

The Bahá'ís of Iran – A Persecuted Community

(January 2019)

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 the 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, clearly, 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 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 of Bahá'í administrative institutions a criminal offence.¹

In response to this announcement, in an open letter dated 3 September 1983, addressed to Iranian authorities, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran detailed the abuses faced by the

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.”

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.

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 memorandum² 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, created because of the ban on Bahá'í administration and with the knowledge and approval of the government—were arrested. They were each sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment and, in 2015, their sentences were belatedly reduced to 10 years, in compliance with amendments to the Iranian Penal Code. They have all been released in 2018, after having completed their unjust sentences.

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 claiming that some others had either already been implemented, or were in the process of implementation. In 2014, of the 10 recommendations that dealt 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.³ 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.

² The text of the 1991 government memorandum can be accessed through the following links:

Persian original:

<<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/iran/1991%20Bahai%20Question%20Memo%20PER.pdf>>; English translation:

<<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/iran/1991%20Bahai%20Question%20Memo%20ENG.pdf>>.

³ See Islamic Republic of Iran: Non-implementation of accepted and partially-accepted UPR recommendations - Concerning human rights violations against Iranian Bahá'ís (January 2018),

<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/iran/iran_upr_mid-term_report_january_2018.pdf>.

See also Bahá'í International Community's publication *Unfulfilled Promises: Iran's failure to act after its 2010 Universal Periodic Review*, <<https://www.bic.org/publications/unfulfilled-promises#vvl85hTO0ISXzhR.99>>.

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)

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 **1,234** Bahá'ís have been arrested in Iran solely because of their religious beliefs. Moreover, during these 13 years, intelligence officers have summoned more than **463** 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 **502** arrests of Bahá'ís. As of August 2018, there are some **78** 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 the usual items, such as 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 September 2018, similar to autumn last year, a series of coordinated arrests of Bahá'ís and raids of their property, were executed in cities around Iran. The following are a few examples from this wave of arrests and home raids:

- On 16 September 2018, Mr. Ehsan Mahboube-Rahe-Vafa and Mmes. Bahareh Ghaderi, Soudabeh Haghighat, Noura Pour-Moradian, and Elaheh Samizadeh, were arrested after their homes were searched.
- On 16 September 2018, concurrent with the recent arrests in Shiraz, the authorities raided a class on environmental preservation in Tehran Province. After confiscating the items belonging to those present and thoroughly searching the house, the authorities arrested four individuals. All of those arrested were transferred to Evin Prison.
- On 23 September 2018, eight Bahá'ís from Baharestan, Saham Armin, Afshin Bolbolan, Milad Davardan, Anoush Rayeneh, Foujan Rashidi, Sepideh Rowhani, Farhang Sahba, and Bahareh Zayni (Sobhanian) were arrested by Intelligence agents. Each of their houses were searched and the usual items were confiscated. The eight individuals were then transferred to Dastgerd Prison in Isfahan. On 18 November 2018, Mrs. Sepideh Rowhani was again arrested after a raid at her home by agents of the Intelligence Office in Tehran, who confiscated the usual items.

- On 24 September 2018, two individuals were arrested. One was later released on bail. During detention, one was subjected to torture and abuse to get an admission from him, which he did not provide.

The following are some examples of arrests, arbitrary detentions, and home raids, which have occurred since July 2018.

- Between August and September 2018, Messrs. Saied Abedi, Vahid Dana, Adib Haghpagjough, Shahram Mansour-Ardestani, and Farhad Sarafraz were sentenced to 1 year's imprisonment under *tazir* law⁴, and 1 year of exile to remote regions of Fars Province, for "propaganda against the regime in support of the enemies." The sentences were handed down, without the presence of the accused or their lawyer, by Branch 1 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Shiraz, headed by Seyyed Mahmoud Sadati. They have been exiled to the following regions:

Name	Region of exile
Mr. Saied Abedi	Darab
Mr. Vahid Dana	Arsanjan
Mr. Adib Haghpagjough	Larestan
Mr. Shahram Mansour-Ardestani	Eghlid
Mr. Farhad Sarafraz	Jahrom

