The Bahá'ís of Iran – A Persecuted Community
(August 2018)

Following the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, members of the Bahá'í Faith—the largest religious minority in the country—have been subjected to a relentless campaign of persecution. This persecution has impacted the lives of generations, from young infants to frail elderly. In the words of the former-United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, Iranian Bahá'ís experience persecution “from the cradle to the grave, and beyond.”

As a religion that was founded after Islam, the Bahá'í Faith is considered a heresy. In addition, its teachings—including the promotion of equality between men and women, independent investigation of truth, and the harmony of science and religion—are seen as threats to the establishment. In the mid-nineteenth century, early adherents of the Faith faced violent opposition from the religious establishment in Iran, which responded to its growth with fierce opposition, inciting violence against followers of the new religion. The persecution continued intermittently thereafter with varying degrees of severity; whenever the government in power felt the need to appease fundamentalist Islamic leaders, it would step up its campaign against the Bahá'ís, using them as scapegoats to protect its own standing with the Islamic clerics.

Since the early 1980s, Bahá'ís have suffered under a new wave of persecution, this time systematic and state-sponsored. The campaign initially targeted many Bahá'ís of influence and those who served on Bahá'í administrative institutions at the local and national levels. In August 1980, for example, all nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly—an elected national council that forms part of the Bahá'í administrative structure in all countries—together with two other individuals serving on other Bahá'í institutions, were abducted by a group of armed men from their meeting in a private home and taken to an unknown location. These individuals disappeared without a trace—presumably the victims of extrajudicial killings—although the government authorities have never admitted to this fact. In the years that immediately followed, members subsequently elected to this council, as well as scores of other Bahá'ís, were executed by the government without due process of law. On 29 August 1983, the Iranian Attorney General announced a legal ban on all Bahá'í administrative and community activities in Iran, making membership on Bahá'í administrative institutions a criminal offence. In response, in an open letter dated 3 September 1983 to Iranian authorities, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran detailed the abuses faced by the Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic and appealed to the Iranian people and the Islamic government to restore their rights as Iranian citizens and as human beings. This letter was the final act of the National Spiritual Assembly before it voluntarily dissolved itself and the rest of the administrative structures within the country as a demonstration of goodwill towards the government.

1This ban was announced in a statement by the Attorney General published in the newspaper Kayhan on 29 August 1983; translated excerpt from statement reads as follows: “Now, if a Baha'i himself performs his religious acts in accordance with his own beliefs, such a man will not be bothered by us, provided he does not invite others to Baha'ism, does not teach, does not form assemblies, does not give news to others, and has nothing to do with the administration. Not only do we not execute such people, we do not even imprison them, and they can work within society. If, however, they decide to work within their administration, this is a criminal act and is forbidden, the reason being that such administration is considered to be hostile and conspiratorial and such people are conspirators.”
Since then, over 200 Iranian Bahá’ís have been executed or murdered, thousands have been arrested, detained, and interrogated, and tens of thousands more have been deprived of jobs, pensions, and educational opportunities. The Bahá’í community’s holy places, cemeteries, and properties have been confiscated, vandalized, or destroyed, and many Bahá’ís have had their homes and other property seized or damaged.

The official policy of the Iranian government against their Bahá’í citizens is summarized in a government memorandum obtained in 1993 by the UN Special Representative on the Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Produced in 1991 by Iran’s Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, this document, entitled ‘The Bahá’í Question’, sets forth specific guidelines for dealing with the Bahá’ís. It states that “[t]he government’s dealings with [Bahá’ís] must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked”. It outlines a series of measures to restrict the educational, economic, and cultural life of Iranian Bahá’ís. This memorandum remains in effect today.

In 2008, all seven members of the Yárán, or “the Friends”—an ad hoc group tending to the social and spiritual needs of the Bahá’í community in Iran with the knowledge and approval of the government—were arrested. Some 20 months after being incarcerated with no charge against them and less than an hour’s access to legal counsel, they were each sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment. In 2015, their sentences were belatedly reduced to 10 years, an act that was in compliance with amendments to the Iranian Penal Code introduced in May 2013. Although six of them have now completed their unjust sentences, one still remains in prison.

