

The Bahá'ís In Iran – A Persecuted Community

September 2016

Since 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 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 their civil, political, economic and cultural rights to education, work, freedom of religion, freedom from arbitrary detention and others. In the absence of any legal protection within Iran, the international community is morally bound to protect their rights.

Since the early 1980s, over 200 Iranian Bahá'ís have been executed or murdered, thousands arrested, detained and interrogated, and tens of thousands more deprived of jobs, pensions and educational opportunities. The Bahá'í community's holy places, cemeteries and properties have been confiscated, vandalized or destroyed; in addition, many Bahá'ís have had 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 without charge 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 which 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 Iran in 1993. Produced in 1991 by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, 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, and approved by Mr. Khamenei, who added his signature to the document. 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 – a UN mechanism to review 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 specifying that some others were either implemented or in the process of implementation. In 2014, of the 10 recommendations requested of Iran which specifically dealt 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 those recommendations related to the situation of the Bahá'ís which were accepted by Iran in 2010 as well as 2014, discovered that not a single one was implemented.² In effect, by failing to abide by its commitments and assurances made to the international community, Iran has gravely

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/iran/1991%20Bahai%20Question%20Memo%20PER.pdf>; English

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

² Please see: *Unfulfilled Promises: Iran's failure to act after its 2010 Universal Periodic Review*

<https://www.bic.org/publications/unfulfilled-promises#v1u85hTQ0ISXzHR.99>.

undermined the entire UPR process. In the sections that follow are found examples of the various types of persecution which the Bahá'ís in Iran have endured for more than 35 years under the Iranian government.

HOME RAIDS, ARRESTS AND ARBITRARY DETENTIONS

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

Since 2004, over 1,000 Bahá'ís have been arrested in Iran, solely because of their beliefs. As of August 2015, there are some 80 Bahá'ís who have been arbitrarily imprisoned. In addition, since 2005, intelligence officers have summoned well over 1,000 more for interrogation, without officially arresting them. 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. Most of those arrested have been detained for weeks or months before being released on bail, and bail demands have been very high, requiring families to hand over deeds to property, and business or work licenses. In nearly all cases, their homes and/or workplaces were searched and personal belongings confiscated, particularly books, photographs and materials related to the Bahá'í Faith, computers, copying machines, and other supplies.

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

- Branch 2 of Gorgan's Revolutionary Court in the Province of Golestan sentenced 24 Bahá'ís to long terms of imprisonment solely because of their religious beliefs. The Court sentenced two individuals to 11 years in prison, 13 to nine years in prison, and nine to six years in prison. This is one of the heaviest rulings issued against Bahá'ís in recent years. The 24 men and women, who range in age from 21 to 60 years old, were arrested by government intelligence agents in coordinated raids on their homes in October 2012, January 2013, or March 2013. All are literate, self-employed, married and with no criminal record. Their charges were solely based on their membership and activities in the Bahá'í community, demonstrating the religious motives behind the arrests and sentencing. The verdict, for example, states that the belief of the Bahá'ís in their prophet – the Bab – is, in itself, considered propaganda against the regime of the Islamic Republic.

The court proceedings were held over a period of time exceeding two months in six sessions, with four individuals being summoned to court at a time. Following requests for further information, it was reported in June 2016 that the Bahá'í defendants appealed the Revolutionary Court's decision within the prescribed timeframe of 20 days. As the Court of Appeals has not yet heard the case, the lawyers in their appeal application requested the release of the Bahá'ís, based on their innocence. It was reported that during detention, and contrary to the legal procedure, none of the detainees had access to a lawyer until after they were released on bail, when they were able to hire a lawyer to represent them. For some time after the arrest, the families of the detainees had no information about the place of detention or the state of the prisoners. Gradually the Bahá'í detainees informed their families about their well-being by telephone. It was also reported that the lawyers of these Bahá'ís were given only a very limited opportunity to study the files (15 to 20 minutes), and it has been confirmed that some were indirectly threatened. Normally, in most court sessions involving Bahá'ís, the judge

is not impartial. Typically, he will not listen to either the Bahá'ís or their legal representatives. As this is the expected behaviour of the judge, the lawyers prepared a written defence statement which is appended to the court file. With regards to the Bahá'ís in Gorgan, the atmosphere in court was as expected and the defendants had no permission to summon any witnesses to come forward.