- On 7 August 2018, Mr. Mehran Bandi-Amirabad was arrested by the authorities, without a written summons, to serve his 1 year and 6 months' prison sentence and 1 year exile to Divandarreh, which was handed down by Branch 3 of the Appeals Court in Yazd in July. Also, on 8 August, Mr. Mehran Eslami-Amirabadi was summoned to serve his 1 year and 6 months' prison sentence and 1 year exile to Saravan by the same Court, and he surrendered himself to the prison.
- On 17 August 2018, 30 armed government agents raided the house of a Bahá'í during a gathering in Fars Province. Six individuals were arrested and their homes also searched, with the usual items confiscated.
- On 1 October 2018, Mrs. May Kholousi, and her daughter, Ms. Saghi Fadaie, who had been sentenced to one year of imprisonment under *tazir* law, were summoned and reported themselves to Mashhad Prison. By way of background, in March 2018, Mrs. Kholousi and Ms. Fadaie, along with two other Bahá'ís, were found guilty of "propaganda against the regime" by Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court.

⁴ *Tazir* (discretionary punishment): Punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.

- It was learned in October 2018 that the five individuals—Ms. Farzaneh Amini, Mr. Peyman Ghiami, Mrs. Soheila Mollaei, Ms. Sinou Rasouli, and Mr. Borhan Tebyanian—who were all arrested last year, were called back to Branch 7 of the Court of Kermanshah for further questioning and for “amendment of charges”. The the wording of the charges against these individuals were changed and no longer included the phrases “Bahá’í sect” and “perverse sect” but were reworded to “membership in groups against the regime” and “intent to disturb state security”.
- On 16 October 2018, security agents raided the home of Mr. Parvan Manavi and Mrs. Elham Salmanzadeh, in Andisheh, Karaj. After searching the house and confiscating the usual items, they were both arrested.
- On 31 October 2018, Mr. Zabihollah Raoufi, who was sentenced by Branch 4 of the Appeals Court in Kurdistan to one year of imprisonment under *tazir* law and one year of exile to Minab, reported himself to Sanandaj Prison to start his sentence after his appeal failed.
- It was reported in November 2018 that in Yazd, Mr. Naser Bagheri and his son, Mr. Faez Bagheri who had been arrested on 28 February 2015 and subsequently released on bail, were sentenced to 3 years, and 9 months imprisonment, respectively.
- It was learned in November 2018 that Mrs. Mitra Badrnezhad and Mr. Farajollah Bangaleh were sentenced to 5 years’ imprisonment each under *tazir* law by Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court of Ahvaz. Mr. Bangaleh had been arrested on 28 March 2018, and Mrs. Badrnezhad on 3 March 2018, both of whom, at the time, had been released on bail.
- On 3 November 2018, two groups of seven Intelligence agents raided two locations in Gilavand, where Bahá’ís had gathered; the homes of Mr. Hosein Mazloumi and Mr. Ali Aghdasi. The authorities confiscated all mobile telephones and laptop computers, and searched the entire house. In the home of Mr. Mazloumi, they found about 2.5 million tuman (approximately US\$596) in cash, and in the home of Mr. Aghdasi, approximately one billion tuman worth (approximately US\$238,457) of coins and other currencies, which they initially confiscated but eventually returned. The Bahá’ís were questioned about the reason for their gathering and who had invited them. Each were then given a piece of paper to provide an undertaking that they would not participate in such gatherings anymore. The authorities then asked everyone to leave.

Subsequently, Mr. Ali Aghdasi, Ms. Monireh Bavali, Ms. Minou Fanaian, Mr. Sohrab Fanaian, and Mr. Hosein Mazloumi, across the two locations, were arrested. The authorities also went to the homes of Mr. Sohrab Fanaian, Ms. Minou Fanaian, and Ms. Monireh Bavali and conducted thorough searches. The arrestees remained in the Intelligence Office in Damavand until 4:00 a.m. the following day. They were then transported to Evin Prison, where they stayed for two or three hours and finally were returned to Damavand. In Damavand, the Bahá’ís were asked about the Bahá’í Cemetery of Gilavand. Ultimately, in the evening of the same day, they were again taken back to Evin Prison, where they were released without bail and all of their belongings were returned to them.

