

BAHÁ'IS OF HIGHLAND NEWSLETTER

“Behold how they preceded all the peoples of the earth in attaining unto His holy Presence – the Presence of God Himself – how they renounced the world and all that is therein, and sacrificed freely and joyously their lives at the feet of that Manifestation of the All-Glorious. ”

The Kitáb-i-Íqán, pg. 159-160

Dear Friends,

We are excited to bring to you the 13th issue of our newsletter! This month we will start with a segment on the “Yaran-i-Iran”. The material of this segment was prepared by a Bahá’i delegation that recently visited the Apple Valley office of Congressman Paul Cook to discuss the situation of our brothers and sisters in Iran and encourage co-sponsorship of House Resolution 274.

The contents of the Yaran Seven segment are outlined as follows:

- ***NUMBERS – “The Bahá’i Question Revisited: Persecution and Resilience in Iran”, pg. 12***
- ***Status of the Bahá’is in Iran: Basic Facts and Updates – May 9, 2017 – Bahá’is of the United States, Office of Public Affairs***
- ***Fariba Kamalabadi - The Bahá’i Seven – United States Commission on International Religious Freedom***
- ***Iran’s False Claims – “The Bahá’i Question”, pg. 10-11***
- ***“Bahá’i Question” Memorandum – “The Bahá’i Question”, pg. 100-101***
- ***Bahá’i Institute for Higher Education***
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- ***Iran: End Persecution of Bahá’is – Human Rights Watch***
- ***H. RES. 274 – 115th Congress, 1st Session***

Following the segment on “Yaran-i-Iran” we will conclude May’s newsletter with our usual overview of the month passed.



NUMBERS

Statistical snapshot

Since 2005 at least:

860

Bahá'ís have been arrested.

275

Bahá'ís have served time in prison.

1,000's

Bahá'ís denied access to higher education. This includes various ploys such as claiming "incomplete" computer files in their application to outright expulsion if they manage to enroll.

950

Incidents of economic suppression aimed at Bahá'ís. These include shop closings, dismissals, the actual or threatened revocation of business licenses, and the demolition of businesses.

80

Violent attacks against Bahá'í-owned businesses or properties, including cemeteries. These range from arson to vandalism.

20,000

Items of anti-Bahá'í propaganda have been disseminated in the government-controlled media in Iran.



BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Status of the Bahá'ís in Iran: Basic Facts and Updates May 9, 2017

- Some 300,000 Bahá'ís live throughout Iran, making the Bahá'í Faith the country's largest minority religion. Although originating in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bahá'í Faith has become a global religion with over 5 million followers in over 200 countries and territories. It is an independent religion – not a sect of Islam – with its own sacred scriptures which recognize the divine origin of all of the world's great religious systems, the oneness of the human race, the equality of men and women, the harmony of science and religion, and the importance of universal education. It eschews violence.
- While Bahá'ís in Iran have been persecuted since the religion began there in the nineteenth century, the persecution has greatly intensified since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. More than 200 Bahá'ís were killed between 1978 and 1998, the majority by execution, and thousands more were imprisoned.
- Economic and social pressure on Iran's Bahá'í community is acute. Government jobs have been denied to Bahá'ís since the years immediately following the Revolution. Muslims are often pressured to refuse employment to Bahá'ís and to dismiss Bahá'ís from their employment in the private sector. Bahá'ís are also often denied business licenses and thus cannot open their own businesses. Bahá'í marriages are not recognized. Bahá'ís are excluded from public universities, and university students discovered to be Bahá'ís are expelled. At times, the government permits the enrollment of a few students known to be Bahá'ís so that it may publicly state that Bahá'ís are enrolled in university – only to expel them later and prohibit them from graduating. Bahá'í school children are frequently harassed by classmates, teachers, and administrators. Bahá'í homes and businesses are raided by government agents and the property of Bahá'ís is often confiscated without compensation. Bahá'í holy places have been attacked and destroyed. Bahá'ís are not permitted to bury their dead according to Bahá'í law, and Bahá'í cemeteries have been vandalized, desecrated and destroyed.
- Iran's state-sponsored news media systematically disseminate propaganda intended to incite hatred against Iran's Bahá'í community. This propaganda often scapegoats Bahá'ís for economic and political unrest in Iran, and is characterized by a range of baseless accusations, including espionage, promiscuity, sexual deviance, armed rebellion, brainwashing and “cult-like” practices, opposition to the government, threatening national security, and blasphemy and animosity towards Islam. The propaganda pieces are often illustrated by images of zombies, the grim reaper, and Bahá'í holy places transformed into hell-like landscapes. There has been a recent surge in this type of propaganda: the Bahá'í International Community reports that, in 2010 and 2011, approximately 22 anti-Bahá'í pieces were appearing in state-sponsored media outlets every month. In 2014, the number of anti-Bahá'í pieces rose to approximately 400 per month; during 2015, the number of pieces averaged roughly 270 a month; and in 2016, it jumped to approximately 1,500 per month.
- Bahá'ís are routinely arrested, detained, and imprisoned. Over 700 Bahá'ís have been arrested since 2004. The number of Bahá'ís in the prison system has increased markedly in the last few years. During 2011, 156 Bahá'ís were arrested, compared to an average of about 50 arrests per year from 2004 to 2010. In January 2011, there were 57 Bahá'ís in prison and 230 Bahá'ís who, although not currently in prison, were awaiting trial, appeal, sentencing, or the commencement of their sentences. In January 2014, the number of Bahá'ís in prison reached a two-decade high of 136, and the number awaiting trial, appeal, sentencing, or the commencement of their sentences reached 443. There are currently 93 Bahá'ís in prison.

