

## Nature of the Persecution against the Bahá'ís in Iran: Background and Documentation

(September 2015 edition)

This report both presents the historical and legal background of the persecution that has targeted Bahá'ís in Iran since the Islamic Revolution, and documents the major upsurge in human rights violations against them since 2005. The abuses involve not only civil and political rights, but also a wide range of social, economic and cultural rights, as can be seen in the Table of Contents, below.

Developments since February 2015 are reported in our UPR implementation document, in attachment.

Additional information can also be found at:

<http://www.bic.org/persecution-bahai-community>

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All of the referenced documents and editions can also be obtained in print from Bahá'í International Community representatives.

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## 1. Situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran – historical and legal context

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The Bahá'ís have been persecuted throughout the history of their Faith in Iran. Early followers faced violent opposition from religious authorities and governing dynasties in Persia – some 20,000 perished in pogroms during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The persecution continued intermittently thereafter, increasing when governments felt the need to appease, or curry the favour of, fundamentalist Islamic leaders.

Some conservative members of the Islamic leadership view the Bahá'í Faith as a threat to Islam and brand Bahá'ís as apostates. The progressive ideas of the Faith on matters such as women's rights, the independent investigation of truth and the absence of clergy are of concern to many fundamentalist Muslim clerics. In addition, for Iran's Shi'ite establishment, the emergence of an independent religion that postdates the Qur'an is theologically abhorrent. Members of the Shi'ite establishment in Iran have long been determined to extinguish the new faith and suppress its followers.

Following the Islamic Revolution, there was a sharp acceleration of the systematic governmental programme to eliminate the Bahá'í community in the country, with a parallel increase in human rights violations against individual Bahá'ís. Since the early 1980s, over 200 have been executed or murdered, thousands arrested, detained, interrogated, and tens of thousands deprived of jobs, pensions and educational opportunities. The community's holy places, cemeteries and property have been confiscated, vandalized or destroyed; many individuals have had homes and other property seized or damaged, and discrimination against Bahá'ís is a matter of official state policy, as detailed in the relevant sections below.

### 1.1 The government memorandum on “the Bahá'í question”

The official nature of the persecution came to light in 1993 with the publication, by the former UN Special Representative on Iran, of a 1991 Iranian government memorandum establishing a policy on “the Bahá'í question”. Drafted by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the memorandum gave explicit instructions to ensure that the “progress and development” of the Bahá'í community “shall be blocked.” Its provisions, still in effect today, include directives denying access to higher education and many kinds of employment for anyone known to be a Bahá'í.<sup>1</sup>

As we have often stated, the Bahá'í community poses no threat to the authorities in Iran. It is not aligned with any other government, ideology or opposition movement. The principles of the Faith require Bahá'ís to obey the laws of their country and to avoid partisan political involvement, subversive activity and all forms of violence. The Bahá'ís seek no special privileges but only their rights under the International Bill of Human Rights (to which Iran is party), in particular the right to life, liberty and security of person, the right to profess and practice their religion individually and in community with others, and the rights to education and work.

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the 1991 government memorandum can be accessed through the following links:  
Persian original: [http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5\\_TheSRCCdocument.pdf](http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5_TheSRCCdocument.pdf)  
English translation: [http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5\\_TheSRCCdocument\\_en.pdf](http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5_TheSRCCdocument_en.pdf)

## 1.2 Constitutional issues

The Bahá'í community is the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran, but it is not recognized as such by the authorities. Article 13 of Iran's Constitution stipulates that Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities. Therefore when the term "religious minorities" is used by Iranian officials, it is only referring to those recognized in the Constitution, and as such does not apply to Bahá'ís.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Article 13 limits freedom of religious practice to recognized religions only, stripping other religions of this freedom and legitimizing the persecution of individuals who practice those religions. When referring to the Bahá'í community, the Islamic regime will use terms such as "misguided" or "deviant sect", a cult, or an "illegal association" in order to distinguish it from religious minorities.

Article 26 of Iran's Constitution restricts freedom of association as follows: "Parties, associations, political groups and trade unions and Islamic or recognized religious minorities shall be free, provided they do not violate the principles of independence, liberty, national unity and Islamic standards and the foundation of the Islamic Republic." As such, freedom of association does not exist for Bahá'ís because it is granted only to recognized minorities and those considered in conformity with "Islamic standards".

Iranian officials quote Articles 14<sup>3</sup> and 20<sup>4</sup> of Iran's Constitution when claiming that every citizen of their country enjoys "all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights". However, Article 20 limits these rights by adding the proviso "in conformity with Islamic criteria", leading to the exclusion of Bahá'ís from equality and protection before the law. Article 14 also limits its own scope by applying only to those who "refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran". The vague conditionality in Article 14 has been employed to attempt to justify the persecution of non-Muslims who are judged to be engaged in conspiracy or activity against Islam. Since belief in the Bahá'í Faith is considered heresy, any involvement in the Faith is thereby considered to be "engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam".

Article 19 of the Constitution provides that the people of Iran "shall enjoy equal rights and the complexion, race, language and the like shall not be considered as a privilege". No reference is made to religion (or gender) in this context: the Constitution does not explicitly recognize the principle of religious non-discrimination. In practice, Bahá'ís are subjected to unfair and discriminatory treatment regarding access to higher education, employment, business, cemeteries and places of worship. Examples are given in the following sections.

Finally, it should be noted that Article 23 of Iran's Constitution reads as follows: "The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task

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<sup>2</sup> The government's restricted use of the term "religious minorities" was clearly stated in 2010 in Iran's national reports to the UPR and to the UN Human Rights Committee.

<sup>3</sup> Article 14 reads: "In accordance with the sacred verse "God does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with those who have not fought against you because of your religion and who have not expelled you from your homes" [60:8], the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and to respect their human rights. This principle applies to all who refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran." *To avoid applying the provisions of this article to Bahá'ís, Iranian officials constantly accuse them of engaging in activities "against Islam and the Islamic Republic".*

<sup>4</sup> Article 20: "All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria."

simply for holding a certain belief". Nevertheless, Bahá'ís continue to be identified in schools, university entrance examinations and at their places of work and consequently discriminated against. The authorities have launched a vast information-gathering campaign during the past eight years, specifically to identify and monitor the activities of all Bahá'ís, as detailed below.

## **2. Denial of the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly**

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The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy; its institutions perform many of the functions reserved to clergy in other religions and are the foundational element of Bahá'í community life. Elected Bahá'í councils, known as spiritual assemblies, exist in over 180 countries and territories throughout the world, following the same administrative rules and organizing similar activities. Many maintain centres where Bahá'ís gather.

