

The Bahá'ís In Iran – A Persecuted Community

Following the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, members of the Bahá'í Faith—the largest religious minority in Iran—have been the subject of a relentless and systematic campaign of persecution. This persecution has impacted the lives of generations, from young infant to frail elderly. Iranian law and official state policy denies Bahá'ís of many fundamental human rights including, inter alia, civil, political, economic, and cultural rights to education, work, freedom of religion, and freedom from arbitrary detention. In the absence of any legal protection within Iran, the international community has a moral obligation to protect the rights of the Bahá'ís.

Since the early 1980s, 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. In 2008, all seven members of the Yaran—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 imprisoned with no charge against them and less than an hour's access to legal counsel, they were 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.

It is clear that discrimination against Bahá'ís is a matter of official state policy. This policy is summarized in an Iranian government memorandum¹ obtained by the then-United Nations Special Representative on the Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1993. Produced in 1991 by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who added his signature to the memorandum, this document, concerning "The Bahá'í Question", sets forth specific guidelines for dealing with the Bahá'ís. Stamped "confidential", the memorandum was signed by Hujjatu'l-Islam Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani, Secretary of the Council. The memorandum specifically calls for Iran's Bahá'ís to be treated in such a way "that their progress and development shall be blocked."

Furthermore, Iran has, to date, been reviewed twice under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)—a UN mechanism to monitor the human rights record of all countries—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.

¹ The text of the 1991 government memorandum can be accessed through the following links:

Persian original:

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

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

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. The Bahá'í International Community, in an analysis of the implementation of these recommendations accepted by Iran in 2010 and 2014, discovered that not a single one was implemented.² 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 outline instances of the various types of persecution that the Bahá'ís in Iran have endured for nearly 40 years under the Iranian government.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION EXPLICIT IN IRAN'S PENAL CODE

Following the appalling murder of a Bahá'í Mr. Farhang Amiri by two men, who confessed to killing him because of his religious beliefs, on 25 July 2017, a court in Yazd sentenced one of the convicted men to just 11 years in prison and two years away from home. The younger man was sentenced to half of his brother's sentence for aiding in the murder. The court justified the sentence by stating that, according to the Islamic Penal Code, the accused and the victim are not equal for the general purpose of retributive justice. This provision in the Code clearly and deliberately deprives non-Muslims of the legal right to seek justice on equal-footing with the country's Muslim majority.³

Mr. Farhang Amiri, a 63-year-old father of four children, was stabbed to death in September 2016 on the street outside of his home in Yazd.

These sentences for the killing of an innocent Bahá'í clearly demonstrate the inherent discrimination and injustice at the heart of Iran's Penal Code, which discriminates against its own citizens because of their religious belief.

HOME RAIDS, ARRESTS, AND ARBITRARY DETENTIONS

In violation of UPR recommendations Rec #138.25, Rec #138.28, and Rec #138.114:

Since 2005, more than 1,000 Bahá'ís have been arrested in Iran, solely because of their beliefs. As of August 2017, there are some 95 Bahá'ís who continue to be arbitrarily imprisoned. Moreover, since 2005, intelligence officers have summoned well over 1,000 more 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, at least 283 Bahá'ís have been arrested.

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. Many have been kept in solitary confinement for long periods and 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 and business or work licenses. In nearly all cases, their homes and/or workplaces are

² Please see: *Unfulfilled Promises: Iran's failure to act after its 2010 Universal Periodic Review* <https://www.bic.org/publications/unfulfilled-promises#vv1u85hTQ0ISXzhR.99>.

³ Bahá'í International Community, Press Release: "Religious discrimination explicit in Iran's penal code", dated 25 July 2017. <http://news.bahai.org/story/1182/>.

searched and personal belongings are confiscated, particularly books, photographs, computers, copying machines, and other supplies, as well as any other materials related to the Bahá'í Faith.

Below are some recent examples of home raids, arrests and arbitrary detentions:

- In April 2017, the authorities in Hormozagan coordinated a series of arrests throughout the Province resulting in the detention of eight Bahá'ís. On 18 April, the following eight individuals were arrested: Mr. Omid Afaghi, Mr. Mehrollah Afshar, Mr. Farhad Amri, Ms. Naysam (Nasim) Ghanavatian, Mr. Adib Haghpaïouh, Ms. Mahnaz Jan-Nesar (Pour-Moradian), Mr. Arash Rasekhi, and Ms. Maral Rasti.