The Yaran (the former national Bahá'í leadership group in Iran)

- In May 2008, Iranian authorities arrested the seven members of the ad hoc leadership group of the Bahá'ís, known as the Yaran-i-Iran, or “friends of Iran,” and detained them in Iran’s notorious Evin prison. The Bahá'í community has no clergy and governs itself through elected bodies. Because there have been no Bahá'í institutions in Iran since the government outlawed them in 1983, the Yaran were informally acting to administer the affairs of the community.
- Accounts in Iranian government-sponsored news media said that the members of the Yaran – Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm – were formally charged with espionage, propaganda activities against the Islamic order, the establishment of an illegal administration, cooperation with Israel, sending secret documents outside the country, acting against the security of the country, and corruption on earth. They categorically denied all the charges.
- The Yaran were tried in a series of closed-door sessions from January to August 2010, during which time they were denied any meaningful access to their lawyers. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, one of the lawyers for the seven leaders, reported that there was no evidence against the seven to sustain the charges against them and that their trial was riddled with irregularities. All seven were sentenced to 20 year prison terms.
- After their sentencing, the Yaran were moved from Evin prison to Iran’s notorious Gohardasht prison, where the five men are still being held in appalling conditions. The two women were then transferred back to Evin prison.
- In late 2015, the Yaran’s sentences were reportedly reduced to 10 years, pursuant to changes in the penal code.

The Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education

- The Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) is an informal higher education system created in 1987 by members of the Bahá'í community in Iran as a direct response to the expulsion of Bahá'í students and educators from Iranian universities. In 1998, 2001, and 2002, a series of sweeping raids resulted in arrests of BIHE faculty and staff and the confiscation of much of its equipment and materials.
- In May 2011, the Government of Iran again raided the homes of individuals associated with BIHE, searching approximately 39 homes, seizing educational materials, and arresting 18 individuals. In June 2011, following the May raids, state-sponsored media reported that the government had declared BIHE to be illegal.
- In July 2011, seven BIHE faculty and staff were reportedly charged with “conspiracy against national security” and “conspiracy against the Islamic Republic of Iran” by “establishing the illegal Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education.” Their trials began in September and concluded in mid-October. A member of their defense team, noted human rights lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani, was detained in 2011 and is now serving a 13-year prison sentence.
- Following the trials, Mr. Kamran Mortezaie and Mr. Vahid Mahmoudi were each sentenced to five years’ imprisonment and the remaining five – Mr. Mahmoud Badavam, Ms. Noushin Khadem, Mr. Farhad Sedghi, Mr. Riaz Sobhani, and Mr. Ramin Zibaie – to four years’ imprisonment. The crime was announced as: “Membership of the deviant sect of Bahá'ísm, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country.” In January 2012, Mr. Mahmoudi was released on probation. In April 2015, Mr. Badavam, Ms. Khadem, Mr. Sedghi, Mr. Sobhani, and Mr. Zibaie were released after serving their sentences. In April 2016, Mr. Mortezaie was released after serving his sentence.
- Since then, several more BIHE instructors were imprisoned. Ms. Faran Hessami; Mr. Kamran Rahimian; Mr. Shahin Negari; Ms. Nasim Bagheri Tari; and Ms. Azita Rafizadeh were given four-year sentences. Mr. Kayvan Rahimian (Kamran’s brother); Dr. Foad Moghaddam; Mr. Amanollah Mostaghim, Mr. Azizullah Samandari, and Mr. Payman Koushk-Baghi received five year sentences. Several have since been released after serving their sentences: Mr. Kamran Rahimian (in August 2015), Ms. Hessami (in April 2016), Mr. Negari (in November 2016), and Mr. Samandari (in April 2017). The other six remain in prison.