Iran has, to date, been reviewed twice under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)—once in February 2010 and again in October 2014. In 2010, Iran accepted a number of recommendations, while also responding that some others had either already been implemented or were in the process of implementation. In 2014, of the 10 recommendations requested of Iran dealing specifically with the situation of the Bahá’ís, only two of them were partially accepted by the Iranian government. However, the Bahá’í International Community, in a recent analysis of the implementation of these recommendations accepted by Iran in 2010 and 2014, confirmed that not a single one has yet been implemented. In effect, by failing to abide by the commitments and assurances it made to the international community, Iran has gravely undermined the entire UPR process. The sections that follow provide an overview of the latest cases of persecution against Iran’s Bahá’ís.

I. Home Raids, Unlawful Arrests, Arbitrary Detentions, and Violations of Due Process

In violation of UPR recommendations Rec #138.25: Strengthen its national legislation in accordance with the international treaties that it has ratified. (Burkina Faso)

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In violation of UPR recommendations Rec #138.28: Make all efforts to guarantee and to protect the rights and freedoms enshrined in the international instruments the country is a party to. (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

Since August 2005, more than 1,168 Bahá’ís have been arrested in Iran solely because of their beliefs. Moreover, during these 13 years, intelligence officers have summoned more than 447 Bahá’ís for interrogation without conducting official arrests. Sadly, the situation has not improved since the election of President Hassan Rouhani in August 2013. Since he came to power, we have documented at least 436 arrests of Bahá’ís. As of July 2018, there are some 67 arbitrarily imprisoned Bahá’ís in Iran.

Members of the Bahá’í community have been arrested in different localities throughout the country and have suffered ill-treatment at the hands of governmental officials. In nearly all cases, their homes and/or workplaces are searched and personal belongings are confiscated, particularly books, photographs, computers, copying machines, and other supplies, as well as items related to the Bahá’í Faith. Many have been kept in solitary confinement for long periods and are often detained for weeks or months before being released on bail. The bail demands are exorbitantly high, requiring families to hand over deeds to their properties or business licenses.

In October 2017, a series of arrests and raids were executed in cities around Iran as Bahá’ís prepared to celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of the Faith’s founder, Bahá’u’lláh. The following are a few examples from this wave of arrests and home raids:

- On 18 October 2017, security agents in Kermanshah arrested nine Bahá’ís after searching their houses and confiscating some personal property. The authorities never provided a justification for the arrests. The names of those arrested are as follows: Mrs. Sepideh Ahrari, Ms. Forouzan Amini (Shahidi), Mr. Amrollah Eslami, Mr. Peyman Ghami, Mr. Amir Kadivar, Mr. Kambiz Moradipour, Ms. Sinou Rasouli, Mr. Nematollah Shadabi, and Mr. Ezzatollah Shahidi. It was reported later that Mrs. Ahrari was pregnant at the time.

- On 20 October 2017, a Bahá’í social worker was arrested and transferred to Evin Prison after his house was searched. He had previously been imprisoned for four years.

- On 21 October 2017, security agents in Kerman approached the houses of eight Bahá’ís. After searching their homes and confiscating items of their personal property, they warned the residents to not leave the city until further notice and said that they would be confronted should they hold any meetings at their homes.

- On 21 October 2017, at 7:00 a.m., security agents in Birjand, with judicial orders in hand and in coordination, simultaneously approached the homes of 15 Bahá’ís. After searching the houses and confiscating personal property, including items associated with the Bahá’í Faith, nine Bahá’ís were arrested. Although a judicial order had been issued, the charges against those detained were not announced to them. The names of the arrested individuals are as follows: Ms. Sheida Abedi, Mr. Bijan Ahmadi, Mr. Firouz Ahmadi, Mr. Khalil Malaki, Mr. Sohrab Malaki, Ms. Saghar Mohammadi, Ms. Simin Mohammadi, Ms. Maryam Mokhtari, and Mr. Bahman Salehi.
The following cases of arrests, arbitrary detentions, and home raids have occurred since autumn 2017.

- On 11 September 2017, Ministry of Intelligence agents approached the houses of 11 Bahá’ís in Manjil, Paresar, Rasht, and Rezvanshahr. The authorities arrested Mr. Farid Asadpour and Mrs. Sousan Badavam (Farhangi) and confiscated personal items as well as materials and books associated with the Bahá’í Faith.

- On 25 September 2017, a Bahá’í business-owner in Tehran, who operates a jewellery store, was arrested by security agents after they searched his workplace and residence and confiscated all his gold inventory. The inventory included mostly rings and pendants containing Bahá’í religious symbols. It is understood that after his interrogation whilst in solitary confinement at Evin Prison, he was released on 19 October 2017 upon providing collateral to the value of 500 million tuman (approximately US$143,003).