Like Bahá'í communities elsewhere in the world, the Iranian Bahá'í community annually elected an assembly of nine members to look after its vital needs. On 21 August 1980, all nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran were abducted and disappeared without a trace. They are presumed dead. Then, on 27 December 1981, the recently re-elected national Bahá'í assembly was again ravaged by the execution of eight of its members. Four more members of the same assembly, which had been courageously re-established through fresh elections, were later executed as well. In 1983, the government called for the institutions to be dismantled. The National Spiritual Assembly of Iran dissolved itself and the rest of the administrative structure as a demonstration of goodwill. Since then, the Bahá'í community in Iran has been denied freedom of association and the right to peaceful assembly. No Bahá'í community centres are permitted in Iran.

As a result, Iran's Bahá'ís made arrangements to worship in small groups, hold classes for children, study and discuss their faith, and take care of other community needs in their homes. The authorities have long attempted to prevent individual Bahá'ís from participating in religious gatherings, activities and events of Bahá'í community life. Since 2004, governmental officials have intensified their pressure in the form of intimidation, harassment, threats, and, notably, by ordering Bahá'ís to suspend social, educational and community-related activities. Essentially, every facet of community life with the exception of individual observance of religious obligations has been the subject of scrutiny and suppression. For Bahá'ís, however, many of these activities are an integral part of their religious practice, and of their right to freedom of religion and worship.

Moreover, every religious community must have some means of administering its own affairs. Being officially prohibited from maintaining their institutions, the Bahá'ís of Iran formed ad-hoc groups to organize the activities of the community and to serve its members at national and local levels. For years, the authorities knew about and tolerated the functioning of these groups, but, early in 2009, the government declared all Bahá'í administrative arrangements illegal.<sup>5</sup>

The Bahá'í International Community issued an open letter to the Prosecutor General in 2009 and another to the Head of the Judiciary in 2010 about this and related issues.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to a press release by official Iranian news agencies on 15 February 2009 (also announced on national TV), this declaration was made by Iran's Prosecutor General.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://news.bahai.org/story/702> and <http://news.bahai.org/story/801>

The community's seven former leaders – the informal group administering the affairs of the community at national level known as the Yaran – had already been arrested in 2008.<sup>7</sup> Subjected to intensive interrogation and ill treatment while in solitary confinement and then repeatedly denied release on bail, they were detained in section 209 of Evin prison in Tehran for over two years. At their trial in 2010, the Court found no evidence to establish guilt on charges that could have carried the death penalty but convicted the Bahá'ís on six other charges and imposed the maximum sentence, 20 years in prison. While the Appellate Court revoked the three charges alleging “espionage”, “collaboration with the State of Israel”, and “provision of classified documents to foreign nationals with the intention of undermining State security”, it affirmed the illegality of both the religious beliefs of the former leaders and of their service to the Bahá'í community. Its ruling reduced their sentences to 10 years of imprisonment. However, in March 2011 the original 20-year sentences were reinstated.

While their case was on appeal, the former leaders were transferred to Gohardasht/ Rajaishahr prison, which is notorious for its brutally harsh conditions. The five men remain imprisoned there; the two women have been moved twice and have now returned to Evin prison in Tehran. They have been denied temporary leave from prison, to which they are legally entitled under Iranian criminal procedure. It should be noted that these seven cases are the object of Opinion No. 34/2008 issued by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

In his August 2014 report on human rights in Iran to the General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General noted:

Seven Baha'i leaders are currently serving 20-year prison terms, although the new Islamic penal Code allows a court to issue parole to individuals who have served one third to one half of their sentences. Given that more than six years have passed since these leaders were imprisoned, the Secretary-General urges their unconditional release or at least their release on parole.”<sup>8</sup>

### **3. Denial of the rights to life, liberty and security of the person**

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A national effort to identify members of the Bahá'í community throughout Iran began in 2005, and the persecution against them has greatly increased in the years since. In March 2006, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief expressed her grave concern about a letter sent in 2005 by the Head of the Armed Forces,<sup>9</sup> to the Ministry of Information, Revolutionary Guard, *Basij*, Police, Army, and others, copied to the Head of the Judiciary and Office of the Supreme Leader. The letter refers to “the misguided sects of Baháism and Babism” and states that “according to the instructions of [Iran's] Supreme Leader”:

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<sup>7</sup> The names of these Bahá'í leaders are: Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm. Mrs. Sabet was arrested on 5 March 2008, and the six others on 14 May 2008.

<sup>8</sup> General Assembly, 69<sup>th</sup> Session-agenda item 2, *Report of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (A/69/306) 12 August 2014, available at [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/69/306](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/69/306) Web. 14 January 2015

<sup>9</sup> The text of the letter (in both the original Persian and English translation) can be accessed through the following page: <http://www.bahaiworldnews.org/story/473>

“...the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces has been given the mission to acquire a comprehensive and complete report of all the activities of these sects (including political, economic, social and cultural) for the purpose of identifying all the individuals of these misguided sects. Therefore, we request that you convey to relevant authorities to, in a highly confidential manner, collect any and all information about the above-mentioned activities of these individuals and report it to this Command Headquarters.”

Implementation orders were sent out in 2006, instructing officials to complete a questionnaire about local Bahá'ís and to “cautiously and sensitively monitor and supervise” all Bahá'í social/educational activities.<sup>10</sup> In the years since then, police and Ministry of Information officials (i.e. Iran's intelligence services, henceforth referred to as the Intelligence Ministry) have interrogated many hundreds of Bahá'ís throughout the country and harassed or misled them to give details about others. Once they had been identified, Bahá'ís and some of their non-Bahá'í friends of all ages became the targets of physical assaults, arson attacks, vandalism, harassment and intimidation, as detailed in the following section.

The authorities have also cracked down on civil society; academics; women's rights and trade union activists; lawyers (including those defending the Bahá'ís); students; journalists and bloggers; and, participants in peaceful demonstrations, particularly before and after the elections in 2009 and 2012. Human rights defenders have been particularly hard hit, as the authorities attempt to silence anyone who reports human rights violations to the international community, including any Bahá'ís who do so.

### 3.1 Violent attacks

The effort to identify Bahá'ís throughout the country, as described above, was accompanied by a major media campaign vilifying the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents. These efforts were launched in 2004 and have not ceased since then (see section 8). Violent attacks then began to target known Bahá'ís in many localities, and members of the community also faced increased harassment and intimidation from officials, anonymous callers, and plainclothes agents. Some received death threats, were assaulted, or were evicted from their homes. Bahá'í cemeteries, vehicles, farms, orchards, shops, and workplaces were badly damaged or defaced with graffiti; a few were completely destroyed.<sup>11</sup> Incidents involving arson occurred in series, targeting different Bahá'ís in the same town. The community in Karaj was affected in 2008-2009; and violence was directed against Bahá'í shops and small businesses in Rafsanjan from 2008 through 2011, particularly after a newsletter linked to local clergy claimed that Bahá'ís had monopolized some private business sectors.