- On Sunday, 28 February 2016, Mr. Peyman Koushk-Baghi was arrested by the authorities while visiting his imprisoned wife, Azita Rafizadeh (Koushk-Baghi), in Evin Prison; Mr. Koushk-Baghi was immediately taken into prison to start his five-year sentence. This arrest took place without any summons having been issued or warning given. The couple's only child, a six-year-old son, Bashir, is now alone and is being cared for by a Bahá'í family in Karaj.

The home of Mr. Koushk-Baghi and his wife – both lecturers for the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE)³ – was raided on 22 May 2011 by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence. One of the charges against them was “activities against national security through membership in BIHE”. Their son, Bashir, was 17 months old at the time of the raid of their home. On 25 October 2015, Mrs. Rafizadeh (Koushk-Baghi), who had been released on bail, started her four year sentence in Evin Prison, while Mr. Payman Koushk-Baghi was waiting to serve his five year sentence under ta'zir law.⁴

- It was reported in July 2016 that Ms. Yekta Fahandej, a Bahá'í resident of Shiraz, was recently sentenced to five years' imprisonment under ta'zir for her beliefs as a Bahá'í. Ms. Fahandej was arrested on Sunday 16 March 2014 by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence. A little after midnight, Mrs. Fahandej was transferred to the Ministry of Intelligence's detention centre along with her confiscated properties including Bahá'í books, photographs and her computer. While at her home, the agents rudely made the following comments: “Now, you should go and file a complaint against us. The House of Justice⁵ has instructed you to plead for justice. We will show you the outcome of your pleas.” Ms. Fahandej very calmly and courageously responded that she would again file a complaint to the judiciary about their behaviour.

ECONOMIC PRESSURES

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.114

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the government has been carrying out a systematic campaign to deny Bahá'ís the right to employment. In many hundreds of cases, the authorities have taken measures to make it impossible for Bahá'ís to earn a living. From 2007 to June 2016, at least 950 incidents of direct economic persecution against Iranian Bahá'ís have been documented by the Bahá'í International Community; more recently, between January and August 2016 alone, over 150 cases have been documented. These include shop closings, dismissals, the actual or threatened revocation of business licenses, and other actions to suppress the economic activity of

³BIHE, an ad hoc higher educational institute, was 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.

⁴Ta'zir (discretionary punishment): Punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.

⁵The international governing-council of the Bahá'í Faith.

Bahá'ís. This represents a minimum number, given the difficulty of getting accurate information about human rights violations from 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. On 25 October 2014, agents of the city of Kerman's Public Places Supervision Office (Amaken Office in Persian)⁶ sealed 80 shops of the Bahá'ís in Kerman, Rafsanjan and Jiroft, under the pretext that the shops had been closed during the Bahá'í holy days (23 October and 12 November).⁷ 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, a form had to be filled out and signed by all who apply for business licenses, requiring the applicant to declare his or her religion. The authorities attempt to actively and pre-emptively deny legal recourse to those subject to mistreatment under discriminatory regulations.

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

- refusing to issue or renew business licenses, work permits and/or trade membership cards to Bahá'ís;
- closing many Bahá'í-owned businesses and sealing the premises;
- issuing instructions to chain stores, government offices and other organizations to avoid purchasing from or stop all business dealings with companies and independents if the owners or managers are Bahá'ís;
- inciting the population to shun Bahá'í-owned businesses;
- instructing landlords of stores to refuse lease renewals to Bahá'í tenant shopkeepers;
- banning Bahá'ís who were working independently from continuing their activities;
- warning private-sector employers against hiring Bahá'ís and/or harassing them to dismiss Bahá'í employees and threatening them with closure of their business if they did not comply. Some of these businesses were shut down; others have been banned from advertising; and
- conducting unexpected inspections of workplaces, summoning and interrogating Bahá'ís, and raiding, and even vandalizing Bahá'í-owned stores.

