

PRESS RELEASE

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Increasing violence against Iranian Bahá'ís engineered by government

GENEVA – In a report released today, the Bahá'í International Community documents hundreds of incidents of torture, physical assault, arson, vandalism, cemetery desecration and the abuse of schoolchildren directed against the Iranian Bahá'í community since 2005 – all carried out with utter impunity for attackers.

“The entire situation puts the Bahá'ís in an impossible position because they must ask for justice and protection from the same authorities who are systematically inciting hatred against them and from a judicial system that treats virtually every Bahá'í who is arrested as an enemy of the state,” said Diane Ala'i, the Bahá'í International Community's representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

“This report shows that attacks on Bahá'ís are engineered by government agents and actively encouraged by the authorities and the Muslim clergy in Iran – and that attackers are well aware that they will go unpunished,” added Ms. Ala'i.

Titled “Violence with Impunity: Acts of aggression against Iran's Bahá'í community,” the 45-page report provides case studies and statistics that document a rising tide of violence against Bahá'ís – and the complete absence of prosecution for attackers.

Focusing on the seven year period from 2005-2012, the report says there have been at least 52 cases where Bahá'ís have been tortured or held in solitary confinement while in detention. It likewise documents another 52 incidents where Bahá'ís have been physically assaulted—sometimes at the hands of officials and sometimes at the hands of plainclothes or unidentified attackers.

The report also describes some 49 acts of arson against Bahá'í homes and shops, and at least 42 incidents of cemetery desecration. There have also been at least 30 cases of vandalism directed against Bahá'í properties, more than 200 instances of threats made against Bahá'ís, and some 300 incidents of abuse directed against Bahá'í schoolchildren.

“Many of the attacks documented in the report – such as the cases of torture or assault during arrests and imprisonment -- are undertaken directly by government agents,” said Ms. Ala'i. “Other attacks, such as arson, cemetery desecration, and vandalism, often come in the middle of the night, by unidentified individuals.

“But in all cases, these violators need to be brought to justice, as is required by the international laws to which Iran is a party. The government's unwillingness to prosecute for these crimes, then, is yet another element in their overall campaign of religious persecution against the Bahá'í minority,” said Ms. Ala'i.