In a speech at the end of November 2014, Hujjat'ul-Islam Abbas Ramezani-Pour, the Friday prayer Imam of Rafsanjan, called for the Bahá'ís to be expelled from the city of Rafsanjan.<sup>12</sup> He also mentioned that according to religious fatwas, Bahá'ís are "unclean" and that it is "forbidden" to

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<sup>10</sup> Detailed information was sought: places of residence, occupations, education, and names of all the members of each family, how they related to their Muslim neighbours and colleagues, etc. To read the English translation of the August 2006 letter from the Ministry of the Interior in this regard, [click here](#). To view the original August 2006 letter in Persian, [click here](#)

<sup>11</sup> Photos documenting some of these attacks can be found at: <http://news.bahai.org/story/645>; <http://news.bahai.org/story/805>; <http://www.bahairights.org/2009/07/08/image-compilation-of-attacks-on-bahai-property-in-iran-in-the-last-year/>; <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1515>; and <http://www.bahairights.org/2009/09/19/anti-bahai-messages-sprayed-on-walls-in-ardestan-iran/>.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://news.bahai.org/story/1031>

conduct business with them. The speech came a few days after an anti-Bahá'í demonstration was held in front of the governor's office in that city. Given the influence the statements by the clerics have on those who follow them, Hujjat'ul-Islam Ramezani-Pour's statement was clearly aimed at inciting hatred against the Bahá'ís in Rafsanjan.

In August 2013, the body of Mr. Ataollah Rezvani, a well-known and very well-respected Bahá'í in Bandar Abbas, was found in his car near the railway station on the outskirts of the city. He had been shot in the head. Despite appeals for a full investigation, no one has been brought to justice for the crime, which, by all accounts, was motivated by religious hatred.

In February 2014, three Bahá'ís were stabbed in their home by an unidentified intruder in the city of Birjand. The attacker, who was wearing a mask, entered the home of Ghodratollah Moodi, a well-known and respected Bahá'í in the city of Birjand, and attacked Mr. Moodi and his wife, Touba Sabzehjou, with a knife or a sharp instrument. He also assaulted their daughter, Azam Moodi, before fleeing. All three were seriously injured. Ms. Moodi managed to summon help, and all three were taken to a local hospital in serious condition. As Mr. Moodi was a well-known leader in the Bahá'í community, and given the absence of any other apparent motive for the crime, there can be no doubt that the attack was driven solely by religious hatred.

In February 2015, in Bandar Abbas, a Bahá'í who is approximately 35 years old, married and employed at an optical shop, was threatened by two individuals and taken to a secluded area. They blindfolded him and, while threatening him with a gun held to his head, forced him to urinate into a cup and then drink the contents. They subjected him to a beating and verbal abuse whilst threatening him, saying, "just as we sent Mr. Rezvani to hell, we will do the same to you."

In the village of Kata, the properties of several Bahá'ís have been attacked, including farmlands. On 15 December 2014, 115 trees belonging to a Bahá'í were cut down during the night. On 2 January 2015, the building on another Bahá'í's property was demolished, its water pumping station dismantled, and six more trees were felled. On 11 January 2015, in the same village, the woodshed of a Bahá'í was set on fire. The fire was contained and then extinguished with the help of his neighbours.

In June 2014, the property of a well-known Bahá'í family was subject to multiple persecutions. These included tight control over the movements of individuals, gun shots at night, electricity being cut off, the transport of fruits during harvesting season being blocked, and the water supply being reduced. In addition, in April 2015 a building that was under construction was demolished. The demolition work, which started on 22 April 2015, was brought to a halt by the efforts of a friend and a lawyer, and a complaint to the Supreme Court. The building remains half demolished.

It is very difficult for members of the community to obtain juridical recourse, as the police do not investigate or do not seem able to find the perpetrators. Even when informed of an impending attack against Bahá'ís or their property, the police offer no protection. The violence is condoned by religious authorities and committed with total impunity. Officials sometimes say that the Iranian people consider Bahá'ís as infidels and want to attack them. It has, however, been the experience of Iran's Bahá'í community that many of their fellow countrymen respect and admire Bahá'ís for their ideals, good character and steadfastness. Negative attitudes are expressed and fostered by Islamic leaders and governmental officials.

### **3.2 Arbitrary arrests and imprisonments**

To put the recent events in context, it should be recalled that five Bahá'ís were in Iranian prisons in 2001, four in 2002-2003, and only two were arrested in 2004. From late 2004 to the present day, however, there have been over 816 arrests. Today, there are still 74 Bahá'ís imprisoned. In addition, since 2005, intelligence officers have summoned well over 1,000 more for interrogation, without officially arresting them.

Members of the community have been arrested in different localities throughout the country and have suffered ill treatment at the hands of governmental officials. Many have been kept in solitary confinement for long periods. Most of those arrested have been detained for weeks or months before being released on bail, and bail demands have been very high, requiring families to hand over deeds to property, and business or work licences. In nearly all cases, their homes and/or workplaces were searched and personal belongings confiscated, particularly books, photos and materials related to the Bahá'í Faith, computers, copying machines, and supplies; and, in some cases, documents with material value, such as deeds to property.

Responding to pressure from the international community, the Iranian authorities have not sentenced any Bahá'ís to death, nor to life imprisonment, since the 1990s. Recent prison terms have ranged from a few months to 20 years, and some have been condemned to additional time in internal exile.

The fact that Bahá'ís are arrested and imprisoned on religious grounds is, in itself, a violation of international human rights law. Article 18 of the ICCPR (to which Iran is party) guarantees the “freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest [one’s] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching”. However, many Bahá'ís in Iran have been sentenced to prison terms on charges of “activity against national security” and “spreading propaganda against the regime”, solely for having manifested their religious beliefs. Other charges vary widely, from merely “possessing a satellite dish receiver” to “corruption on earth”, which can carry the death penalty in Iran. According to recent verdicts, Iran’s judiciary considers as a criminal offense: “membership in the misguided Bahaist sect for the purpose of destroying national security”, in other words simply being a member of the Bahá'í religious community.

Being a human rights defender can also constitute a criminal offense in Iran. As mentioned above, one of the charges against the seven Bahá'í leaders was “provision of classified documents to foreign nationals with the intention of undermining State security”. We refer to many of those documents in this report, as they concern human rights violations and were submitted by our office to UN Special Procedures from 2006 to present.