- On 4 November 2017, Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court, presided by Judge Mohammad Moghiseh, found three Bahá’ís students from Karaj and Tehran—Ms. Tara Houshmand, Ms. Rouhiyyeh Safajou, and Mr. Sarmad Shadabi—guilty on charges of “acting against national security through membership of the Bahá’í deviant sect” and “dissemination of falsehoods”. Under ta’zir law, the court sentenced each of them to five years’ imprisonment. They have appealed the sentence. By way of background, on 8 March 2016, agents of the Ministry of Intelligence went to the homes of the three students and after searching their homes thoroughly—seizing mobile phones, computers, books, pictures, and anything related to the Bahá’í Faith—the youth were arrested and taken to an unknown location. Their families later learned that the three youth had been taken to Tehran’s Evin Prison. The three Bahá’ís were subsequently transferred to the political ward of the prison, accused of engaging in activities against national security through membership in and managing of the “perverse sect”.

- On 15 November 2017, Mr. Hasan Momtaz was arrested in Shiraz and transferred to prison to serve his five-year sentence. By way of background, the verdict and sentence were issued in March 2014 by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, headed by Judge Mohammad Moghiseh. Mr. Momtaz was found guilty for his work as a teacher at the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE).

- On 16 November 2017, six Bahá’ís from the province of Sistan and Baluchestan were each sentenced to three years’ imprisonment under ta’zir law by Branch 5 of the Zahedan Court. The names of the six individuals are as follows: Mr. Ali-Mohammad Anvari-Aliabadi, from Iranshahr; Mr. Rowshan Bareghi, from Chabahar; Ms. Fahimeh Eshagh-Nourabadi, from Chabahar; Mr. Bijan Eslami-Mehdiabadi, from Khash; Mr. Bahador Kamjou, from Chabahar; and Mr. Houshang Mokhtari, from Saravan. The lawyer for the Bahá’ís has filed an appeal.

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5 Ta’zir law (discretionary punishment): punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.

6 Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE): An ad hoc higher educational institute, created to meet the higher educational needs of Bahá’í youth. It primarily draws on the volunteer services of Bahá’í professors and lecturers who had been dismissed from their university posts.
On 18 December 2017, Mrs. Negin Ghadamian, one of the collaborators of the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), who had previously been sentenced to five years’ imprisonment under ta’zir law, was arrested at the airport and transferred to Evin Prison.

In December 2017, seven Bahá’ís from Isfahan were sentenced to between five and six years’ imprisonment under ta’zir law. The names of the seven individuals are as follows: Mr. Ehsanollah Eshtiagh, Mr. Farzad Homayouni, Mr. Mohsen Mehregani, Mr. Enayatollah Naimi, Mr. Soroush Pezeshki, Mr. Manouchehr Rahmani, and Mr. Enayatollah Sohrab Naghipour. The court order confirms that all seven men were charged with “membership in the illegal Bahá’í administration for the purpose of acting against domestic [national] security”. The judge sentenced six of the Bahá’ís to five years’ imprisonment. In addition to the “membership in the illegal Bahá’í administration” charge, Mr. Rahmani was also found guilty of engaging in “propaganda activities against the regime of the Islamic Republic”; accordingly, he was sentenced to a total of six years’ imprisonment. The prison sentences for all seven Bahá’ís have been appealed.

On 13 February 2018, at around 7:30 a.m., the security forces of Bushehr Province simultaneously raided the homes of a number of Bahá’ís. In addition to confiscating personal effects and items associated with the Bahá’í Faith, they arrested the following seven individuals: Mr. Lagha Faramarzi, Mr. Asadollah Jaberi, Mr. Emad Jaberi, Mrs. Farideh Jaberi, Ms. Pouneh Nasheri, Ms. Minou Riazati, and Ms. Ehteram Shakhshi.

In March 2018, Ms. Dori Amri, Ms. Saghi Fadaie, Ms. May Kholousi, Mrs. Fattaneh Nabilzadeh, and Mr. Shayan Tafazoli—who were arrested in Mashhad and released on bail—were charged with “propaganda against the regime” and were each sentenced to one-year imprisonment under ta’zir law by Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court. The individuals have appealed the verdict.

On 14 March 2018, the homes of several Bahá’ís in Yazd, including Mr. Mehran Basiri, Mr. Ramin Jiveh, Mrs. Tannaz Mohammadi, and Mr. Soheil RowhaniFard, were raided and items associated with the Bahá’í Faith were seized.