⁶ Public Places Supervision Office (*Amaken*): Is reportedly responsible for the enforcement of accepted moral codes in places of work and other offices.

⁷ According to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, there are nine holy days which are considered religious holidays on which Bahá'ís take off from work; some of these holy days do not coincide with the official holidays of the official Iranian calendar.

In addition to the case of 80 Bahá'í shops which were closed in three cities, below are some more recent examples. Of course incidents of economic persecution against the Bahá'ís are ongoing and have, in fact, increased over the past two years.

- It was reported in March 2016 that a Bahá'í who had been a member of the Photographers' Union of Isfahan for the last five to six years, and who had been appointed to serve in a position of some importance, was unjustly expelled from the Union. In 2015, the chairman of the board of directors of the Photographers' Union had given the Bahá'í the task of taking the photographs at the "International Conference of Abrahamic Religions" in Isfahan. This conference was attended by Ministers and Advisors to President Rouhani. A few days after the event, the Bahá'í was summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence Office, interrogated, and forced to resign both his position in and membership of the Union.
- As a result of Bahá'í shops not opening for business on 23 May 2016, a Bahá'í holy day,⁸ a new wave of warnings and shop closures has been reported, as follows:
 1. 15 shops in Ghaemshahr were closed.
 2. 2 shops in Kashan were closed.
 3. 28 shops in Oroumiyeh were warned and then closed.
 4. A shop in Boroujerd was warned that it would be closed. In addition, a window of a car belonging to a Bahá'í was smashed.
 5. 8 shops in Isfahan were warned that they would be closed.
- A Bahá'í-owned oil-change business in Hamadan has been sealed since 2012. It was reported in June 2016 that despite a May 2014 court decision ordering the reopening of the shop, the Hamadan's Intelligence Office continues to use its influence to prevent the court order from being enforced. In order to earn his living, the Bahá'í owner has been forced to conduct his business activities on the sidewalk in front of his shop.
- Following the sealing of all the business premises owned by Bahá'ís in Rafsanjan in 2015, a number of Bahá'ís who repair appliances for a living took on a limited number of repair jobs for some of the customers in the backyard or garage of their homes. Mr. Iraj Payandeh and Mr. Majid Payandeh subsequently received a written notice from the Trade Union that they are not permitted to work in the garage of their home. Therefore, they decided not open their garage door for business in order not to attract attention and did not go to the Trade Union. Notwithstanding this, on 26 June 2016, the garage door of the home of the above-mentioned individuals was sealed by the Trade Union.

DENIAL OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.111

⁸ According to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, there are nine holy days which are considered religious holidays on which Bahá'ís take off from work; some of these holy days do not coincide with the official holidays of the official Iranian calendar.

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

(...) 2. 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 was 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 “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 2015 – 2016 academic year, a considerable number of Bahá'í youth who scored high grades in the national examination were either denied entry into university or were expelled during the academic year once they were identified as Bahá'ís. Below are some recent examples:

- It was reported in June 2016 that Mr. Faraz Karinkani Saysan – who had been attending as an undergraduate student the Institute of Higher Education of Ghasoddin Jamshid Kashani (a private institution) since the beginning of this academic year – was expelled. The notification letter from the head of the Institute, dated 28 May 2016, explicitly states that the cause of expulsion is Mr. Saysan’s belief in the Bahá'í Faith.
- It was reported in February 2016 that a number of Bahá'í youth who were studying in different universities across the country were expelled because of their beliefs. Previously, such individuals were dismissed post-registration, apparently at random. The recent dismissals have led the Bahá'í community in Iran to the conclusion that these expulsions may have been part of an integrated approach to identify any Bahá'ís who had managed to gain a university place at the start of the academic year and to expel them. Intellectuals and dissidents within Iran are aware of these expulsions and they see them as being clearly both discriminatory and contrary

to the Iranian Constitution. Below are the names of Bahá'í students who were expelled from university at that time :