Mr. Mehrollah Afshar, Ms. Naysam (Nasim) Ghanavatian, Ms. Mahnaz Jan-Nesar (Pour-Moradian), Mr. Arash Rasekhi, and Ms. Maral Rasti were arrested after their houses were searched and items related to the Bahá'í Faith were confiscated. On the island of Qeshm, Mr. Omid Afaghi and Mr. Farhad Amri, who was serving a period of exile, were also arrested. The judicial order to arrest these individuals was issued initially as a two-month detention; however, it is understood that, usually the initial detention is for only one month, which is then extended if deemed necessary. On 15 May 2017, Mr. Afaghi and Mr. Amri were transferred from the Ministry of Intelligence detention centre to Bandar-Abbas Prison.

Between 12 and 19 June 2017, the prisoners were released from Bandar Abbas Prison, each on 120 million tuman (approximately US\$36,783) bail, pending their criminal trial. While the exact charges have not been made public, it is clear that they are based solely on the eight individuals' membership and activities in the Bahá'í community, demonstrating the religious motives behind the arrests. If convicted, these individuals could face significant prison sentences.

- In June 2017, Mr. Naim Baghaie, who has owned an optometry shop in Khomein with his father, Mr. Laghaollah Baghaie, and two brothers for the past ten years, was assaulted by a local shop owner. It is clear that the attack was instigated by local authorities. The shop owner had accused Mr. Baghaie of insult and assault. During the subsequent sham trial, the judge ruled against Mr. Baghaie without considering the evidence in his favour, such as recorded video footage of the event in question and statements of those who had witnessed the incident. The judge sentenced Mr. Naim Baghaie to payment of *Diyeh*⁴ as well as 20 lashes.

By way of background, since Mr. Laghaollah Baghaie's family took residence in Khomein approximately 40 years ago, they have continuously been suffering persecution at the hands of the authorities in various ways.

- On 29 July 2017, prison authorities transferred a number of inmates in Gohardasht Prison, including over fifteen Bahá'ís, to a newly-built section of the prison with difficult conditions and heightened security measures. This new section of the prison is equipped with added

⁴ *Diyeh* is a financial punishment ("blood money") that is imposed by a judge.

security features, including surveillance cameras and microphones even in toilets and showers. The move was enforced without prior notice and prisoners were not allowed to take their personal belongings, such as essential items, medicine and clothes. Family visits were initially halted after the transfer, and news of the worsening conditions of the prisoners, some of whom suffer from illnesses, has caused alarm.⁵

ECONOMIC PRESSURES

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.114

Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the government has carried 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 Bahá'ís to earn a living. Since 2005, over 1,170 specific incidents of direct economic persecution against Iranian Bahá'ís have been documented by the Bahá'í International Community. These include shop closures, dismissals, the actual or threatened revocation of business licenses, and other actions to suppress the economic activity of Bahá'ís. This represents a minimum number, given the difficulty of obtaining accurate information about human rights violations in Iran.

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 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 Bahaist sect" must be prevented from engaging in certain occupations. 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". In addition, with the adoption of this governmental policy, all those applying for business licenses are required to fill out and sign a form asking applicants to declare their religion. The authorities attempt to actively and pre-emptively deny legal recourse to those 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. 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;

⁵ Bahá'í International Community, Press Release: "Baha'i Prisoners Face Harsher Conditions", dated 16 August 2017. <http://news.bahai.org/story/1182/>.

- 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;
- 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; some businesses were threatened with closure if they did not comply and were shut down after refusing to do so; 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.