On 24 April 2018, Mr. Nematollah (also reported as “Nematullah”) Bangaleh and his daughter, Ms. Nazanin Bangaleh, were each sentenced to five years’ imprisonment by the First Branch of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court. By way of background, on 27 August 2016, both individuals were arrested following an illegal raid on their home in Shiraz by security agents. Ms. Bangaleh was released from Shiraz Prison on 13 September 2016 after paying 175 million tuman (approximately US$55,632) in bail. Mr. Bangaleh was released on 31 October 2016 after paying 550 million tuman (approximately US$171,380) in bail. On 28 March 2018, Mr. Bangaleh was again arrested in Shiraz by agents dispatched from Khuzestan and was transferred to Ahvaz Prison.

On 23 April 2018, Mr. Afif Naeimi—the last remaining imprisoned former member of the Yárrán—was called back from his medical furlough to serve the remainder of his 10-year prison sentence despite having persistent and severe health problems. The resumption of Mr. Naeimi’s prison stay, despite his grave medical condition and relevant Iranian legal provisions pertaining to his possible release, is deeply concerning. Mr. Naeimi has repeatedly
lost consciousness in prison due to severe heart problems and has been transferred to the hospital several times as a result.  

- On 6 May 2018, Intelligence agents approached the houses of Ms. Noushin Afshar, Ms. Forough Farzaneh, and Ms. Neda Sabeti in Abadan and, while doing a thorough search and confiscating items associated with the Bahá’í Faith, arrested the three women. They were released after six days, on 12 May 2018.

In May 2018, a new wave of arrests and raids on Bahá’í homes across different cities in Iran raised concern for the Bahá’í community in the country. The systematic nature of the arrests, which unfolded in multiple provinces such as Isfahan, Alborz and Razavi Khorasan, suggests a coordinated strategy on the part of government authorities. In many cases, detentions were accompanied by raids on personal homes and the seizure of religious books and materials.

II. Economic Persecution

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec. #138.88: Continue its national policy to promote equal opportunities and treatment with respect to employment. (Sri Lanka)

Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the government commenced a systematic campaign to deny Bahá’ís the right to work and employment in violation of Article 23.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Part III and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In hundreds of cases, the authorities have taken measures to make it nearly impossible for Bahá’ís to earn a living. Since August 2005, over 1,060 specific incidents of direct economic persecution against Iranian Bahá’ís have been documented by the Bahá’í International Community. This represents a minimum number, given the difficulty of obtaining accurate information about human rights violations in Iran. Incidents include arbitrary shop closures, unjust dismissals, the actual or threatened revocation of business licenses, and other actions to suppress the economic activity of Bahá’ís.

Since 2014, 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, for example, the authorities systematically seal Bahá’í-owned shops, giving spurious reasons for doing so. 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 Tehran’s Amaken (Public Places Supervision Office) dated 9 April 2007 confirms orders to the commanders of police and heads of intelligence and security throughout its province that members of the “perverse Bahai sect” must be prevented from engaging in certain occupations. The letter stipulates that Bahá’ís must be denied

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7 For further information on this case, please refer to the Bahá’í International Community’s press release of 7 May 2018, titled “Member of former Yaran back in prison despite grave medical condition”; <https://www.bic.org/news/member-former-yaran-back-prison-despite-grave-medical-condition>.

8 For further information on this matter, please refer to the Bahá’í International Community’s press release of 25 May 2018, titled “Bahá’ís in Iran Face a New Wave of Arrests”; <https://www.bic.org/news/bahais-iran-face-new-wave-arrests>.

9 Amaken (Public Places Supervision Office): Is reportedly responsible for the enforcement of accepted moral codes in places of work and other offices.