- On 15 November 2018, security agents raided a class being conducted on the topic of Health and Hygiene in Isfahan, and arrested all 18 attendees, 15 of whom were released after interrogations at the end of the evening of the same day. Three of the arrestees, Mr. Farid Amini, Ms. Nasrin Khajeh, and Ms. Mozhgan Khoshhal, were temporarily released on bail a few days later, on 19 November 2018.
- On 17 and 18 November 2018, Intelligence agents raided five Bahá'í homes in Tabriz, and after the search of the homes and removal of the usual items, arrested Mr. Farzad Bahadori, Mr. Shahriar Khodapanah, and Mr. Kambiz Mishaghi on 17 November 2018, and Mrs. Monica Alizadeh (Aghdasi) and Mr. Khayrollah Bakhshi on 18 November 2018. Also on 18 November, agents of the Intelligence Office in Tabriz searched the home of Ms. Shabnam Isakhani. Since she was not at home, they summoned her the next day to the Intelligence Office for questioning. On 20 November 2018, Ms. Isakhani was arrested after appearing at the Intelligence Office. By way of background, Mr. Bahadori and Ms. Isakhani were also arrested in May 2015, along with Mr. Bahadori's wife, two daughters, and another individual. They were all sentenced to 1 year of imprisonment under *tazir* law but later, in a rare move by the judiciary, acquitted on appeal. In addition, Mr. Khodapanah and Mr. Mishaghi were among the 16 Bahá'í individuals who had their businesses sealed in December 2017 in Tabriz.
- On 18 November 2018, at 8:00 in the morning, agents of the Intelligence Office in Tehran arrested Mrs. Shahrzad Nazifi (Naraghi) outside her home, and then searched her house and took the usual items.
- On 20 November 2018, seven Intelligence agents in Ghaemshahr raided the home of Mr. Ali Ahmadi. After searching the house and confiscating Mr. Ahmadi's personal belongings, they arrested him on charges of propaganda against the regime and transferred him to the Kachouie detention facilities in Sari. By way of background, on 19 May 2008, Mr. Ahmadi was sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment and 1 year exile, which he served. Months after his release from prison, on 14 November 2009, his home was raided and the usual items confiscated. His home was again raided by Ministry of Intelligence agents on 30 October 2011. He was subsequently arrested on 16 November 2011 and released on bail of 40 million tumans (US\$35,000 in 2011) after being arbitrarily detained for 27 days. On 16 April 2012, Mr. Ahmadi was sentenced by Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court of Sari to 1 year's imprisonment under *tazir* law on the charge of "propaganda against the regime by way of propaganda for the perverse Bahaist sect", which was later changed to a fine.
- It was reported in December 2018 that Mr. Shayan Tafazzoli, resident of Mashhad, who had been sentenced to 1 year of imprisonment under *tazir* law, has gone to prison to serve his sentence.

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 January 2005, over **1,113** 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)⁵ 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 Bahaist sect” must be prevented from engaging in certain occupations.⁶ The letter stipulates that Bahá'ís must be denied 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, since 2006, various trade associations, unions, and business organisations have been instructed to compile lists of Bahá'ís in every type of employment under their purview.⁷

Since President Rouhani came to power, there have been at least **803** documented incidents of economic persecution or discrimination. A few recent examples are shared below:

- A trend has been recently observed involving the rejection of bank loan applications from young married Bahá'í couples. The couples have applied for loans at several banks and are repeatedly rejected because the documentation they used to prove their marriage was not accepted. For context, standard marriage certificates are not granted to Bahá'ís, who must use a unique form of marriage documentation registered through Notary Public Offices. Most banks recognise the validity of this documentation, however, such documentation helps banks identify Bahá'ís, which can lead to discriminatory practices.

⁵ *Amaken* (Public Places Supervision Office): Is reportedly responsible for the enforcement of accepted moral codes in places of work and other offices.

⁶ 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 Police Forces of the Provincial Regional Municipalities—Heads of the Public Intelligence and Security Force; <<https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/measures-restrict-involvement-bahais-many-business-categories>>.