## **4. Denial of the right to education**

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### **4.1 Elementary and secondary schools**

Children and adolescents known to be Bahá'ís are subjected to harassment, vilification and psychological pressure in primary, middle, and high schools throughout Iran. Often these abuses are committed by their teachers and school administrators. Many pupils have been threatened with expulsion or forced to change schools. In hundreds of incidents, young Bahá'ís were pressured to convert to Islam, obliged to use textbooks that denigrate and falsify their religious heritage, singled out as their faith was attacked. Any of the children who had the courage to respond were severely reprimanded: recently, in Karaj and Tehran two Bahá'í schoolchildren



aged 13 years-old and younger were threatened with expulsion when they spoke out against the incorrect and defamatory depiction of their faith by teachers in their classes

Discrimination against the Bahá'ís has even been embedded in school textbooks, where a distorted and incorrect account of the Bahá'í Faith is given, with the aim of inciting hatred and discrimination against its adherents in schoolchildren across the country<sup>13</sup>.

In conjunction with this more direct form of oppression, schoolteachers themselves were deliberately misdirected about the Bahá'í Faith. The materials provided for them by the government perpetuated falsifications that have been disseminated since the early days of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran, and were remarkably similar to defamatory propaganda in the media (described in section 8, below). Anti-Bahá'í leaflets were distributed in schools, and efforts were made through the school system to single-out Bahá'í students of all ages, as well as the members of their families. For example, a form circulated by the Education Department Management Security Office in Shiraz had to be completed for all students “who belong to religious minorities and the perverse Bahaist sect”. The form required information not only about the student and his/her parents, but also about all of the student's siblings. A Ministry of Education directive in November 2011 not only called for all Bahá'í pupils to be identified, but explicitly included pre-schoolers— children in kindergarten.

## 4.2 Higher education

Members of the Bahá'í Faith have long been denied access to higher education. It is an official policy of the government to expel Bahá'ís from universities and vocational training institutions, as soon as they are identified as members of the community.

The authorities are well aware that Bahá'ís, as a matter of principle, will not deny or lie about their religious affiliation. In 2004-2005, the government responded to international pressure by re-interpreting an entry on an official form in a way that allowed Bahá'ís to take the national university entrance exam without declaring their religion.<sup>14</sup> For several years, small numbers obtained admission but, one by one, those who began their studies were identified as Bahá'ís and expelled – some during their final semester, just before graduation. Nearly all those who passed the entrance exams were blocked during the enrolment phase or expelled later, when it became known that they are members of the Bahá'í community.

Government documents have been identified that indicate that this discriminatory treatment represents formal and settled official state policy. Chief among these is a communication sent in 2006 by the Central Security Office of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and addressed to 81 Iranian universities - the names of which were listed. The letter instructed these universities to expel any student that was found to be a Bahá'í at the time of enrolment or

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<sup>13</sup> A recent study by Freedom House entitled “Discrimination and Intolerance in Iran's Textbooks” depicts how the Bahá'í religion is mentioned as a “false sect” and the Bahá'í are accused of being tools in the hands of foreign superpowers.

See [https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/discrimination-and-intolerance-irans-textbooks#.VYQ7I\\_mqpHw](https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/discrimination-and-intolerance-irans-textbooks#.VYQ7I_mqpHw)

<sup>14</sup> The authorities stated that the required entry for “religion” on the application form for the national university entrance examination was not meant to identify the student's religion but only the required course of religious study that he or she had chosen. In Iran, this exam includes a section testing knowledge of one religion. Applicants choose the religion on which they wish to be tested, but there are only four options: the four recognized religions.

during his/her studies.<sup>15</sup> University enrolment forms include declarations of religion, and many officials do not allow these to be left blank. Even during the academic year, university authorities have summoned students and demanded that they identify their religion. Whenever a student was identified as a Bahá'í, he or she would be expelled.

It is no coincidence that the 2006 letter was sent out the same year that Bahá'í students were finally permitted to take the national entrance exam. This was also the first year since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran that a few token Bahá'ís had been admitted to university. The instructions in that letter cited "decree number 1327/M/S, dated 6/12/69 [= 25 February 1991]", which refers to the 1991 memorandum from the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council with the directive that "(t)hey [Bahá'í students] must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís". Other official letters that same year confirmed that these instructions were being implemented throughout the country.<sup>16</sup>

All the Bahá'í students who have appealed against their expulsions with relevant educational authorities, and/or through the courts, have seen their cases rejected and dismissed. In some of their verdicts, the courts explicitly referred to the 1991 policy document from the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council. Not a single expulsion case has ever been decided in favour of a Bahá'í.

In June 2014, Amnesty International published a report entitled "Silenced, Expelled, Imprisoned, Repression of Students and Academics in Iran", which dedicated a whole section to the denial of access to education to scores of Bahá'ís in Iran.<sup>17</sup>

During the 2014-2015 academic year, more than 300 cases of denial to higher education were reported. When the announcement of the results of the National University Entrance Examination was made, unlike the previous year (where the notation "incomplete file" was written against the names of the Bahá'í youth), the following was written in front of the Bahá'í students' names:

*"Please write to Post Office Box 3166- 31635 Karaj, or go to the National Education Measurement and Evaluation Organization, Enquiries Unit."*

A group of Bahá'í youth visited the above referenced office in Karaj to follow up. The person in charge opened the booklet about the National University Entrance Examination and showed them the page with the requirements for taking the examination, which stated that only Muslims and officially recognized minorities were allowed to participate in the examination.

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<sup>15</sup> The 2006 letter to universities can be accessed at:

Persian: [http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/1\\_LetterFromMinistriesToUniversities.pdf](http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/1_LetterFromMinistriesToUniversities.pdf)

English: [http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/1\\_LetterFromMinistriesToUniversities\\_en.pdf](http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/1_LetterFromMinistriesToUniversities_en.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> For example, see a letter from the Central Security Office of Payame Noor University, November 2006:

Persian original: [http://info.bahai.org/pdf/payame\\_noor\\_univ\\_memo\\_farsi.pdf](http://info.bahai.org/pdf/payame_noor_univ_memo_farsi.pdf)

English translation: [http://info.bahai.org/pdf/payame\\_noor\\_univ\\_memo\\_english.pdf](http://info.bahai.org/pdf/payame_noor_univ_memo_english.pdf) Another related letter dated 17 March 2007 can be accessed at:

Persian: [http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/2\\_LetterToPayam-i-NurUniversity.pdf](http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/2_LetterToPayam-i-NurUniversity.pdf)

English: [http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/2\\_LetterToPayam-i-NurUniversity\\_en.pdf](http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/2_LetterToPayam-i-NurUniversity_en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International Report June 2014, *Silenced, Expelled, Imprisoned, Repression of Students and Academics in Iran*, see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/015/2014/en/a44b334a-cbcb-468d-a2f8-e3e66ce9e939/mde130152014en.pdf>

Indeed, the government's denial of higher education to Bahá'ís is officially recorded in a publication issued by Sanjesh, the national academic evaluation and measurement organization of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. Entitled, "A guide to enrolling and participating in the national entrance examination for academic year 1394 [2015–2016]", this 50-page publication presents detailed guidelines on the application process for students wishing to enter university in Iran, including criteria for admission. The first admission criterion of the publication by Sanjesh states as follows on page 4 under the heading 'General Requirements':

"A belief in Islam or in one of the recognized religions (Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian) in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran".