10 Letter dated 9 April 2007 from the Public Intelligence and Security Force F.A.A. [F.A.A., Headquarters of Intelligence and Security] in the province of Tehran—Public Places Supervision Office, to the Commanders of
work permits and licenses for over 25 kinds of specifically-listed businesses and are barred from any other “high-earning businesses”. Furthermore, with the adoption of this governmental policy, applicants applying for business licenses are required to fill out and sign a form asking them to declare their religion. The authorities attempt to actively and pre-emptively deny legal recourse to those already subject to mistreatment under discriminatory regulations. Moreover, beginning in 2006, and in the years that followed, various trade associations, unions, and business organizations have been instructed to compile lists of Bahá’ís in every type of employment under their purview.\footnote{For example, in May 2006, the Trade Affairs Association Manufacturing & Technical Services of Kermanshah sent a letter to the Battery Resellers Trade Union, directing it “to provide this Association with the list of the names of the members of the Baha’i sect who are members of your Union.” <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/requesting-names-bahais-battery-trade-kermanshah>.}

Since President Rouhani came to power, there have been at least \textbf{757} documented incidents of economic persecution or discrimination. A few recent examples are shared below:

- In October 2017, Bahá’í business-owners in Khorramshahr were summoned to the \textit{Amaken} (Public Places Supervision Office) and were instructed to seek permission any time they wished to suspend work.

- On 21 October 2017, agents from the \textit{Amaken} (Public Places Supervision Office) in the cities of Gonbad, Gorgan, Marvdasht, and Shiraz sealed the business premises of 26 Bahá’ís, following the suspension of work during two Bahá’í holy days. On the days before the holy days, Bahá’í business owners were warned by trade unions in Gonbad and Gorgan that their business premises would be sealed if they suspended work to commemorate those occasions.

- On 22 and 23 October 2017, agents from the \textit{Amaken} (Public Places Supervision Office) in Mahshahr sealed the business premises of 22 Bahá’ís, following the suspension of work during two Bahá’í holy days.

- On 28 October 2017, seven Bahá’í-business owners in Rasht and Sangar were warned by the \textit{Amaken} (Public Places Supervision Office) that their business premises would be sealed if they closed to observe the Bahá’í holy day. The reason cited in the warning was: “Bahá’ism-closing of unallowed commercial unit”. The business premises were sealed on 31 October 2017. The names of the business owners and the types of businesses they operated are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mr. Farajollah Farhangi</td>
<td>Convenience store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mr. Touraj Farhangi</td>
<td>Watch sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mr. Sirous Haghjou</td>
<td>Kitchen products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mr. Fariborz Keshavarz</td>
<td>Plumbing installation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mr. Aref Razavian</td>
<td>Couch manufacturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mr. Masoud Razavian</td>
<td>Security systems installation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Mr. Mehran Sami-ian</td>
<td>Electronics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- As of January 2018, 25 Bahá’í-owned business premises were sealed in Orumiyeh (Urmia).
As of February 2018, there were more than 20 sealed businesses in Tabriz.

In February 2018, the premises of a Bahá’í-owned optician business in Alborz, which was sealed in May 2017 and unsealed after payment of a fine, was once again approached by the Correction Office agents, who objected to the breaking of the seal; the business owner was charged with smuggling, and the authorities seized 90 eyeglass frames from the shop. The authorities set a fine of 4.5 million tuman (approximately US$1,228) and freed him after he paid the fine.

III. Denial of the Right to Education

A. Access to higher education

*In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.111: Adopt provisions to prevent all forms of discrimination against women and girls and, in particular, promote access to higher education for members of the Bahá’í community and other religious minorities. (Chile)*

Iranian Bahá’ís have long been denied access to higher education. It is an official policy of the government to expel individuals from universities and vocational training institutions as soon as they are identified as members of the Bahá’í community. The 1991 government memorandum concerning “The Bahá’í Question”, produced by Iran’s Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, specifically called for Iran’s Bahá’ís to be treated such “that their progress and development shall be blocked.” The document indicated, for example, that the government aims to keep the Bahá’ís illiterate and uneducated, living only at a subsistence level. The section that defined the “educational and cultural status” of adherents to the Bahá’í Faith includes the instruction that “[t]hey 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.”

In addition, other 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 during his or her studies. Even during the academic year, university authorities have summoned students and demanded that they identify their religion. Whenever a student identified as a Bahá’í, he or she was expelled.

The authorities are well aware that Bahá’ís, as a matter of principle, will not deny or lie about their religious affiliation. Every year, hundreds of Bahá’í students are denied enrolment to universities and other institutions of higher education, such as vocational training schools, under the pretext of having an “incomplete file”. These young Bahá’ís participate in the national examination and receive high scores, making them eligible for entry into university, and yet they are denied the right to education only because they are Bahá’ís. Below are some recent examples:

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12 A scanned copy of this letter and a provisional English translation are available at the following link: [https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/bahais-must-be-expelled-university](https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/bahais-must-be-expelled-university).
On 27 September 2017, a young Bahá’í civil engineering student, who wishes to remain anonymous, was expelled from the university during the seventh term of his studies at the Islamic Open University in Karaj. University officials annulled his enrolment and removed his records, which was confirmed through a confidential letter that was shown to the student but which he himself did not have access to.

