following links: Persian original: http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5_TheISRCCdocument.pdf English translation: http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5_TheISRCCdocument_en.pdf

¹² The same court has ruled in two other Bahá'í cases: that complaints made against the orders of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution would not be investigated by the Court; and that the expulsion of the Bahá'í student was not illegal, based on the decision of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. Again, we can only assume that these rulings are referring to the 1991 government memorandum, see footnote 11.

¹³ *Sanjesh* is the National Education Measurement and Evaluation Organization (EMEEO).

that she had not informed the university of her religion at registration. The student, Ms. Neda Keshavarz Rahbar, replied that she had clearly indicated her religion as Bahá'í on the application forms. This fact was confirmed when university officials carefully checked her file. The officials then told her that, if she did not recant her Faith, she would not be allowed to finish her studies. Ms. Keshavarz refused to do so and was expelled from the university on the same day.

Finally, we noted the case of yet another Bahá'í student presented in an article written by Mr. Ahmad Batebi, a prominent Iranian activist now in exile (who is not a Bahá'í). Published on 2 September 2008, the article quotes a text about the situation of Mr. Hesam Mithaqi, who had posted an open letter giving a detailed account of his experience. The article by Mr. Batebi can be found in Persian on *Rooz Online* at: http://www.roozonline.com/archives/2008/09/post_8980.php and in English translation at: <http://www.iranian.com/main/2008/freedom-all>.

8. Incitement to hatred based on religion or belief

Several State-sponsored anti-Bahá'í events covered by the Iranian media were reported in section 1, above. In section 4, we mentioned that Bahá'í homes and vehicles had been attacked after an anti-Bahá'í sermon by the Friday Imam (leader of the Friday prayer) in Kerman. When the Friday Imam of Bandar Abbas, Ayatollah Naeimabadi, attacked the Bahá'í Faith in his sermons for four consecutive weeks (25 July – 15 August 2008), excerpts were published in the local newspaper, *Darya*. The Bahá'í community in Bandar Abbas wrote a letter to the Office of the Imam, refuting his accusations, and another to the Governor of Bandar Abbas, requesting him to take action so as to prevent unwarranted attacks on Bahá'ís.

Three different versions of an anti-Bahá'í brochure entitled *Baha'ism: a Colonial Dance* were widely distributed in Shiraz in July – August 2008. They contained many false accusations against the Bahá'í Faith, the same lies that have been published repeatedly for several years in *Kayhan*, the government-backed daily newspaper.

On 10 September 2008, *Fars News* reported that a lengthy narrative entitled *Farib* (“Deception”) was being issued as a series in *Today's Woman* magazine, a *Kayhan* publication. The report referred to its author, Mrs. Mahnaz Raoufi, as a former Bahá'í who had converted to Islam. Two years ago, *Kayhan* published a 77-episode series by the same author: *The Grim Shadow: memoirs of a person saved from Baha'ism*.¹⁴ Moreover, Mrs. Raoufi has been giving speeches and interviews attacking the Bahá'í Faith, throughout the country.¹⁵

On 18 August 2008, *Kayhan* responded to the statement issued by the Bahá'í International Community less than a week before – as you may recall, our statement of 12 August had denied allegations published in the Iranian media:

- that Mrs. Shirin Ebadi's daughter had become a Bahá'í;
- that Bahá'ís are agents of Zionism;
- and that when Iranian Bahá'ís communicate with the Bahá'í Faith's international governing body in Israel, it is a “conspiracy.”

¹⁴ See <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8706180307>

¹⁵ See <http://www.kayhannews.ir> and <http://www.iran-newspaper.com/1387/870607/html/rodarro.htm>

Kayhan claimed that “the Bahá’í leaders in Israel” had confirmed that they had been in communication with the arrested Bahá’ís in Iran (i.e. the imprisoned leadership) and had stated that such communication is legal and normal. *Kayhan* again condemned the Bahá’ís for having their international headquarters in Israel:

The Bahá’í leaders certainly did not explain what they are doing in this occupied country [Palestine] sixty (60) years after the establishment of the illegal Zionist regime, and how they are benefiting from the unique support that regime provides them to freely perform their activities!¹⁶

Finally, we noted that, on 27 September 2008, *Iran Book News Agency (IBNA)* announced the publication of a tome entitled *Armaghan-e-Safi* (i.e. *Safi’s Gift*) by Ayatollah Safi-Golpaygani (1862-1962). The book is an autobiography that criticizes “the Bahá’í sect” by relating stories from different phases of the author’s life and the evolution of his ideas in “confronting and opposing the Bahá’í ideology”. The publisher has produced 5500 copies of this book for distribution, at a price not exceeding the equivalent of US \$2.00.¹⁷

In this context, it should be recalled that members of the Bahá’í minority have long been denied access to all means of communication with the public in Iran, and thus cannot counter the lies and calumnies propagated about them and their religion. When Bahá’ís have made attempts to contact newspapers and other media requesting rights of reply, they have been ignored or even mocked for having imagined that they might be granted the means to deny published allegations or to present their point of view – in total contradiction with Article 5 of the Iranian Press Law.

Furthermore, the authorities have repeatedly acted to deny Bahá’ís access to all means of printing or photocopying Bahá’í materials. For many years, Bahá’í books, leaflets and other publications have been systematically confiscated during house searches, along with photocopiers, computers and printers belonging to individual Bahá’ís. This not only deprives the community of the means to produce materials for internal use, but also obstructs its members from providing accurate information in response to the widespread propaganda against them.

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.

Further information and background can be found in the 2008 edition of *The Bahá’í Question – Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, available online (in PDF) at: <http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/TheBahaiQuestion.pdf> .

More information is also regularly posted at: <http://www.bahai.org/persecution/iran>

¹⁶ See <http://www.kayhannews.ir/870528/2.htm#other208>

¹⁷ See: <http://www.ibna.ir/vdch6vni.23n-idfft2.html>