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United States Commission *on*
International Religious Freedom



United States Commission *on*
International Religious Freedom

Fariba Kamalabadi - The Baha'i Seven

Country: [Iran](#)

Key Fact: Developmental psychologist and Baha'i member

Detained Since: May 14, 2008

Charges: Espionage, propaganda against the Islamic Republic, and establishment of an illegal administration

Sentence: 20 years imprisonment



Biography: Fariba Kamalabadi was born on September 12, 1962, in Tehran, Iran. Ms. Kamalabadi graduated from high school with honors but was barred from attending university due to her Baha'i faith.

In her mid-30s, Ms. Kamalabadi embarked on an eight-year period of informal study and eventually received an advanced degree in developmental psychology from the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), an alternative institution the Baha'i community of Iran established to provide higher education for its young people. The Iranian government does not recognize the BIHE.

Ms. Kamalabadi is one of the seven Baha'i leaders known as "Yaran" or "Friends," who tended to the spiritual and social needs of the Iranian Baha'i community in the absence of formally elected Baha'i leadership due to restrictions by the Iranian government. The other six members are Mahvash Sabet, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm.

Ms. Kamalabadi was arrested on May 14, 2008 after an early morning raid on her home. Ms. Kamalabadi and the other Baha'i Seven were held incommunicado for weeks, placed in solitary confinement for months, and spent a year behind bars without access to legal counsel. In 2010, the seven were tried and convicted of charges of "espionage" and "spreading propaganda against the regime." The Seven were sentenced to 20 years in prison, the longest of any current prisoner of conscience in Iran.

Ms. Kamalabadi currently is being held in Tehran's Evin prison, along with other female prisoners of conscience, including Mahvash Sabet.

Ms. Kamalabadi married fellow Baha'i Ruhollah Taefi in 1982 and they have three children, Vargha, Alhan, and Taraneh. Ms. Kamalabadi's father was fired from his job in the government health service in the 1980s because he was a Baha'i; he was later imprisoned and tortured.

Iran's False Claims

At international meetings, Iranian officials claim Bahá'ís have “all citizenship rights.” This is untrue.

At the United Nations and in other international forums, Iranian government representatives have claimed that Bahá'ís are not discriminated against in Iran. They say Bahá'ís are able to freely attend university. They say Bahá'ís face no economic persecution, suggesting that many are wealthy. And if they are in prison, Iranian officials say, it is for crimes like spying or acting against the regime, not religious belief.

In general terms, here is what Iranian officials claim – supported by direct quotations from Mohammad Javad Larijani, the Secretary of the Iran's High Council for Human Rights – side by side with the facts.

THE CLAIMS

- Bahá'ís face no official discrimination. Rather, Iranian officials allege that Bahá'ís enjoy the same rights as other Iranians.

“You know Bahá'ís are a minority in Iran, and... they are dealt under the so-called citizen's contract. Under this citizenship contract, they enjoy all the privileges of any citizen in Iran.” – Mohammad Javad Larijani to the UN Human Rights Council, 31 October 2014

THE FACTS

- Bahá'ís are deprived of virtually all citizenship rights. They have no constitutional protection and are subject to a well-documented government policy of discrimination.

- If Bahá'ís are arrested or imprisoned, it is for political or other crimes, not for legitimate religious belief.

"No Iranian citizen has been arrested or put in jail because of being a member of the Bahá'í community... Iran's judiciary deals with them as it does regarding other citizens if they commit a crime." – Dr. Larijani, quoted by the Iranian Students' News Agency on 15 May 2011.

- Bahá'ís face no discrimination in economic activity and, in fact, are wealthy and prosperous.

"Bahá'ís are very much affluent people economically in Iran. They have huge companies. And a lot of successful business." – Dr. Larijani, Press TV interview, 6 March 2016.

- Iran recognizes its obligations to educate all its citizens, and Bahá'ís are free to attend university.

"They have professors at universities. They have students at university. So they enjoy all the possibilities and privileges." – Dr. Larijani, 31 October 2014.

- Iran condemns religious intolerance of all kinds, and Bahá'ís are free to worship.

"They cannot propagate Bahaism among non-Bahá'ís. It is against the law. But they can have their own preaching within themselves. They have their own meetings, in their own worship places." – Dr. Larijani, 6 March 2016.

- Bahá'ís have played a pernicious and destructive role in Iran's history, supporting colonialism, Zionism, and other allegedly anti-regime political movements.

"Bahaism is not a religion in Iran but a diversionary sect and that based on Iran's law, publicity in favor of Bahaism is a crime, but Bahá'ís enjoy complete freedom in their personal issues and nobody opposes them." – Dr. Larijani, 15 May 2011.

- Bahá'ís do not participate in partisan politics, and charges against them almost always refer to their religious identity.

- Bahá'ís are specifically excluded from many sectors of economic activity, including all government employment. They face continual harassment from workplace inspectors in even the smallest of shops.