After being denied admission to university for the 2014–2015 academic year on the basis of her religious beliefs as a Bahá’í, on 23 September 2014, Ms. Anisa Fanaian, from Karaj, filed a complaint against the Sanjesh at the Court of Administrative Justice. On 27 September 2015, the Court rejected her complaint and confirmed the decision of the Sanjesh as required by the existing ruling of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (i.e., the 1991 memorandum concerning “The Bahá’í Question”). Ms. Fanaian then filed a complaint to the Court of Administrative Justice against the decision of Sanjesh. On 5 July 2016, the Court of Administrative Justice decided that, based on the decision of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, the Sanjesh had acted properly, and Ms. Fanaian’s case was dismissed. On 12 November 2017, Branch 1 of the Appeal Court of Administrative Justice upheld the previous decision to deny Ms. Fanaian’s admission to university and supported the ruling of the lower court. In the associated court documents, it states that the previous ruling had been issued according to the policy and regulations prescribed by law.

In January 2018, three Bahá’í students were expelled from their universities by the order of the Hirasat (the University Security Office). The three youth were deprived of continuing their education and their student identification cards were cancelled.

In March and May 2018, Bahá’í university students throughout Iran were asked by the authorities to sign a compulsory pledge, which requires the student to choose between two statements: “I … Son/daughter of … National Identification Number … Bahá’í and borne as Bahá’í participated in the national academic test … and was accepted/results not yet announced … at the university of … I undertake/guarantee to obey the laws and regulations of the national higher education department and avoid any propagation or participation in group activities related to the banned sect of Bahá’ism and give precedence to country’s national law over advice and messages of the Universal House of Justice situated in the occupied territories of Palestine.” The second statement said: “I ………. holder of National Identification Number ………………without any questioning will obey the guidance of the infallible body of Universal House of Justice.”

B. Harassment of schoolchildren

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.110: Continue to take measures to strengthen mechanisms for the protection of the rights of women and children. (Uzbekistan)
Children and adolescents known to be Bahá’ís are subjected to harassment, vilification, and psychological pressure in primary, middle, and high schools throughout Iran. These abuses are often committed by their teachers and school administrators. Many pupils have been threatened with expulsion or are forced to change schools. In hundreds of incidents, young Bahá’ís have been pressured to convert to Islam, obliged to use textbooks that denigrate and falsify their religious heritage, and have been singled out as their faith was attacked. Any child who has the courage to respond is severely reprimanded. In only two months, January and February 2007, over 150 such incidents were reported from ten different cities, and from October 2008 to February 2009, the Bahá’í International Community received reports of over 100 incidents in a dozen different localities. In parallel, schoolteachers were being “educated” about the Bahá’í Faith using materials that contain lies remarkably similar to those used in State-sponsored media propaganda, constituting incitement to hatred and intolerance. Below are some examples of the more recent cases of persecution against children:

- In March 2017, a music school in a city in northern Iran requested permission from the parents of its students for them to perform at a concert at a well-known public venue, which belongs to the Provincial branch of the Islamic Culture and Guidance Department. The security office of the Department of Culture and Islamic Guidance identified two Bahá’í students and asked the school to remove their names from the list of performers and to prevent them from being present at the concert. The school expressed regret but said that it acted in accordance with the orders of the Department of Culture. The names of the Bahá’ís and the school are not mentioned, as the affected Bahá’ís wish to remain anonymous.

- In November 2017, an eighth grade Bahá’í student residing in Sari was expelled from her school because of her religious beliefs and sent to another school in a village ten kilometres away from the city.

- It was learned in January 2018 that a form is being distributed at schools by the Ministry of Education Security Office of Mazandaran Province for statistical purposes. It appears that every school year, the statistics of Bahá’í students are collected from schools by the Ministry of Education.