Incidents of economic persecution against the Bahá'ís are ongoing and have, in fact, increased over the past three years. Since President Rouhani came to power, there have been at least 645 documented incidents of economic persecution or discrimination. There are countless instances of economic persecution occurring throughout the country, a few examples of which are shared below as a means of illustration:

- In April 2017, following the sealing of a number of Bahá'í-owned optical business premises in Karaj, Alborz, sentences were issued for some of the Bahá'í business owners on the grounds of possession of smuggled goods. The Bahá'ís were sentenced to one year of imprisonment and payment of a substantial monetary fine, in addition to having their possessions confiscated. In one case, the stock of spectacles in a store, valued at 110 million tuman (approximately US\$33,950), was confiscated, and the owner was sentenced to one year of imprisonment under *ta'zir* law⁶ and the payment of a 360-million tuman (approximately US\$111,060) monetary fine.
- On 1 May 2017, the business premises of 18 business-owners in Shahinshahr, Isfahan, were sealed by the Public Places Supervision Office (*Amaken*)⁷ because of their having closed on Bahá'í holy days. The concerned business-owners have asked that their names not be made public.
- In May 2017, the Sects and Religions Commission, which was formed on 30 October 2016 at the Public and Revolutionary Courts in the centre of Mazandaran Province, decided to refuse any requests by Bahá'ís to close their business premises on Bahá'í holy days and to require them to provide an undertaking. This decision was announced to 11 organisations across the province in a directive format, along with an order of the Justice Administration of the Province of Mazandaran to city public prosecutors.

⁶ *Ta'zir* (discretionary punishment): Punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.

⁷ Public Places Supervision Office (*Amaken*): Reportedly responsible for the enforcement of accepted moral codes in places of work and other offices.

- Following a Bahá'í holy day on 9 July 2017, at least 50 Bahá'í-owned stores were sealed by the Public Places Supervision Office (*Amaken*) throughout the country. The mass business closures include, 11 stores in Ahvaz, Khuzestan; 16 business premises in other cities in Khuzestan Province; and 19 business premises in Urmia, West Azerbaijan.

DENIAL OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.111

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 so “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 “They 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. University enrolment forms include a declaration of religion, and many officials do not allow this declaration to be left blank. 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. For the 2016–2017 academic year, a considerable number of Bahá'í youth who scored high grades in the national examination have either been denied entry into university or have been expelled during the academic year once they were identified as Bahá'ís. Below are some recent examples:

- In May 2017, Ms. Maedeh Hoseini Rad and Ms. Dorna Esmaili were expelled from university. Ms. Hoseini Rad was first told that she had an “incomplete file” following her application to

pursue her studies, but later, after strenuously following up with *Sanjesh*,⁸ she was accepted at the Polytechnic University of Isfahan to study statistics. However, after one term, she was denied access to the university website. When she enquired with the staff responsible at *Sanjesh*, they sympathized with her and explained that she was denied education per an order from the Intelligence Office and the Science and Technology Organization.

Ms. Dorna Esmaili was expelled after going to a university for seven semesters to study graphic design. She was also expelled as a result of orders from the Ministry of Intelligence, as conveyed by a “Mr. Nourbakhsh” at the *Sanjesh*.

- On 29 May 2017, Mr. Misagh Safajou and Mr. Riaz Safajou were expelled from Tehran Open University after studying biomedical engineering for six terms. It is understood that the two Bahá'ís faced many challenges since they were accepted at the Open University in 2014. When they first started, they had to fill out various forms that asked for their religion. In their fourth semester, they were called to the security office to be interviewed by the agents of the Ministry of Intelligence; during the interrogation about their personal and Bahá'í activities, they were told not to participate in any social or cultural activities at the university. Recently, their log-in access to the university website was revoked. It is not clear which office is responsible for this action, as each one refers them to the other. Meanwhile, a Telegram group has been formed by their fellow students and some professors in their defence. More than 220 individuals have expressed their support for them by joining this group; in addition, a petition addressed to the Islamic Open Medical University of Tehran, contesting the unofficial expulsion of Mr. Misagh Safajou and Mr. Riaz Safajou, shows the signatures of a large number of their fellow students.
- In July 2017, it was learned that an official at the Tehran Open University had privately shared with a Bahá'í youth, who was recently expelled from this same university, that a confidential letter had been sent to all government and open universities urging the expulsion of the Bahá'í students. Some of the recently expelled students include the following; these Bahá'ís have asked that their names not be made public.

A young Bahá'í man, who was expelled from Amirkabir University in Tafresh at the start of term seven. He entered the university in the year 2013–2014 and was studying chemical engineering. The Bahá'í was also one of the thirteen Bahá'í youth musicians from Karaj who were forcibly removed from a musical band because of their religion. The band was scheduled to perform in Tehran's most prestigious philharmonic in Roudaki Hall on 9 March 2017, and the conductor was forced to remove the Bahá'ís following threats made by the authorities from the Public Places Supervision Office (*Amaken*).