- Bahá'ís are blocked from obtaining higher education through a series of bureaucratic ruses and mandated expulsions if they identify themselves as Bahá'ís.

- The government sponsors and condones anti-Bahá'í propaganda in the media, contrary to international law.

- The Bahá'í Faith emerged in Iran in 1844 as a new and independent religious movement. Its teachings advocate non-violence and peaceful solutions to all forms of conflict, and call on its followers to promote the betterment of society wherever they reside.

In the coming chapters, this report will deal with each of these claims in turn, showing the degree to which they are both inaccurate and utterly disingenuous.

English translation of the 1991 "Bahá'í Question" memorandum outlining the Islamic Republic's plan to block the progress and development of Iranian Bahá'ís.

[TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

[Text in square brackets added by translator]

In the Name of God!
The Islamic Republic of Iran
The Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council

Number: 1327/...

Date: 6/12/69 [25 February 1991]

Enclosure: None

CONFIDENTIAL

Dr. Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani
Head of the Office of the Esteemed Leader [Khamenei]

Greetings!

After greetings, with reference to the letter #1/783 dated 10/10/69 [31 December 1990], concerning the instructions of the Esteemed Leader which had been conveyed to the Respected President regarding the Bahá'í question, we inform you that, since the respected President and the Head of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council had referred this question to this Council for consideration and study, it was placed on the Council's agenda of session #128 on 16/11/69 [5 February 1991] and session #119 of 2/11/69 [22 January 1991]. In addition to the above, and further to the [results of the] discussions held in this regard in session #112 of 2/5/66 [24 July 1987] presided over by the Esteemed Leader (head and member of the Supreme Council), the recent views and directives given by the Esteemed Leader regarding the Bahá'í question were conveyed to the Supreme Council. In consideration of the contents of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the religious and civil laws and general policies of the country, these matters were carefully studied and decisions pronounced.

In arriving at the decisions and proposing reasonable ways to counter the above question, due consideration was given to the wishes of the Esteemed Leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran [Khamenei], namely, that "in this regard a specific policy should be devised in such a way that everyone will understand what should or should not be done." Consequently, the following proposals and recommendations resulted from these discussions.

The respected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the Head of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, while approving these recommendations, instructed us to convey them to the Esteemed Leader [Khamenei] so that appropriate action may be taken according to his guidance.

Continued next page

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

A. General status of the Bahá'ís within the country's system

1. They will not be expelled from the country without reason.
2. They will not be arrested, imprisoned, or penalized without reason.
3. The government's dealings with them must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked.

B. Educational and cultural status

1. They can be enrolled in schools provided they have not identified themselves as Bahá'ís.
2. Preferably, they should be enrolled in schools which have a strong and imposing religious ideology.
3. 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.
4. Their political (espionage) activities must be dealt with according to appropriate government laws and policies, and their religious and propaganda activities should be answered by giving them religious and cultural responses, as well as propaganda.
5. Propaganda institutions (such as the Islamic Propaganda Organization) must establish an independent section to counter the propaganda and religious activities of the Bahá'ís.
6. A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country.

C. Legal and social status

1. Permit them a modest livelihood as is available to the general population.
2. To the extent that it does not encourage them to be Bahá'ís, it is permissible to provide them the means for ordinary living in accordance with the general rights given to every Iranian citizen, such as ration booklets, passports, burial certificates, work permits, etc.
3. Deny them employment if they identify themselves as Bahá'ís.
4. Deny them any position of influence, such as in the educational sector, etc.

Wishing you divine confirmations,

Secretary of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council

Dr. Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani

[Signature]

[Note in the handwriting of Mr. Khamenei]

In the Name of God!

The decision of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council seems sufficient.

I thank you gentlemen for your attention and efforts.

[signed:] Ali Khamenei

What is the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE)?

<http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/education/bihe>

In what the *New York Times* called “an elaborate act of communal self-preservation,” the Baha'i community in 1987 established its own higher education program to meet the educational needs of young people who had been systematically denied access to higher education by the Iranian government.

The Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) is an informal arrangement because the Iranian government will not allow the establishment of any Baha'i institutions in Iran.

Initially, the BIHE made use of the volunteer services of Baha'i professors and lecturers who had been dismissed from their university posts. The Institute operated largely by correspondence. Later, classes and laboratory work were carried out in private homes and basements. Online studies were added in more recent years.

In September and October 1998, agents of the Iranian government staged a series of sweeping raids, arresting at least 36 members of the BIHE's faculty and staff and confiscating much of its equipment and records, which were located in over 500 homes. In subsequent years there have been periodic onslaughts of varying intensity against this endeavour, most notably in 2001 and 2003.

The BIHE nevertheless continued to conduct its courses according to the highest academic standards.

At the time of the latest raids on its staff and resources, it was offering 17 university-level programs. Some 200-300 people were teaching classes and supporting its work by way of administration. An average of 1000 students apply to BIHE every year.