This requirement of Iran's own official admission document clearly states that access to higher education in Iran is restricted only to those who believe in Islam or in one of the three other recognized religions specified in Iran's Constitution – thus excluding those who believe in the Bahá'í Faith.

Although Islamic teachings and Article 23 of the Constitution strongly forbid the investigation of individuals' beliefs, it is clear that Bahá'ís are denied their fundamental rights solely because they are identified as such. Most Bahá'ís are identified early in the university application process and are not even permitted to complete the procedure.

#### **4.2.1 Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education**

Shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, all Bahá'í students enrolled at the time were expelled from university, and Bahá'í university professors and lecturers were summarily dismissed from their positions. In the late 1980s, the Bahá'í community made informal arrangements to begin offering university-level courses to Bahá'í students, conducted in private through distance learning and/or in Bahá'í homes and premises, using the volunteer services of the Bahá'í professors who had been fired from their jobs. The Iranian government made repeated attempts to stop this quiet, peaceful initiative known as the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), notably in 1998, 2001 and 2003.

In 2011, intelligence officers acted against Bahá'ís engaged in BIHE courses in cities throughout the country. The latest joint report submitted by UN Special Procedures (A/HRC/22/67) recalls the following communication to the Iranian government:

09/06/2011 JUA, IRN 8/2011, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

##### **Arbitrary detention; Freedom of religion; Minority issues;**

Alleged arrests and arbitrary detention of members of religious minorities, in particular those belonging to the Bahá'í faith. According to the information received, on 21 May 2011, raids were carried out in at least 30 homes of individuals involved in the activities of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education. These households were reportedly subjected to extensive searches which took place simultaneously in cities throughout the country, including Gohardasht, Isfahan, Karaj, Sari, Shiraz, Tehran and Zahedan, with 15 individuals being arrested. A further eight members of the Bahá'í faith were reportedly interrogated by intelligence officers, and were released on the same day. These events reportedly form part of a continuous effort to deny access to education to members of the Bahá'í faith, who are reportedly being prevented from entering public and private universities and vocational training institutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In all, 40 households were searched, countless private and personal belongings were confiscated – particularly electronic devices and computers – and dozens of Bahá'ís were interrogated. Nineteen had been arrested by the end of June. While twelve of those nineteen were later released, seven remained in prison for five months before facing trial. All seven were convicted of “membership of the deviant Bahaist sect, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country”. The judgements presented activities in support of the BIHE as crimes. There is no foundation whatsoever to the accusations. Currently, seven Bahá'í educators and staff are serving four or five year sentences.

This concerted action against the BIHE provides clear evidence of the government's determined efforts to deny higher education – in any form, from any source – to members of the non-recognized Bahá'í religious minority in Iran. In his latest documentary entitled “To Light a Candle”, internationally renowned journalist, Mr. *Maziar Bahari*, gives an excellent account of the BIHE and its objective to meet the educational needs of the young Bahá'ís who are barred from entry or expelled from universities or other post-secondary studies in Iran.<sup>18</sup>

Further background information can be found at: <http://denial.bahai.org/index.php>.

## 5. Denial of the right to housing and other property

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Property rights of Bahá'ís are generally disregarded in Iran. In documented cases since 1979, officials have abusively confiscated more than 2,000 properties belonging to Bahá'ís throughout the country, including houses and apartments, buildings, offices, shops, factories, and other businesses, and farms, agricultural land and orchards, as well as Bahá'í holy places and cemeteries, which had previously been the private property of individual Bahá'ís or of the community as a whole.

Confiscations were often accompanied by threats and physical violence, before and during forced evictions. Some cases were taken to Court, but the judgements demonstrated that the authorities consider the Bahá'í Faith as an illegal movement and legitimise human rights violations against Iranian citizens who are members of the community. Some verdicts have declared that the confiscation of property from “the evil sect of the Baha'í” is legally and religiously justifiable.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, since 2005 there has been a marked increase in the number of summary searches of Bahá'í homes and workplaces during which personal belongings have been seized. Computers, mobile phones, books, photos, documents –including deeds and business licenses, printed material, and possessions related in any way to Bahá'í activities are routinely confiscated during these searches.

The confiscation and destruction of property belonging to Bahá'ís has continued in recent years; and their right to inherit is systematically denied. In April 2010, for example, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards confiscated 5,000 square meters of land in Ghaemshahr (Mazandaran province) that belonged to a Bahá'í and should have been inherited by his family; the confiscation was applied while his heirs were farming the land. In the village of Ivel in the same

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<sup>18</sup>Maziar Bahari, *To Light a Candle*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6dyEoWv9w&feature=share>

<sup>19</sup> See the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing in 2006, after his country visit to Iran (E/CN.4/2006/41/Add.2): <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/CountryVisits.aspx>

province, members of a previously large community still tended farmland and harvested crops, even though for many years Bahá'ís had not been able to return to their homes without being attacked. In June 2010, homes belonging to some 50 Bahá'í families in this village were destroyed. All the Bahá'í homes in Ivel were later razed, and the land was cleared to erase evidence.<sup>20</sup> Authorities have also taken measures to confiscate farmland from 17 Bahá'í families in the village of Kata.

Moreover, the right to property of Bahá'ís is also totally disregarded by intelligence agents who search Bahá'í homes and/or workplaces. They seize everything related in any way to the Bahá'í Faith; i.e., books, music, photos, documents, CDs, and computers, amongst other things.