IV. Denial of Cultural Rights, including Desecration and Destruction of Bahá’í Cemeteries and Violations of Burial Rights

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.221: Ensure the freedom of religion and belief for all citizens of Iran. (Romania)

The desecration and destruction of Bahá’í cemeteries began methodically during post-revolutionary Iran as a means to strip the Bahá’ís of their cultural identity and to erase any ties to the community as a whole. Although, in some cities, Bahá’ís have been given access to land for a modest cemetery, such initiatives on the part of the authorities are not acts of compassion; rather, it is a reflection of their deep-seated prejudice towards the Bahá’ís. Most alarming are their rationales that Bahá’ís should not be buried in Muslim cemeteries because they are considered najis (unclean)\(^\text{16}\) and they are

\(^{16}\) For example, in April 2017, the Bahá’ís in Tabriz visited the director of the Vadiy-i-Rahmat (“Valley of Mercy”, referring to a cemetery) in Tabriz to ask about the refusal to bury Bahá’ís in the cemetery. The Bahá’ís were told that instructions had been issued by higher authorities, and were advised to wait patiently for a response to a complaint filed earlier. A member of the Islamic Council in Tabriz wrote to the Mayor of Tabriz requesting him to
not “people of the Book [Qur’an].” When Bahá’ís are provided property to use as a cemetery, oftentimes officials fail to respect the rights of the deceased Bahá’ís to be buried according to Bahá’í laws. For example, many deceased Bahá’ís from Tabriz and Sanandaj are required to be buried in the Miandoab and Ghorveh cemeteries respectively, which are at least 160 and 90 kilometres away. In several cases, the families concerned were only informed after the burials had already taken place. Moreover, there have been at least 74 attacks against Bahá’í cemeteries in different localities throughout Iran since August 2005. Vandals have attacked Bahá’í cemeteries with total impunity, destroying graves and causing extensive damage. Below are some more recent examples:

- In August 2017, a copy of an official form was obtained which details the legal requirements for burial at the Bahá’í Cemetery of Semnan. In the form, the authorities ask for a pledge from the deceased’s family before issuance of the burial permit. In this pledge, the relatives of the deceased are required to indicate their relationship with the deceased, their birth certificate number, and sign and comply with the six requirements mentioned on the form, namely no engravings on tombstones other than the name, surname, date of birth and death of the individual. Other items cited include a prohibition against natural beautification (e.g., greenery); prohibition against building a wall around the cemetery; prohibition against erecting any buildings and/or structures around the mortuary; prohibition against hanging or placing picture frames or written signs on the tombstone or in the area of the cemetery and for tombstones to be level with the ground. In November 2017, it was confirmed that the gravestone inscription restrictions are applied solely to the Bahá’ís and are generally enforced at all Bahá’í cemeteries in Iran. However, presenting a written undertaking is currently only required of the Bahá’ís in Semnan.

- In December 2017, in East Azerbaijan, five Bahá’ís from Tabriz lodged a complaint against the Tabriz City Council for not allocating land to serve as a Bahá’í cemetery. In response, Branch 51 of the Court of Administrative Justice ruled against the Bahá’ís and their request to be given land for a cemetery in Tabriz.

- In early February 2018, in Ardestan, Isfahan, the city’s intelligence agents once again completely destroyed the surroundings of the Bahá’í cemetery, a 700-metre radius, leaving no trace of the past and making it impossible to repair or restore the cemetery.

make it possible for the Bahá’ís to bury their deceased in the city. However, in response, the authorities, determining the Bahá’ís to be najis (“unclean”) based on the fatwa of the religious jurists, stated that the people were opposed to the burial of the Bahá’ís in the public cemetery.

In the early 1980s, the Mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Kazem Seifian, instructed cemetery directors to prohibit the burial of Bahá’ís in Muslim cemeteries. In one letter dated 12 December 1981, the mayor said, in part, “Many simpletons have been misled by this sect and many Muslims have wasted their time arguing with them [the Bahá’ís]. It [“Bahá’í sect”] is therefore, not an officially recognized religion and these individuals [i.e., the Bahá’ís] must be buried in the section of the cemetery that is allocated to those people who are not of the Book.” <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/bahais-must-be-buried-part-cemetery-reserved-those-who-are-not-people-book>

In another letter dated 27 December 1982, the mayor said, “In view of the approval given by Sharia Judge Hojjat al-Eslam Mohammadi Gilani and to prevent contamination of the environment and to maintain cleanliness [purity], it is permissible to construct in the cemetery a facility where individuals who are not of the Book can be washed in the cemetery.” <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/permission-build-washing-area-cemetery>.