The BIHE issues a degree to its graduates but, since the Iranian government does not recognize the Institute, the degree is not certified. Nevertheless, a number of universities in Europe, North America, Australia, and India, have admitted BIHE graduates to pursue post-graduate studies. Most of these students return to Iran upon the awarding of their degrees and, in turn, volunteer to teach courses, enabling the BIHE to maintain its academic standards.

There can be no doubt that the attacks on the BIHE are being carried out under a centrally orchestrated campaign aimed at demoralizing Baha'i youth and eroding the formal educational level of the community so as to hasten its impoverishment.

Not content with excluding Baha'is from the nation's universities, the Iranian government is callously revitalizing its efforts to thwart the educational arrangements that the Baha'i community has undertaken to enable its youth to expand their knowledge beyond the high school level.

Baha'i Institute for Higher Education's (BIHE) Vision for the 21st Century

<http://www.bihe.org>

BIHE was born out of a need to educate those who were unjustly denied access to a university education. As such, the origin of BIHE is rooted in a spirit of purposefulness, dedication, and a belief in the power of true education. The unique circumstances surrounding BIHE, whereby professors taught without compensation, and all staff and students participated in the university at great personal risk, unwittingly forced the university to become a leader in combining online learning, traditional classroom instruction and preparation for a successful career.

Today the exigencies of higher education are different from the past. Rapid cultural and technological changes are creating new demands. At BIHE, we believe that through collaborative and versatile learning that emphasizes conceptual as well as practical aspects of living in a global society, challenges can be transformed into possibilities. Indeed, that has been the founding principle of BIHE.

BIHE aspires to make its services accessible to all Iranians, irrespective of their religious affiliations, and to be a useful instrument for the well-being and prosperity of the nations in the 21st century.

BIHE at a Glance

- BIHE was founded in 1987
 - In the first year of its establishment, 1987, students were accepted in two fields of studies, namely sciences and humanities
 - BIHE has five faculties with 5 associate programs, 18 undergraduate degree programs and 14 graduate programs
 - BIHE offers over 1050 courses ranging from Persian Literature to Applied Chemistry.
 - BIHE has a combined faculty and administrative staff of over 955 members
 - An average of 1000 students apply to BIHE every year
 - BIHE currently accepts about 450 students into its first year programs
 - BIHE applicants must conform to the same rigorous academic standards as other students in Iran. They must pass the national entrance exam, and meet all the BIHE academic requirements

- BIHE graduates have been accepted at more than 85 different university graduate programs outside of Iran including:
 - Harvard University, Yale University, University of California, Berkeley, Stanford Medical School, Columbia University, University of Chicago, and over thirty other U.S. universities
 - Universities in Canada, India, United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway, Finland, France, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Portugal, Australia, New Zealand

Hanged for teaching Sunday School

Few incidents are more shocking – or revealing of the religious basis of the persecution against Bahá'ís and the courage with which they face it – than the group hanging of ten Bahá'í women in Shiraz on 18 June 1983.

Their crime: teaching religious classes to Bahá'í youth – the equivalent of being “Sunday school” teachers in the West.

Ranging in age from 17 to 57, the ten Bahá'í women were led to the gallows in succession. Authorities apparently hoped that as each saw the others slowly strangle to death, they would renounce their own faith.

But according to eyewitness reports, the women went to their fate singing and chanting, as though they were enjoying a pleasant outing.

One of the men attending the gallows confided to a Bahá'í: “We tried saving their lives up to the last moment, but one by one, first the older ladies, then the young girls, were hanged while the others were forced to watch, it being hoped that this might induce them to recant their belief. We even urged them to say they were not Bahá'ís, but not one of them agreed; they preferred the execution.”

All of the women had been interrogated and tortured in the months leading up to their execution. Indeed, some had wounds still visible on their bodies as they lay in the morgue after their execution.

The youngest was Mona Mahmudnizhad, a 17-year-old schoolgirl who, because of her youth and conspicuous innocence, became a symbol of



the group. In prison, she was lashed on the soles of her feet with a cable and forced to walk on her bleeding feet.

Yet she never wavered in her faith, even to the point of kissing the hands of her executioner, and then the rope, before putting it around her own throat.

Another young woman, Zarrin Muqimi-Abyanhi, 28, told the interrogators whose chief goal was to have her disavow her faith: “Whether you accept it or not, I am a Bahá'í. You cannot take it away from me. I am a Bahá'í with my whole being and my whole heart.”

During the trial of another of the women, Ruya Ishraqi, a 23-year-old veterinary student, the judge said: “You put yourselves through this agony only for one word: just say you are not a Bahá'í and I'll see that...you are released...” Ms. Ishraqi responded: “I will not exchange my faith for the whole world.”