The seizure of cemeteries has been particularly cruel, as numerous Bahá'í families were given access only to areas of wasteland for this purpose. In some cities, members of the community do not receive permission for burials at all. Moreover, there have been severe attacks, often repeated, against Bahá'í cemeteries in different localities throughout Iran since 2005. Vandals have attacked Bahá'í cemeteries with total impunity, destroying graves and causing extensive damage: April 2010 in Gilavand; May 2010 in Mashhad; June 2010 in Isfahan and in Boroujerd; July 2010 in Jirof; December 2012 in Yazd; June 2013 in Abadeh; and December 2013 in Sanandaj. In January 2014, the grave of a Bahá'í buried in the city of Sabzevar was destroyed by a bulldozer. Bahá'ís of the city had to purchase new land in order to rebury the deceased Bahá'í. In March 2014, the Bahá'í cemetery of Ahvaz's metal door was welded shut and a wall was built in front of it. Officials failed even to respect the rights of the deceased Bahá'ís to be buried according to Bahá'í laws: many deceased Bahá'ís from Tabriz and Sanandaj have been buried in the Miandoab and Ghorveh cemeteries respectively, which are at least 160 and 90 kilometres away. From 2013 to 2014, 15 deceased Bahá'ís from Tabriz have been buried in the Miandoab cemetery. In several cases, the families concerned were only informed after the fact that the burials had taken place.

Bahá'í cemeteries have been closed in several different localities, and Bahá'í families continue facing difficulties in burying their dead at the Bahá'í cemetery of Semnan, Yazd and Ghazvin.

In Ahvaz a Bahá'í family began legal proceedings in November 2014 to have the body of their deceased relative released from the Coroner's Office, where it is being stored, and buried in that cemetery. However, the body of the deceased was held in the morgue for three months in Ahvaz because local officials refused to allow the burial<sup>21</sup>. In early 2014, the Revolutionary Guards started demolition of the cemetery in the city of Shiraz, where approximately 950 Bahá'ís are buried among whom are the ten Bahá'í women who were cruelly hanged in 1983 for belonging to the Bahá'í Faith. On 4 September 2014, three Special Rapporteur issued a joint statement expressing their dismay with the excavation work at the Bahá'í cemetery of Shiraz and asked the government to take urgent action to stop the exaction.<sup>22</sup>

Virtually every Bahá'í cemetery in the country has been vandalized or desecrated, and at least two were fully demolished. Details of latest destructions are reported in our UPR implementation document (attached).

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<sup>20</sup> Photos can be found at: <http://news.bahai.org/story/780> ; <http://news.bahai.org/story/782> ; and <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/6219/screen-shot-2010-07-17-at-12-10-50-pm>

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.bic.org/news/Two-months-morgue-One-facet-campaign-make-Iranian-Baha%E2%80%99-invisible>

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14990&LangID=E>

## 6. Denial of the right to work (and earned pensions)

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Since 2004, the Iranian government has been carrying out a systematic campaign to deny Bahá'ís the right to employment. In many hundreds of cases, the authorities have taken measures to make it impossible for those known to be Bahá'ís to earn a living. There have been at least 650 employment related incidents against the Bahá'ís in Iran since 2005, including 73 since our latest report in February 2015. In the recent months, Iranian authorities have intensified their discriminatory policies and practices towards members of the Bahá'í faith through different measures of economic disruption. In many cities, the authorities sealed Bahá'í-owned shops giving spurious reasons for doing so. On 25 October 2014, agents of the Amaken in Kerman sealed 80 shops of the Bahá'ís in Kerman, Rafsanjan and Jiroft, under the pretext that the shops had been closed during the Bahá'í holy days (23 October and 12 November). Official documents prove that these abuses are not isolated cases but are, in fact, a matter of established government policy.

In particular, a letter from the Public Places Supervision Office (Tehran, 9 April 2007) gave orders to the commanders of police and heads of intelligence and security throughout its province. Members of the “perverse Bahaist sect” – as well as members of “anti-revolutionary political organizations” and other illegal groups – were to be prevented from engaging in certain occupations. The orders stipulated that Bahá'ís must be denied work permits and licences for over 25 kinds of specifically-listed business, and are barred from any other “high-earning businesses”.<sup>23</sup> In addition, with the adoption of this governmental policy, a form had to be filled out and signed by all who apply for business licences, requiring the applicant to declare his/her religion, and to undertake to:

adhere to and uphold the moral principle of the law and regulations of the Public Places Supervision Office and the laws and authority of the Islamic Revolution... [and accede that] ...in the case of the slightest wrongdoing, the [same] Office has the authority to impede my activity without adhering to any legal or administrative proceedings, and I, consequently, do not have grounds for any objections.

In this regard, the authorities now attempt to actively and pre-emptively deny legal recourse to those subject to mistreatment under discriminatory regulations.

Beginning in 2006 and in the intervening years, various trade associations, unions and business organizations were instructed to compile lists of Bahá'ís in every type of employment. This systematized process of identification has been followed by an untold number of governmental officials committing some, or all, of the following abuses:

- refusing to issue or renew business licenses, work permits and/or trade membership cards to Bahá'ís;
- closing many Bahá'í-owned businesses and sealing the premises;
- issuing instructions to chain stores, government offices and other organizations to avoid purchasing from or stop all business dealings with companies and independents if the owners or managers are Bahá'ís;

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<sup>23</sup> A copy of this April 2007 letter (in Persian original and English translation) can be found on pages 86-87 of *The Bahá'í Question – Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, which can be downloaded in electronic form at: <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/the-bahai-question.html> or obtained in a bound edition from Bahá'í International Community representatives.

- inciting the population to shun Bahá'í-owned businesses;
- instructing landlords of stores to refuse lease renewals to Bahá'í tenant shopkeepers;
- banning Bahá'ís who were working independently from continuing their activities;
- warning private-sector employers against hiring Bahá'ís and/or harassing them to dismiss Bahá'í employees and threatening them with closure of their business if they did not comply. Some of these businesses were shut down; others have been banned from advertising; and
- conducting unexpected inspections of workplaces, summoning and interrogating Bahá'ís, and raiding, and even vandalizing, Bahá'í-owned stores.

Abuses occurred throughout the country. In one case, an official informed the Bahá'í owner of a store in Hamedan, which was operated by his family for 48 years, that licenses for grocery stores would no longer be issued to Bahá'ís, at which point the owner requested confirmation in writing. To this request the official replied: “Wherever you go, even to the United Nations, you will end up here, where you will get the same clear answer.” Then the official added that, if the Bahá'í wanted a license, he could change his religion.

In addition, banks have refused to proceed with loan approvals for, and/or frozen the assets in accounts belonging to, Bahá'ís. Business licenses and banking services are vital, as many Bahá'ís have launched private enterprises over the years because they and other members of the community could not obtain employment in Iran. Since the Islamic Revolution, all members of the community have been banned from work in the public sector. In the 1980s, over 10,000 Bahá'ís were dismissed from positions in government, education, health care, etc., and never received unemployment benefits. Pensions were terminated, as well. Some of those deprived of their rightfully earned pensions attempted to pursue legal remedies, but the courts have systematically ruled against them. Copies of Court decisions in such cases explicitly state the following: “payment of pension to those individuals connected with the Baha’i sect is illegal” [or an “unlawful act”].

