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PRESS RELEASE

Baha'i International Community

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Shiraz cemetery demolition continues by the Revolutionary Guards

NEW YORK – Despite a worldwide outcry, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards is continuing to destroy a historic Baha'i cemetery in Shiraz, Iran.

The ongoing demolition – which is understood to be taking place without a permit from municipal authorities, continues unabated. Ironically, President Hassan Rouhani's advisor on religious and ethnic minorities spoke last Friday in a synagogue in Shiraz and called on Iranians to respect the rights of religious minorities. All the while, the revolutionary guards were carrying out the ongoing destruction in another part of the city.

“Baha'is around the world have been moved by the overwhelming expressions of outrage in the media and particularly from Iranians both inside and outside of Iran who condemn this deplorable act,” said Ms. Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations.

Many Iranians have responded with anger, registering their concern online.

“I'm a Shiite Muslim and now my religion is placing a great burden on me because it is destroying the cemetery of another religion,” wrote someone in response to the Radio Farda story. “Mr. Rouhani, please wake up from your sleep.”

On Facebook, on a Persian language page dedicated to promoting the spirit of citizenship, an individual posted an article about the Shiraz cemetery's destruction, saying that whether someone was pro-government or against it, religious or atheist, how could one imagine supporting such an action. “Which one of you supports this act committed against our Bahá'í compatriots by the Islamic Republic?”

Ms. Dugal added: “Given the historic character of this ground, where some 950 Baha'is are buried, including [ten women](#) who were hanged in 1983 for their refusal to recant their Baha'i belief, this continuing action is not only illegal but morally outrageous.”

Noting that the news has been widely discussed in the news media and online, Ms. Dugal called on the international community to continue to raise its voices against the Guards' action, in the hope that it will motivate the authorities in Iran to press harder for them to stop the demolition.

“Given that his own advisor has been travelling the country calling for respect for religious minorities, we would hope that President Rouhani himself would step in and get the Revolutionary Guards to stop this desecration,” she said.

[Word of the cemetery's demolition](#) emerged on 1 May after the Baha'i International Community learned that Revolutionary Guards had in late April dug up an area some 200 square meters and lined up some 40 to 50 trucks for continuing excavation.

It has since been learned that the appropriate municipal authorities had not issued a permit for the excavation, a legal procedure required for any such work. The Guards, who took ownership of the site three years ago and announced plans to build a new cultural and sports building there, ignored the legal requirement.

Ali Younesi, the special advisor to President Hassan Rouhani for ethnic and religious minorities, who issued a call for religious tolerance while visiting a synagogue in Shiraz is reported to have said:

“Iran belongs to all Iranians from every minority group and they all have the right to live with peace among other people.” He added: “no one has the right to violate the rights of any minorities.”

Ms. Dugal said Mr. Younesi's remarks seemed to make a mockery of the government's ability to control the Revolutionary Guards.

“Here we have a top presidential advisor to Hassan Rouhani calling for Iranians to respect the rights of religious minorities, in a talk given at a Jewish holy place no less, while the revolutionary guards are hard at work in another part of the city destroying the holy ground of another religious group,” said Ms. Dugal. “The irony, let alone the injustice, is incredible.”

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