The names of the other women hanged on 18 June 1983 were Shahin Dalvand, 25, a sociologist; Izzat Janami Ishraqi, 57, a homemaker; Mahshid Nirumand, 28, who had qualified for a degree in physics but had it denied her because she was a Bahá'í; Simin Sabiri, 25; Tahirih Arjumandi Siyavushi, 30, a nurse; Akhtar Thabit, 25, also a nurse; Nusrat Ghufrani Yalda'i, 47, a mother and member of the local Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly.

All had seen it as their duty to teach Bahá'í religious classes – especially since the government had barred Bahá'í children from attending even regular school.



FEBRUARY 23, 2010 4:52PM EST

Iran: End Persecution of Baha'is

Dozens Detained Without Charge; Leaders Face Charges Carrying Death Penalty

(New York) - The Iranian government should immediately stop harassing and arbitrarily detaining members of the Baha'i community, Human Rights Watch said today.

The detention of 13 Baha'is on February 10 and 11 follows the arrest of 13 others in early January. The government alleges that those arrested in January helped to organize recent anti-government demonstrations but has not made public any charges against those detained in February. These arrests come during a broad government crackdown on opposition activists.

"The Iranian government seems to be using the post-election unrest as a cover for targeting the Baha'i community," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "These arrests are only the latest chapter in the government's systematic persecution of the Baha'i."

Unlike Iran's Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian communities, which are accorded constitutional protection, the Iranian government does not recognize the Baha'i Faith and considers its adherents to be apostates from Shi'a Islam. Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, the Iranian government has put in effect various discriminatory policies against the Baha'is, including limiting access to education and employment.

Since October 2009, authorities have detained at least 47 Baha'is in Tehran, Mashhad, Sari, Semnan, and Yazd, according to the United Nations office of the Baha'i International Community (BIC) in Geneva. In May 2008, the government arrested seven leaders of the Baha'i community in Tehran, who have been held in detention since then. Their trial began on January 12, but has been postponed to April 10.

The Judiciary has charged the seven community leaders with a range of national-security-related offenses, including spying for the benefit of foreigners, propaganda against the system, establishing and spreading illegal organizations, undermining the image of the Islamic Republic in the international community, and spreading

"corruption on earth." Most of these charges carry the death penalty. During the more than a year and a half that the five men and two women have been held, they have been allowed only limited visits from family and lawyers.

One of those detained on February 10 was Alaeddin Khanjani. According to the Committee of Human Rights Reporters in Iran, Ministry of Intelligence (MOI) agents entered his home in Tehran at about 2:30 a.m., searched the premises, confiscated personal belongings including a computer and religious material, and took him into custody. Khanjani is the son of Jamaloddin Khanjani, one of the seven Baha'i leaders on trial in Tehran. Ministry of Intelligence agents had also arrested Alaeddin Khanjani's adult daughter in January. Within several hours of Alaeddin Khanjani's arrest, agents arrested seven more Baha'is, claiming they were being detained for their involvement in recent public demonstrations. On February 11, agents arrested five Baha'is in their homes in Tehran. No charges have been filed against any of the 13.

On January 3, MOI agents also raided the homes of 13 Baha'is and detained them, releasing three of them after they indicated they would not participate in further public demonstrations. In addition to the others arrested on February 10, one of those arrested on January 3 and then released was rearrested on February 10.

In a press statement on January 12, Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi, the Tehran general prosecutor, said that the 10 Baha'is who have been held since January 3 faced charges of "organizing the unrest on Ashura [December 27] and sending photos of the unrest abroad." In a previous statement on January 8, he claimed that authorities had found arms and ammunition in some of their homes. Dolatabadi denied that the arrests had anything to do with their Baha'i affiliation. Security forces have reportedly arrested hundreds of Iranians for their alleged involvement in the demonstrations on Ashura, a Shi'a day of mourning.

The authorities are holding those arrested on January 3 in Gohardasht Prison in Karaj and have not allowed them to contact their lawyers. According to the BIC, a few of them were allowed to contact family members after spending several weeks in prison.

The BIC also indicated that 60 Baha'is are currently in detention, with an additional 90 having been released but awaiting trial. Since 2004, 99 Baha'is have been convicted of various charges, including acting against national security, teaching against the Islamic Republic, propaganda against the regime, involvement in establishing illegal groups and organizations, and insulting the sacred institutions of Islam. These individuals are free pending appeal. Scores of others have been summoned and interrogated by security and intelligence agents without being taken into custody, according to the BIC.

The five Baha'is arrested in Tehran on February 11 are: Taraneh Ghanouni, Naghmeh Ghanouni, Shaida Yousefi, Aria Shadmehr, and Riaz Firouzmandi.