⁷ 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>>.

- As of July 2018, the Bahá'ís in Sari, Mazandaran, 29 of whose businesses were forcibly sealed in November 2016, continued to make representations to the authorities to request that their shops be unsealed. In some instances, authorities have indicated general support yet stated that it was not their decision to seal the shops. In another instance, the Public Prosecutor of Mazandaran Province told the Bahá'ís that they need only sign an undertaking so that their shops could be unsealed. By way of background, these shop closures were part of the over 90 Bahá'í owned businesses which were closed in Mazandaran alone in November 2016.
- On 27 September 2018, 30 September 2018, and 6 October 2018, respectively, the warehouses of a distributor of sanitary products with an inventory valued at 250 million tuman (approximately US\$59,604); of a distributor of hospital gears and products with an inventory valued at 450 million tuman (approximately US\$107,216); and that of a distributor of sanitary products and cosmetics, were sealed on the allegations of “hoarding commodities”.
- It was recently learned in October 2018 that a Bahá'í in Alborz Province, who was arrested after his business was raided and sealed, has taken various legal steps to recover his inventory. His lawyer has explained to him that the judge in his case had said that if the Bahá'í professes himself as Muslim to the Intelligence agency then his business would be unsealed, his inventory would be returned to him, and he would face no further penalties.
- It was reported in November 2018 that a young Bahá'í living in Hamadan Province, has repeatedly been faced with the challenge in which he is hired by a non-Bahá'í in the area but is then fired as a result of pressure brought upon his employer, under various pretences, by Intelligence agents.
- On 5 November 2018, the shops belonging to two Bahá'ís were sealed by the authorities in Khuzestan Province prior to the Bahá'í holy days on 9 and 10 November. Their shops were sealed after they had gone to the *Amaken* to inform officials that they would be closing their the shops on those days.
- On 12 November 2018, shops belonging to five Bahá'ís in Ahvaz were sealed due to having closed their shops in observance of Bahá'í holy days. The list of those whose shops have been sealed are as follows: Jahanbakhsh Afsharzadeh (interior design), Sohrab Derakhshan (interior design), Vargha Derakhshan (interior design), Feizollah Ghanavatian (television repair shop), and Behrouz Zohdi (interior design). By way of background, Messrs. Vargha and Sohrab Derakhshan, and Ghanavatian were among 11 Bahá'ís who had their businesses closed by the authorities for the same reason in July 2017.

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 admissions 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.⁸ The letter instructed these universities to expel any student that was found to be a Bahá'í at the time of enrolment or during their studies. Even during the academic year, university authorities have summoned students and demanded that they identify their religion. Whenever a student has identified as a Bahá'í, they have been 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:

- Up to November 2018, the total number of Bahá'í students who have shared that they were deprived from accessing higher education in the present school year on the basis of having an “incomplete file” is 109.
- It was confirmed in July 2018 that Mrs. Sowgol Zabihi-Seisan was expelled from Rasam University in Karaj during her fourth term of Graphics studies because of her religious beliefs.
- It was learned in October 2018 that a lawyer has been investigating the cases of Bahá'í candidates for the National University Entrance Examination who were told they had an “incomplete file”. The lawyer learned that the students’ files were transferred to a provincial court where they are being kept in a large cabinet, thus preventing them from being processed. The lawyer has emphatically asked the head of the Branch to resolve this issue as the delay will cause further infringement on his clients’ rights.

B. Harassment of schoolchildren

⁸ 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>>.