1. Ms. Elham Pakrou was studying computer engineering at Malard – Azad University;
 2. Ms. Sahba Avazpour;
 3. Mr. Rabi Khalili was studying applied science in Kermanshah University;
 4. Ms. Shomeis Pour-Shah-Rezaie was in her third semester in drama and film directing at Tehran – Azad university;
 5. Ms. Mehrnoush Shafi'ie-Mehr was studying applied science in Karaj – Imam Khomeini Institute in Karaj. Ms. Mehrnoush Shafi'ie-Mehr had previously obtained a qualification in Applied Business Management from Semnan University of Amol;
 6. Mr. Arsalan Mirzaie was studying materials engineering at Ahvaz – Shahid Chamran University. Mr. Mirzaie had already been expelled from university before along with three other Bahá'ís, although he was able to return to class as a result of the follow-ups and actions taken with the authorities.
- It was reported in April 2016 that Mr. Misagh Aghsani and Miss Sahar Panahi (term five of literature) and Mr. Navid Moghaddam (term five of electrical engineering) were expelled from Payame Noor University in Oroumiyeh because they are Bahá'ís.

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

Below are some recent examples:

- It was reported that in May 2013, the Shokouhi family was not permitted to bury the bodily remains of their son, Kamyar, in the city cemetery in Tabriz. As is becoming the norm for the Bahá'ís, they were required to take the remains to the Bahá'í cemetery at Miandoab; this requirement is in contravention of Bahá'í teachings, which states that the body of a deceased cannot be buried in a location that is more than an hour's travel from the city in which he or she died. In this connection, it was recently reported that the authorities in Tabriz are continuing to insist that deceased Bahá'ís are buried in Miandoab Bahá'í Cemetery rather than the municipal cemetery in Tabriz and have even left bodies there unprotected when the Bahá'í families of Tabriz have refused to acquiesce to burials taking place at Miandoab.
- On 14 July 2016, at around 5:00 a.m., the Bahá'í cemetery of Ghorveh was levelled to the ground in the presence of the Ministry of Intelligence agents. Bulldozers and other heavy equipment were used by the police to demolish the mortuary, funerary hall, boiler room and a store of coffins. Nearly 300 trees, all over twenty years old were knocked down and items of equipment that were not destroyed were taken away. The police then raised a banner stating "Buildings in this property was demolished by orders of the judiciary. The owner or owners may contact the Provincial Offices of the Jihad-e-Keshavarzi for information."⁹

It was reported that this incident followed a sermon given by the new Friday prayer leader of Ghorveh. He is reported to have said, "I have come to this town to combat Bahá'ísm." After the destruction of the Bahá'í cemetery in Ghorveh, a local Bahá'í approached Jihad-e-Keshavarzi and other relevant authorities and, as a result of his actions, he was summoned to the Public Court, was arrested and later released on bail. It is understood that no Ghorveh resident was willing to cooperate with the authorities and so, in order to carry out their plans, the authorities were forced to ask for help from the city of Malayer, which is 165 km away from Ghorveh.

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. Often these abuses are committed by their teachers and school administrators. Many pupils have been threatened with expulsion or forced to change schools. In hundreds of incidents, young Bahá'ís 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 – February 2007, over 150 incidents were reported from ten different cities, and from October 2008 to February 2009, we 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, it was reported that Aref Hekmatshoar, a third grade student, was enrolled in a private primary school in Karaj and subsequently expelled by the school principal. Despite

⁹ Jihad-e-Keshavarzi: Ministry of Agriculture.

efforts being made by the family and two human rights activists to allow him to remain at the school, on 11 October 2015 his parents were 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 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 24 November 2014 Miss Layli Ziaie defended the Bahá'í Faith to her teacher and was told that she has to move to a new school now that her fellow students know she is a Bahá'í.