A Bahá'í youth, who was expelled from Payame Noor University in the Fars Province after completing 137 units. He entered the university in the year 2012–2013.

⁸ *Sanjesh*: The National Educational Measurement and Evaluation Organization (EMEEO) of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

A Bahá'í youth, who was expelled from Amirkabir University at graduation time. He was subsequently not issued a university certificate. He entered university in the year 2013–2014 and studied metallurgy (energy and physics engineering).

A Bahá'í youth, who was also expelled from Amirkabir University during the end-of-term examinations. He entered university in the year 2015–2016 and was studying physics. It is understood that he was an outstanding student and, following completion of the National University Entrance Examination, had achieved the national ranking of 2,702 out of approximately one million students.

CEMETERY DESTRUCTIONS AND BURIAL RIGHTS

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.221

Cemeteries play a significant part of the cultural identity as well as historical meaning for the surrounding living community. Scholars agree that memorial sites are a means of learning the social constructs of a community. 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.

The seizure of cemeteries has been a particularly cruel form of persecution, as numerous Bahá'í families are only given access 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, including in: April 2010 in Gilavand, May 2010 in Mashhad, June 2010 in Isfahan and 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. The Bahá'ís in that city had to purchase new land in order to rebury the deceased Bahá'í. In March 2014, the metal entry door to the Bahá'í cemetery of Ahvaz was welded shut and a wall was built in front of it. Officials failed to even respect the rights of the deceased Bahá'ís to be buried according to Bahá'í laws:⁹ 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 were buried in the Miandoab cemetery. In several cases, the families concerned were only informed after the fact that the burials had taken place.

Below are some more recent examples:

- On 3 October 2016, the Bahá'í cemetery of Urmia was attacked and vandalised by unidentified individuals. Six trees were burned and a number of graves were damaged. One

⁹ Bahá'í teachings require that the bodily remains of a deceased cannot be buried in a location that is more than an hour's journey from the city in which he or she died.

month later, in November, 35 trees in the same cemetery were lit on fire during the night. The incident was reported to the Intelligence Office, the Political Directorate of the Office of the Provincial Governor-General and its associated Governor's Office, and the Justice Administration, as well as the local police station, which sent individuals to investigate.

Representatives of the Bahá'ís in Urmia went to the relevant authorities to seek justice and demand that the action of the trespassers be stopped. To date, these efforts have proved unavailing.

- On 18 April 2017, a Bahá'í man, who is responsible for the Bahá'í cemetery of Tehran and who wishes to remain anonymous, was contacted on behalf of the security police and was told that a Bahá'í woman had passed away in one of the plantations of Gilavand and, as there was no one to perform the funeral ceremony, he should go to the *Behesht-i-Zahra*¹⁰ to retrieve the body and make the burial arrangements. The Bahá'í caretaker of the cemetery subsequently learned the identity of the deceased Bahá'í and knew that she had passed away four months prior to this and had been buried in the Bahá'í cemetery of Gilavand. The security police had said, "You have no right to bury your deceased in the Gilavand cemetery". Therefore, with the judge's order, the authorities had exhumed the body, transferred it to the *Behesht-i-Zahra*, and informed the deceased Bahá'í's son that he should take steps to bury his mother. As the son refused to do so, the authorities eventually contacted the cemeteries caretaker.

The body of another deceased Bahá'í—who had passed away four months earlier and had been buried in the Gilavand cemetery—was also exhumed by the authorities. Her remains were taken out of the coffin and are reported as missing. The families are pursuing legal recourse.

- In late-May 2017, a Bahá'í, whose family wishes to remain anonymous, passed away in Roudehen. When the deceased's family approached the governor's office regarding his burial, the staff there stated that, owing to the opposition of the local people with the burial of the Bahá'ís in that region, the Security Council had approved that no further burials should take place in that region and that the Bahá'ís could only possess one cemetery in each province. The family conveyed that they were unable to transfer the body to a place more than one hour away¹¹. Ultimately, the authorities transferred the deceased to the *Behesht-e-Zahra* cemetery in Tehran.

¹⁰ *Behesht-e-Zahra*: Tehran cemetery.