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 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)⁹ and they are not “people of the Book [Qur’an].”¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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, and take well over an hour to get to. In several cases, where the authorities have taken over the burial process, the families concerned were only informed after the burials had already taken place. Moreover, there have been at least **78** 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.¹² Below are some more recent examples:

- On 23 July 2018, two workers were tiling the mortuary of the Bahá’í Cemetery of Bandar-Abbas when several Intelligence agents, entering the cemetery over the walls, destroyed the tiles that had just been laid and warned the workers that they were not allowed to work there.
- In August 2018, as a result of the authorities’ prohibition against burials at the Bahá’í cemetery and despite repeated actions taken and approaches made by the family of a deceased individual, who had passed away on 7 August 2018 in Kerman Province, his body had to be buried, against the family’s will, in Rafsanjan, which is over 100 kilometres away.
- On 24 October 2018, Ms. Shamsi Jahan Khanum Azamiyan passed away in Gilavand. Her family decided to bury her in the Gilavanad Bahá’í Cemetery, where the funeral had taken place. It is worth noting that the authorities had previously banned burial in the Gilavanad Bahá’í Cemetery. On 28 October 2018, with an order from the Prosecutor’s Office, the authorities exhumed the body. On the same day, the police called one of the Bahá’ís in Gilavand to convey that the authorities had found Ms. Azamiya’s corpse in the nearby

⁹ 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 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.

¹⁰ 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>>.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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>>.

desert area and transferred it to Tehran Bahá'í Cemetery. The authorities asked the caretakers of Tehran Bahá'í Cemetery to bury the body there, which eventually was done.

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 and dedicated to that purpose. This is institutionalised 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 affiliated with, and controlled and sanctioned by, the government as listed below.

Since January 2014, there have been more than **36,002** articles, videos, or web pages 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 right of reply, they have been ignored, or else mocked for having thought that they would be granted the means to deny published allegations or to present their own point of view. This refusal is in total contradiction with Article 5 of Iran's *Press Law*.¹³

¹³ 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

On 26 March 2018, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei issued, via his website,¹⁴ a new religious decree (fatwa) concerning “association and dealing with Bahá’ís”. He stated 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 July 2018, it was confirmed that during the 2:00 p.m. news broadcast, the presenting journalist read a letter from an individual who had stated that members of “the perverse Bahá’í sect” turn on their air conditioners and open their windows during the electricity shortage to increase electricity consumption and create difficulties for other Iranians.
- It was learned in July 2018 that at an exhibition in Baharestan from 29 April to 2 May 2018, a six-page anti-Bahá’í pamphlet entitled *Musleh-e-Jahan*¹⁵ was being disseminated, along with many other materials. A copy of the pamphlet may be shared upon request.
- On 3 October 2018, representatives of Fars Province negatively reacted to the support of some of the members of the City Council and representatives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly concerning the citizenship rights of the Bahá’ís and wrote a letter to the Islamic Consultative Assembly. See Appendix 2 for a provisional translation of the letter.

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.

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.

¹⁴ <<http://www.leader.ir>>.

¹⁵ “Reformer of the world”.

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.]**

[Provisional translation of letter from representatives of Fars Province against Bahá'ís]

Number: T/M/9730421

Date of Completion: 11/7/1397 [3 October 2018]

Enclosure: ----

**In the Name of God
Islamic Republic of Iran**

Islamic Consultative Assembly
Administrative Affairs

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

The Province of Fars, with a historic record and an extensive Iranian-Muslim civilization, and Shiraz, as the third shrine of the family of Imam (PBUH), in protection and safeguarding of the ideals of the Islamic revolution and the Imam, by offering fifteen thousand tulip-like martyrs, has been in the forefront. The people of Fars and Shiraz, patriotic to their province, have been in the vanguard of the battle against British colonialism and the perverse sect of Baháism. The honourable people of Fars have historically lived a peaceful life with pride and respect alongside all religious minorities and followers of monotheistic religions.

The Association of the Representatives of Fars Province and the people, patriotic to their province, have relentlessly defended the lofty ideals of the Islamic revolution, the Imám, and the Leadership, and regard the tyrannical, child killing and occupying regime of Israel as the number one enemy of mankind, and we plea to the relevant authorities to protect the citizenship rights of the upright people of Iran within the framework of the Constitution, and do not allow the perverse and satanic sects and the Bahá'í sect, established and supported by the British, as well as those who are protecting them, to conspire and flourish, and to firmly stand before the co-conspirators and the offenders. We ask the government and provincial authorities to stand united in solidarity and, in a revolutionary crusade, defend the ideals of the Imam and the revolution.

The Association of the Representatives of Fars Province