Bahá'í farmers are also affected. Agricultural land owned by members of the community has been confiscated; trees have been uprooted in Bahá'í-owned orchards; crops have been destroyed, livestock slaughtered, and Bahá'í farms forced to shut down.

The intergovernmental body most concerned with the right to employment is the International Labour Organization (ILO). Its Committee of Experts has repeatedly referred to Iran’s Bahá'ís in its reports, expressing concern about discrimination in the areas of vocational education and employment against “members of unrecognized religions, in particular the members of the Baha’i faith”. At the 2006 ILO Conference, statements about discrimination on the basis of religion in Iran focused almost entirely on the Bahá'ís, and the relevant extract in the Provisional Record ran to nearly four pages.<sup>24</sup> Recurrent violations against Bahá'ís – and the fact that the government had taken no measures to comply with ILO recommendations in this regard – were again noted with concern by the organization in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and from 2013 to 2015.

In its report for the June 2015 Conference, the ILO Committee of Experts included the following in the segment concerning Discrimination based on religion and ethnicity:

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<sup>24</sup> These discussions took place at the ILO Conference sitting on 15 June 2006. The text can be accessed at: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/reim/ilc/ilc95/pdf/pr-24-part2.pdf> (see bottom of page 41 to page 44)



The Committee notes from the Mission's report that the situation of nonrecognized religious minorities, in particular the Baha'i, remains sensitive, including the societal attitude towards members of this group. No statistics could be produced indicating the number of members of the Baha'i (or any other nonrecognized religion) in the public service. The impact of the Selection Law, which requires prospective state officials and employees to demonstrate allegiance to the state religion (gozinesh), on these groups remains unclear. The actual situation regarding the access of the Baha'i in practice to universities also remains unclear. (...) <sup>25</sup>

## **7. Denial of civil rights and liberties**

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Bahá'ís have no legal protection in Iran and thus their civil rights can be ignored with impunity. In nearly all routine civil procedures for which a form must be filled out, Iranian citizens must identify their religious affiliation.

The freedom of Bahá'ís to travel outside or inside Iran is often impeded and sometimes denied. Bahá'ís have had their passports confiscated when attempting to travel abroad, and some have been placed on so-called "no fly" lists. More Bahá'ís have been given passports in recent years, but there has been no official change of policy. Bahá'ís abroad still find some Iranian embassy officials uncooperative. Requiring applicants to declare affiliation with a "recognized" religion on passport application forms has been used to pressure Bahá'ís to recant their beliefs.

Measures taken by the government in 2000 has enabled married Bahá'í couples to register as husband and wife and to register their children, but the law has not changed. Therefore, Bahá'í marriages and divorces are still not legally recognized. In June 2011, we heard that an announcement had been sent to official marriage bureaus in Shiraz, prohibiting them from performing a marriage ceremony for a Bahá'í and Muslim couple. It threatened the bureaus with closure if they do not follow these instructions. Finally, as mentioned above, the right to inherit property is denied to Bahá'ís.

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

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The upsurge in human rights violations against Bahá'ís in Iran over the past eight years was both preceded and accompanied by efforts to incite hatred, distrust, intolerance, and even violence against them. Some officials have openly encouraged the persecution, and some members of the clergy have preached sermons against the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents. National and provincial budgets have included allocations for "educational" programmes to "confront" the Bahá'í Faith, and official organs have been established, dedicated to that purpose. This is institutionalized incitement to hatred.

In October 2011, the Bahá'í International Community documented over 400 published instances of incitement to hatred over a 16-month period, in a report available at: <http://news.bahai.org/story/861>. These concerned not only print and online media but also seminars, conferences, workshops, exhibitions, national TV and radio series and programmes, software data bases, and at least two websites entirely dedicated to combating the Bahá'í Faith.

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<sup>25</sup> For the full text, see [http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09661/09661\(2015-104-1A\).pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09661/09661(2015-104-1A).pdf)



From January to May 2014 there were 871 anti-Bahá'í articles (over 650 in April and May 2014 alone) on government-sponsored and pro-government websites in Iran. In all cases, the disseminations were sponsored and/or approved by the State.

Since January 2015, over 60 influential figures have publicly issued speeches, articles or written declarations against the Bahá'ís, including clerics, religious figures, academics, editors and government representatives. Such statements have been published on websites of various media organizations regularly attacking the Bahá'ís, including:

- Iranian Quran News Agency (IQNA);
- Quds Online;
- Ferghe News;
- Aftab News
- Shabestan News
- Basij News
- Fars News;
- Rasa News;
- Hawzah News

They present a wide range of totally false allegations. In some cases, lies and misrepresentations distort history, grossly malign Bahá'í moral principles and vilify both the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents, using malicious or vile language and innuendo. In other cases, Bahá'ís are falsely accused of espionage, conspiracy, instigating sedition and other illegal, anti-regime activities that threaten national security.

Incitement to hatred against the Bahá'ís has long been a mainstay of campaigns by the government to promote religious orthodoxy. Members of the community across Iran receive threatening telephone calls, text messages and anonymous letters, and they come across anti-Bahá'í pamphlets in shops, schools and other public places. In many localities, graffiti is spray-painted in and around Bahá'í cemeteries, houses, shops, orchards and vehicles. Without fail, these secondary sources of slander contain the very same malicious lies and incendiary language found in government-controlled, affiliated, and sanctioned media, as listed above.

Over the course of one month and in the Kerman province, two Friday Prayer Leaders made remarks against the Bahá'í Faith, indicating organization on the part of the authorities. In a speech at the end of November 2014, Hujjat'ul-Islam Abbas Ramezani-Pour, the Friday prayer Imam of Rafsanjan, called for the Bahá'ís to be expelled from the city of Rafsanjan. He also mentioned that according to religious fatwas, Bahá'ís are "unclean" and that it is "forbidden" to conduct business with them. The speech came a few days after an anti-Bahá'í demonstration was held in front of the governor's office in that city. And on 20 January 2015, the Friday Prayer Leader in Jiroft, Hujjat'ul-Islam Reza Karamipour made some defamatory statements about the Bahá'í community, that were subsequently reported in an article hostile to the Bahá'ís posted on the Daqianus website.

In March 2015 a number of posters against the Bahá'í Faith have been displayed in most of Tehran's metro stations. The anti-Bahá'í posters described Bahá'ís as members of a cult devised by imperialist powers, whose aim is to spy and to change the culture and religion of Iranians, specifically Shi'a Muslims.