In addition to Alaeddin Khanjani, those arrested on February 10 are: Ashkan Bassari, Maria Ehsan Jafar, Bashir

Ehsani, Romina Zabihyan, Houtan Sistani, Simin Ghaffari, and Pedram Sanaei.

Those arrested on January 3 are: Mehran Rowhani, Farid Rowhani, Babak Mobasher, Leva Mobasher Khanjani, Payam Fanaian, Jinous Ghazanfari Sobhani, Artin Ghazanfari, Nikav Hoveydaei, Ebrahim Shadmehr, Zavosh Shadmehr, Negar Sabet, Mona Hoveydaei Misaghi, and Nasim Beiglari. Negar Sabet, Mona Misaghi, and Nasim Beiglari were released on January 3, but Mona Misaghi was summoned to the MOI agency's office again on February 10 and rearrested.

The seven members of the Baha'i leadership whose trial began on January 12 are: Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm.

Background

Due to governmental restrictions on openly practicing their faith, Baha'is in Iran are unable to convene and administer a National Spiritual Assembly as in most countries where Baha'i communities exist. Instead, they have formed an informal coordinating body known as the "Friends of Iran." The seven members facing trial consist of six leaders and the secretary of this coordinating body.

Haifa, in present-day Israel, is the final resting place of Baha'ullah - the founder of the Baha'i Faith - and the faith's administrative headquarters since 1868, when Haifa was under Ottoman rule. Despite the fact that sites in and around Haifa were considered holy to the Baha'is well before the creation of the state of Israel, the Iranian government has repeatedly used the connection as an excuse to accuse Baha'is in Iran of spying for Israel, with which Iran has hostile relations.

During a recent review of its human rights record before the United Nations Human Rights Council, Iranian officials dismissed numerous concerns by member states regarding the government's treatment of its Baha'i minority. Mohammad Javad Larijani, the head of Iran's UN delegation, stated on February 15 that "no Baha'i in Iran is prosecuted because he is a Baha'i," and the government rejected recommendations put forth by other governments calling for "an end to discrimination and incitement to hatred vis-à-vis the Baha'i."

Region / Country

- Middle East/North Africa
- Iran

Topic

- Free Speech
- Religious Freedom

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 274

Condemning the Government of Iran's state-sponsored persecution of its Baha'i minority and its continued violation of the International Covenants on Human Rights.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 25, 2017

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN (for herself, Mr. DEUTCH, Mr. CHABOT, Mr. ENGEL, Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Ms. JENKINS of Kansas, and Mr. SCHNEIDER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Condemning the Government of Iran's state-sponsored persecution of its Baha'i minority and its continued violation of the International Covenants on Human Rights.

Whereas in 1982, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2016, Congress declared that it deplored the religious persecution by the Government of Iran of the Baha'i community and would hold the Government of Iran responsible for upholding the rights of all Iranian nationals, including members of the Baha'i Faith;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2016 Annual Report states—

(1) “The Baha’i community, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran, long has been subject to particularly severe religious freedom violations. The government views Baha’is, who number at least 300,000, as ‘heretics’ and consequently they face repression on the grounds of apostasy.”;

(2) “Since 1979, authorities have killed or executed more than 200 Baha’i leaders, and more than 10,000 have been dismissed from government and university jobs.”; and

(3) “Over the past 10 years, approximately 850 Baha’is have been arbitrarily arrested.”;

Whereas the Department of State 2015 International Religious Freedom Report states—

(1) religious minorities in Iran “continued to face societal discrimination, especially the Bahai community, which reported continuing problems at different levels of society, including personal harassment.”;

(2) the Government of Iran “continued to prohibit Bahais from officially assembling or maintaining administrative institutions, actively closed such institutions, harassed Bahais, and disregarded their property rights.”;

(3) in Iran, “Bahai blood may be spilled with impunity, and Bahai families are not entitled to restitution” and “Bahais cannot receive compensation for injury or crimes committed against them and cannot inherit property.”;

(4) the Government of Iran “requires universities to exclude Bahais from access to higher education or expel them if their religious affiliation becomes known.”; and

(5) in Iran, “Bahais are banned from government employment” and “[t]here were reports of non-Bahais

being pressured to refuse employment to Bahais or dismissing Bahais from their private sector jobs.”;

Whereas, on June 8, 2016, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief issued a joint statement condemning the “wave of incitement of hatred of the Baha’i community reflected in speeches made by religious, judiciary and political officials in the Islamic Republic of Iran”;

Whereas, on September 6, 2016, the United Nations Secretary-General issued a report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/71/374), which stated that “human rights violations have continued at an alarming rate”;

Whereas, on December 17, 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/RES/70/179), which “[e]xpress[ed] serious concern about ongoing severe limitations and restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and restrictions on the establishment of places of worship, as well as attacks against places of worship and burial, as well as other human rights violations, including but not limited to harassment, persecution and incitement to hatred that lead to violence against persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities, including Christians, Jews, Sufi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Zoroastrians and members of the Baha’i Faith and their defenders”;