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 disseminations were 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 which 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; Hawzah News.

The materials present a wide range of totally 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 around Bahá'í cemeteries, houses, shops, orchards and vehicles. Without fail, these secondary sources of slander contain the very same malicious lies and incendiary language found in government-controlled, affiliated, and sanctioned media as listed above.

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 14 February 2015, at 2:30 p.m., while returning home, Mr. Karim Jahandari, approximately 35 years old and a resident of Bandar Abbas, was threatened by two individuals and taken to a secluded area. They blindfolded him and, while threatening him with a gun held to his head, forced him to urinate into a cup and then drink the contents. They subjected him to a beating and verbal abuse whilst threatening him, saying, “just as we sent Mr. Rezvani (a Bahá’í in Bandar Abbas who was murdered in 2013) to hell, we will do the same to you, Mr. Mehran Afshar and Mr. Behzad Rasti.” (Mr. Afshar and Mr. Rasti are well known Bahá’ís in Bandar Abbas).

Owing to the traffic and people passing by, the intruders fled the scene. Mr. Jahandari was advised to immediately file a complaint with the legal authorities, go to the office of provincial governor general, mention the history of the murder of Mr. Ataollah Rezvani, and request protection. The legal authorities promised Mr. Jahandari their cooperation and said they would bring the matter to the attention of Municipal Security Council. Mr. Jahandari was advised to also report the incident to the authorities outside of the province, such as the Office of the President, the Commission for Article 90 of the Parliament, the Ministry of Interior and the Head of the Judiciary, requesting an investigation of the matter.

- In April 2016, Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, one of the seven imprisoned members of the former Bahá’í leadership group, was given a five day furlough from prison. During this time, a number of prominent individuals in Iran, some of whom had been in prison with Mrs. Kamalabadi, visited her at her home. One of these individuals was Ms. Faezeh Hashemi daughter of Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, former president of Iran and the current head of the Council of Experts. Following Ms. Hashemi’s visit, there was an unprecedented number of anti-Bahá’í statements across Iran, expressed within the official news media and in government-sponsored websites. More than 160 clerics, politicians, authorities within the Revolutionary Guards, high-ranking officers of the judiciary, the members of the Assembly of Experts, and parliamentarians have spoken with the voice of religious prejudice against the Bahá’ís, calling the individual members of the community “the enemy” and encouraging the population to disassociate themselves from the Bahá’ís and to have no contact with them. Fatwas written decades ago as well as those penned more recently that forbid Muslims from consorting with “infidel” Bahá’ís have been published.

Scores of Friday prayer leaders, in twenty-five of the thirty-one provinces of Iran, condemned the Bahá’í “sect” with similar words, claiming that “Baha’ism” is not a Faith, a religion or an ideological belief, it is a fabricated political party. The Association of Friday Prayer Leaders, a nine-member council appointed by Ayatollah Khamenei, oversees the appointment and functioning of all the Friday prayer leaders in Iran and provides them with the themes for their weekly sermons. In his sermon on Friday, 20 May, Ayatollah Imami Kashani – one of the Friday Prayer Leaders of Tehran, an appointee of Ayatollah Khamenei and one of the most senior clerics in Iran – when addressing the faithful, referred to the Bahá’ís as a “polluted sect” and asked of his audience which country and which constitution allows “the enemy” to live within its borders.

In another development, the editor of the *Kayhan* newspaper, considered in Iran as the mouthpiece of the Supreme Leader, referring to the Bahá'í Faith stated, "each and every member of this sect is considered a member of this Zionist party." Hundreds of pieces inciting religious hatred against the Bahá'ís appeared after the sermons of the Friday prayer leaders were delivered. The volume of these is completely without precedent.

CONCLUSION

The persecution and discriminatory practices against the Bahá'ís, highlighted above, continue to this day. International monitoring constitutes the only protection for this community and the key factor in protecting the Bahá'ís in Iran. 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.