It should be recalled that members of the Bahá'í community in Iran have long been denied access to all means of communication with the public. Therefore, they cannot counter the lies and calumny propagated about them and their religion, which, in many cases, come from those

who give the Iranian people guidance in spiritual matters. When Bahá'ís have tried to contact newspapers and other media requesting rights of reply, they have been ignored or even mocked for having thought that they could be granted the means to deny published allegations or to present their point of view – a refusal that is in total contradiction with Article 5 of Iran's Press Law.

Moreover, the government blocks all Bahá'í websites, whether originating from within or outside Iran, and officials have repeatedly acted to deny Bahá'ís access to printing or photocopying. For years, Bahá'í books, leaflets and other publications have been systematically confiscated during house searches, along with photocopiers, computers and printers belonging to individual members of the community. This not only deprives Bahá'ís of the means to produce materials for their own use, but also makes it difficult for them to provide accurate information in response to the propaganda against their Faith.

## 9. Conclusion

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International monitoring constitutes the only protection for this community. Any lessening of international support for Iran's Bahá'ís will be perceived by the authorities as a license to continue violating their rights with impunity. Only when legal and administrative steps are taken to completely emancipate the Bahá'ís will Iran be able to claim full compliance with its repeated declarations of commitment to human rights.

Outside Iran, the persecution against the Bahá'ís is one of the issues repeatedly denounced by the international community – the United Nations, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society – when condemning Iranian government violations of international human rights standards. For over 20 years, the UN General Assembly has adopted resolutions that refer to violations against minorities in Iran, including the Bahá'ís. Since 2005, eight UN Special Procedures have reported on the abuses detailed above,<sup>26</sup> also presented in the reports on human rights in Iran by the UN Secretary-General in 2010,<sup>27</sup> 2011,<sup>28</sup> 2012,<sup>29</sup> 2013<sup>30</sup>, 2014<sup>31</sup>, and 2015<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Since 2005, human rights violations against Iranian Bahá'ís have been mentioned in documents submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the Special Rapporteur on torture, the Independent Expert on minority issues, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, and in joint reports by numerous UN Special Procedures on their communications with governments.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://news.bahai.org/story/732> and <http://news.bahai.org/story/796>

<sup>28</sup> See <http://news.bahai.org/story/858>

<sup>29</sup> The 2012 report to the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/19/82, is available at:

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A.HRC.19.82\\_AUV.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A.HRC.19.82_AUV.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> See summary of reports by the Special Rapporteur on Iran and the UN Secretary-General in March 2013: <http://news.bahai.org/story/941> and the full report to the Third Committee of the General Assembly (October 2013) <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/68/documentslist.shtml>

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Council, 25<sup>th</sup> Session-agenda item 2, *Report of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (A/HRC/25/26) 7 April 2014, see <http://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/asiaregion/pages/irindex.aspx> Web. 14 January 2015

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Council, 28<sup>th</sup> Session-agenda item 2, *Report of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (A/HRC/28/26) 20 February 2015 See [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session28/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_28\\_26\\_ENG.do](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session28/Documents/A_HRC_28_26_ENG.do)

As for the UN treaty bodies: the Islamic Republic did not cooperate with the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for over 15 years. The government submitted its long-overdue reports to these treaty bodies at the end of 2009, just in time to announce renewed cooperation before its human rights record was examined for the first time under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in February 2010. Iran's second UPR cycle began in October 2014, in the face of the non implementation of one single recommendation concerning the Bahá'ís. On 17-18 October 2011, the Human Rights Committee criticized Iran's non-compliance with the ICCPR, raising numerous issues of concern, including many questions about the Bahá'ís. The Experts emphasized that as religion and belief have the same status in the ICCPR, Iran must allow Bahá'ís to manifest their beliefs individually and in community with others, in public and in private, even if the authorities do not consider the Bahá'í Faith to be a religion. A section of the Committee's *Concluding Observations* was devoted to the Bahá'ís.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, Iran's treatment of its Bahá'í citizens has been repeatedly identified as a major area of concern in publications by international human rights organizations. Of particular note: recent reports issued by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Minority Rights Group International (MRG), Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, each focussing on a different issue – minorities, freedom of religion or belief, or within the context of the draft Citizenship Rights Charter.

Finally, we would note that the persecution against the Bahá'ís of Iran has been deplored by prominent people in countries throughout the world: Nobel Peace Prize winners, parliamentarians, religious leaders, theologians, academics, business and trade union representatives, lawyers, judges, writers, artists, and filmmakers.<sup>34</sup>In April 2014, in an unprecedented move, a prominent Muslim cleric, Ayatollah Abdol-Hamid Masoumi Tehrani, gifted to Bahá'ís of the world, particularly to the Bahá'ís of Iran, who he said "have suffered in manifold ways as a result of blind religious prejudice" an illuminated work of calligraphy of a paragraph from the writings of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>35</sup> In his website the Ayatollah described this act as "an expression of sympathy and care from me and on behalf of all my open-minded fellow citizens" and a "symbolic action to serve as a reminder of the importance of valuing human beings, of peaceful coexistence, of cooperation and mutual support, and avoidance of hatred, enmity and blind religious prejudice." In his latest documentary entitled "To Light a Candle", internationally renowned Iranian journalist, Mr. Maziar Bahari, portrays the injustice faced by Bahá'í students in Iran who are barred from entry or expelled from universities, and launched a campaign on the right to education of Bahá'ís.

We are gravely concerned about the dramatic increase, during the past several years, in the arbitrary and cruel use of power against the Bahá'ís of Iran. The nature, number and range of incidents give ample evidence of official policy, putting members of the community under severe pressure, attempting to separate them from their friends and fellow citizens, and inciting the population to detest and distrust them.

The Iranian Bahá'ís deeply love their country, and despite all the suffering they have endured under successive regimes, they are encouraged by the growing support of the general

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<sup>33</sup> Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee Islamic Republic of Iran*, (CCPR/C/IRN/CO/3), 29 November 2011 see: [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fIRN%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fIRN%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en) Web. 14 January 2015

<sup>34</sup> Many of these have been documented at: <http://www.bic.org/media/international-reaction>

<sup>35</sup> See <http://news.bahai.org/story/987>

population in defence of their rights. The members of this community seek the freedom to serve their country and humankind as a whole, at the prompting of the principles and teachings of their faith. Regardless of the restrictions imposed on them, they do not refrain from discharging their spiritual and social responsibilities. They will always continue to strive, through their participation in constructive discourse with their neighbours, co-workers, friends and acquaintances, to play an important role in the advancement of their homeland.