Whereas since May 2008, the Government of Iran has imprisoned the 7 members of the former ad hoc leadership group of the Baha’i community in Iran, known as the Yaran-i-Iran, or “friends of Iran”—Mrs. Fariba

Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm—and these individuals were convicted of charges including “spying for Israel, insulting religious sanctities, propaganda against the regime and spreading corruption on earth” and sentenced to 20-year prison terms, the longest sentences given to any prisoner of conscience in Iran at that time, now reportedly reduced to 10 years;

Whereas beginning in May 2011, officials of the Government of Iran in 4 cities conducted sweeping raids on the homes of dozens of individuals associated with the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education (referred to in this Resolution as “BIHE”) and arrested and detained several educators associated with BIHE, with 16 BIHE educators ultimately sentenced to 4- or 5-year prison terms, 7 of whom remain in prison;

Whereas scores of Baha’i cemeteries have been attacked, and in 2014, Revolutionary Guards began excavating a Baha’i cemetery in Shiraz, which is the site of 950 graves, and built a cultural and sport center on the cemetery site;

Whereas the Baha’i International Community reported that there has been a recent surge in anti-Baha’i hate propaganda in Iranian state-sponsored media outlets, noting that—

(1) in 2010 and 2011, approximately 22 anti-Baha’i articles were appearing every month;

(2) in 2014, the number of anti-Baha’i articles rose to approximately 400 per month; and

(3) by 2016, the number of anti-Baha’i articles rose to approximately 1,500 per month;

Whereas there are currently 90 Baha’is in prison in Iran;

Whereas the Government of Iran is party to the International Covenants on Human Rights and is in violation of its obligations under such Covenants;

Whereas section 105 of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (22 U.S.C. 8514) authorizes the President to impose sanctions on individuals “responsible for or complicit in, or responsible for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, the commission of serious human rights abuses against citizens of Iran or their family members on or after June 12, 2009”; and

Whereas the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–158) amends and expands the authorities established under the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (Public Law 111–195) to sanction Iranian human rights abusers: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) condemns the Government of Iran’s state-
3 sponsored persecution of its Baha’i minority and its
4 continued violation of the International Covenants
5 on Human Rights;

6 (2) calls on the Government of Iran to imme-
7 diately release the 7 imprisoned Baha’i leaders, the
8 7 imprisoned Baha’i educators, and all other pris-
9 oners held solely on account of their religion;

10 (3) calls on the President and the Secretary of
11 State, in cooperation with responsible nations, to im-
12 mediately condemn the Government of Iran’s contin-

1 ued violation of human rights and demand the im-
2 mediate release of prisoners held solely on account
3 of their religion; and

4 (4) urges the President and the Secretary of
5 State to utilize available authorities to impose sanc-
6 tions on officials of the Government of Iran and
7 other individuals directly responsible for serious
8 human rights abuses, including abuses against the
9 Baha'i community of Iran.

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Announcements

- *Opportunities with the Bahá'í National Organization*
- *109th Bahá'í National Convention Highlights*
- *Georgia Sanchez Bahá'í Gospel Workshop and Concert*

Letters/Communications

- ***National Spiritual Assembly***
 - *Feast of Ázamat*
 - *109th US National Bahá'í Convention Message from Delegates*
 - *National Spiritual Assembly Announces Election of Officers*
 - *Passing of Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh*
 - *On Relations with "Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light"*
 - *Social and Economic Development Survey*
 - *Cover Letter of April 27 Letter from Supreme Body*
 - *On 12th International Bahá'í Convention*
- ***Universal House of Justice***
 - *BWC Bicentenary Film on Bahá'u'lláh*
 - *Response to 109th Convention Delegates' Letter*
 - *BWC Film and Reports to be Made Available for Twin Holy Birthdays' Planning*
 - *Guidance on Social Action and Public Discourse*
- ***Cluster***
 - *Appointment of Area Teaching Committee*

Talks/Presentations/Web

- *"God and Apple Pie: Religious Myths and Visions of America", Christopher Buck*
- *"Where Spirit Intersects Art", Anne Perry*

Links

- *Bahá'is of Banning*
- *Bahá'is of Claremont*
- *Bahá'is of Fontana*
- *Bahá'is of Rancho Cucamonga*
- *Bahá'is of Redlands*
- *Bahá'is of Riverside*
- *Bahá'is of San Bernardino*
- *Bahá'is of San Bernardino southwest*
- *Bahá'is of Upland*
- *Bahá'is of Yucaipa*
- *Highland Children's Classes*

Bahá'is of Highland

<http://www.divinegemsvirtues.com/highland-lsa.html>

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