¹¹ Bahá'í personal status laws require that the bodily remains of a deceased cannot be buried in a location that is more than an hour's journey from the place of death.

PERSECUTION OF CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.110

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 examples of the most recent cases of persecution against children:

- In October 2015, Aref Hekmatshoar, a third grade student, was enrolled in a private primary school in Karaj and subsequently expelled by the school principal. Despite efforts being made by the family and two human rights activists to allow him to remain at the school, his parents were eventually forced to enrol him in a new school.
- The following story was reported in April 2015 regarding Dana Jaber, a 13-year-old boy in grade seven from Fardis, Karaj. One day, his teacher, Mr. Esmailzadeh, informed the class that the Bahá'í Faith is useless and that they should avoid it. Dana told his teacher that what he was saying was wrong. He then spoke to the principal about this, who told the teacher that school is a place to teach and not to speak about religion. Afterwards, the teacher complained to Dana because he had spoken to the principal and since the incident, whenever Dana wants to speak in his classroom, his teacher does not allow him to do so.
- On 17 October 2016, a Bahá'í from Isfahan, who wishes to remain anonymous, was summoned to his son's primary school by the school principal. After arriving at the principal's office, he was led to the hallway and intensely questioned about his son and his refusal to participate in the school's obligatory prayer session. The father provided an explanation about Bahá'í beliefs and expressed his support for his son's decision. The principal warned him that if other students were learning about the Bahá'í Faith through his son's non-participation in the obligatory prayer sessions, the principal would be compelled to put together approximately 15 CDs with comprehensive information about his son and send them to various offices, including the Ministry of Intelligence. He added that students receive a grade for performing obligatory prayers, which are conducted every 35 days. The principal also stated that his son would be expelled from school if he did not participate in obligatory prayers.

- 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 have been removed, as the affected Bahá'ís wish to remain anonymous.

INCITEMENT TO HATRED

In violation of UPR recommendations Rec #138.221 and Rec #138.53

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.

Since President Rouhani took office in August 2013, there have been more than 12,000 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, over 220 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 Iranian Quran News Agency (IQNA), QudsOnline; Ferghe News, Aftab News, Shabestan News, Basij News, Fars News, Rasa News, and Hawzah News.

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.

It should be recalled that Iranian Bahá'ís have long been denied access to all means of communication with the public. Accordingly, 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.

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

- On 5 August 2016, a Bahá’í man, who wishes to remain anonymous, was told to go to the headquarters of the Intelligence Office of the city in which he resides. During his interrogation, the Bahá’í was asked about his professional and educational background, the reason for his arrest and imprisonment, and his service experience. He was advised of several “red lines” that Bahá’ís should not cross. The most significant issue, he was told, was that of teaching and inviting Muslims and other non-Bahá’ís to Bahá’í meetings. Another “red line” was the holding of Bahá’í gatherings during *Muharram*¹² holy days, the month of Ramadan, and the days of lamentation. The agents said that authorities within the Intelligence Office had discovered and thwarted plans made by the *Hojjatiyyeh*¹³ to murder a number of Bahá’ís in Yazd. The agents warned, however, that the Bahá’ís in the city should be careful not to cross the red line by sharing the teachings of the religion with non-Bahá’ís. The meeting ended with one of the two agents saying that, “You can share with others what I have told you. If you invite non-Bahá’ís to your meetings, they may be your last guests.”
- In February 2017, a Bahá’í from Miandoab, who wishes to remain anonymous, was invited by the Ministry of Intelligence in Miandoab to collaborate with them, but he declined to do so. Following this experience, he was subjected to harassment by unknown individuals and he and his family have suffered mental anguish as a result.
- After Mr. Farhang Amiri’s two murderers were apprehended and during their subsequent interrogations and court hearings, the two men disclosed that they were prompted to carry out this act by their religious beliefs and statements made by clerics that Bahá’ís are against Islam. The father of the two men is reported to have complained about a cleric who is responsible for radicalizing his two sons.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

The persecution and discriminatory practices against the Bahá’ís in Iran, highlighted above in brief, 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.

¹² *Muharram*: The first month of the Islamic calendar.

¹³ *Hojjatiyyeh*: An anti-Bahá’í association.

¹⁴ For a full summary of the Farhang Amiri murder case, please visit the website of the Bahá’í International Community at <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais>.