Bahá’í teachings require that the bodily remains of a deceased be buried in a location that is less than an hour’s journey from the city in which he or she died. For more historical information, see the Bahá’í International Community’s report Situation of the Bahá’ís in Iran with respect to their cultural rights, November 2016; <https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/srculturalrights-1116.pdf>.
On 14 March 2018, the Bahá’í Cemetery in Kerman, which has an 80-year history, was sealed by the authorities with the installation of a placard. Thus far, many offices and organisations, such as the City Council, the governor’s office, the deputy governor’s office, and the office of the imam jumeh (Friday prayer leader) of Kerman, have been approached repeatedly. They have refused to take any action, owing to the judicial order of the authorities, and almost all of the authorities are of the opinion that the deceased need to be taken to and buried at the Bahá’í Cemetery of Rafsanjan, which is over 100 kilometres away.

V. Incitement to Hatred

*In violation of UPR recommendations Rec. #138.50: Continue its policies and initiatives aimed at the promotion of dialogue, cooperation and tolerance between different cultures and religions of the national minorities of Iran. (Armenia)*

*Rec #138.53: Strengthen and expand interreligious and intercultural dialogue. (Lebanon)*

The upsurge in human rights violations against the Bahá’ís in Iran since 2005 has been 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.

The materials present a wide range of completely false allegations. Incitement to hatred against the Bahá’ís has long been a mainstay of campaigns by the government to promote religious orthodoxy. Members of the Bahá’í community across Iran receive threatening telephone calls, text messages, and anonymous letters, and they encounter anti-Bahá’í pamphlets in shops, schools, and other public places. In many localities, graffiti is spray-painted in and on 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 media controlled, affiliated, and sanctioned by the government as listed above.

Since President Rouhani took office in August 2013, there have been more than 31,382 articles, videos, or webpages appearing in government-controlled or government-sponsored media featuring anti-Bahá’í propaganda. In all cases, the dissemination was sponsored and/or approved by the State. Since August 2016, hundreds of influential figures, including clerics, religious figures, academics, editors, and government representatives have publicly issued speeches, articles, or written declarations against the Bahá’ís. Such statements have been published on websites of various media organizations affiliated with the Iranian government that regularly attack the Bahá’ís. They include Aftab News, Basij News, Fars News, Ferghe News, Hawzah News, Iranian Quran News Agency (IQNA), QudsOnline, Rasa News, and Shabestan News.

Moreover, because Iranian Bahá’ís have long been denied access to all means of communication with the public, they cannot counter the lies and misinformation 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.\(^{20}\)

On 26 March 2018, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei issued, via his website,\(^{21}\) a new religious decree (fatwa) concerning “association and dealing with Bahá’ís”. He states that, “[y]ou should avoid any association and dealings with this perverse and misguided sect.” An English translation of the entire decree is included in Appendix 1 to this document.

Below are some other recent examples of incidents involving incitement to hatred:

- In December 2017, a programme was broadcast on Channel 2 of the Islamic Republic Television Network that criticized the activities of the Bahá’ís. A recording of a portion of this programme in Persian may be shared upon request.

- In order to wrongly implicate the participation of the Bahá’í community in the protests and riots throughout Iran during the beginning of 2018, the online newspaper Hegmataneh in Hamadan publicised, through its Telegram channel, a fake story reporting on the arrest of some Bahá’ís in the demonstrations.

- In May 2018, at the Tehran International Book Fair, a booth was arranged to disseminate misinformation about the Bahá’í Faith. The number of books at the booth were greater than in previous years.

VI. Conclusion

The persecution and discriminatory practices against the Bahá’ís in Iran, briefly highlighted above, continue to this day. International monitoring constitutes their only safeguard and the key factor in the protection of this community. 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 its commitment to human rights.

\(^{20}\) Article 5: The press are lawfully permitted to acquire and disseminate domestic and foreign news aimed at enhancing public awareness by taking into consideration the best interests of the community and by observing the provisions of the existing law. Press Law (Ratified on 19 March 1986) And Its Executive By-law (31 January 1987) With amendments of 18 April 2000.

Appendix 1

[Provisional translation of the decree issued on the website of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei concerning association and dealing with Bahá’ís]

6 Farvardín 1397 [26 March 2018]

http://www.leader.ir

[Emblem] The Office of the Supreme Leader Website

New Enquiry (Farvardín [March/April])

[This website provides answers to various religious enquiries. The following question relates to Bahá’ís:

Association and dealing with Bahá’ís
Q. What is the judgment about association and dealings with a Bahá’í?
A. You should avoid any association and dealings with this perverse and misguided sect.]