

# BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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30 November 1982

## STATEMENT IN REBUTTAL OF ACCUSATIONS MADE AGAINST THE BAHÁ'I FAITH BY THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS General Assembly, 37th session, November 1982

In a document entitled "Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran - a review of the facts" circulated to representatives to the Third Committee of the 37th session of the General Assembly at United Nations Headquarters on 23 November 1982, the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran made a number of false and damaging statements concerning the nature of the Bahá'í Faith and the activities of its followers. The Bahá'í International Community wishes to refute these false statements and to present the true facts.

(For ease of reference, copies of the relevant pages of Iran's report are attached).

1. *The Bahá'í Faith is accused of being "a political entity created and nourished by anti-Islamic and Colonial Powers" (see page 27 paragraph 3 of the report). Reference is made to "the Bahá'í espionage network" (p.3. para 2) and it is alleged that "a very sophisticated and systematic espionage network has been established by the Bahá'ís" (p.29 para 2). Other references of a similar nature appear elsewhere in the report.*

The Bahá'í International Community categorically denies these allegations. Participation in partisan politics, and involvement in any form of subversive activity, are both totally forbidden to Bahá'ís in accordance with the most fundamental principles of their faith.

Bahá'í communities exist in countries throughout the world and their activities are known to the governments of these countries to be non-political, non-partisan and peaceful.

The activities of Bahá'í communities in every part of the world are open to scrutiny and, in view of the serious nature of the charges made by the Iranian government in this world forum, the Bahá'í International Community invites the establishment of an impartial body of inquiry to mount a thorough investigation into the activities of the Bahá'í world community.

2. All the allegations made against the Bahá'ís in Iran are based on deliberate misinterpretations of the aims and purposes of the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings. The most common charges levelled against the Bahá'ís - and repeated in Iran's new report - are as follows:

1. *Bahá'ís are accused of being political supporters of the late Shah and of having benefited from the former regime.*
2. *Bahá'ís are accused of being a political organization opposed to the present Iranian government.*
3. *Bahá'ís are accused of collaboration with SAVAK.*
4. *Bahá'ís are accused of being enemies of Islam.*
5. *Bahá'ís are accused of being agents of Zionism.*

All these allegations are explained and convincingly refuted in the Bahá'í International Community's publication "The Bahá'ís in Iran: A Report on the Persecution of a Religious Minority", revised and updated July 1982, pages 19 to 24.

The new and/or very specific allegations contained in Iran's latest report can be answered as follows:

3. *It is alleged that the son of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith was an agent of the British government, engaged in "covert activities against the Ottoman Empire" in Palestine; that, during World War I, he was "highly successful to render great services for the British army", including supplying the army with "large supplies of food and grains which he had secretly been storing"; and that the British authorities protected his life and gave him "huge amounts of gold" and a knighthood as a reward for his espionage activities. (See pages 24 and 25 of the report).*

These alleged "facts" are gross distortions of the truth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (also known as Abbas Effendi), the son of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, was not a British spy. The knighthood conferred upon him by the British government in 1920 was in recognition of his humanitarian services to the poor and needy in Palestine during World War I. To portray these humanitarian services as calculated political acts is totally unjustified. Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá accepted the knighthood, he never used the title, and he never received any financial aid, much less "huge amounts of gold" (p.25 para 6), from the British government.

The intervention of the British government in 1918 to protect the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá had nothing whatsoever to do with any supposed covert association between that government and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was inspired by, and in response to, urgent requests from the British Bahá'ís, who

were gravely concerned about the safety of the leader of their faith - just as Bahá'ís in the free world today appeal to their governments, expressing concern about the safety of their fellow-believers in Iran.

The concern of the British Bahá'ís arose from the fact that the leader of the advancing Turkish forces, Jamal Pasha (a fanatical and long-standing enemy of the Bahá'í Faith) had publicly declared his intention of crucifying 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his family on the slopes of Mount Carmel. The British authorities (including those named in the report, p.24 para 3) responded sympathetically to the appeals of the Bahá'ís and alerted the Commander of their forces in Palestine to the potential danger. Having entered Haifa, General Allenby duly cabled a confirmation to London that 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his family were safe.

In order to reinforce the argument that some clandestine connection existed between the British government and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the report (pages 24 to 26) cites the names of many prominent Britons. It should be emphasized, however, that, during his years in the Holy Land, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in contact with prominent personalities in many countries (among them such eminent figures as Dr. Auguste Forel of Switzerland, Leo Tolstoy of Russia, Professor Arminius Vambery of Hungary, Prince Muhammad-Ali Pasha of Egypt); with scholars and leaders in Lebanon and other middle-eastern countries; and with such institutions as the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, in the Netherlands.

Similarly, while the report (p.26 para 1) names the two British officials who attended 'Abdu'l-Bahá's funeral, it omits to mention that, in recognition of his high and unique position, the chiefs of the Muslim, Christian, Jewish and other religious communities in the Holy Land, as well as notables from all strata of Palestinian society, were also present at the obsequies.

4. *It is alleged that the Bahá'í Faith was used by the colonial powers as a tool for colonial expansion into Muslim countries.*

This is a complete fabrication, unsubstantiated even by the "evidence" adduced in its support. The report (p.26 para 5) accurately refers to a passage in the Bahá'í book "God Passes By", recording that the leader of the Bahá'í Faith was invited to "spend a while in India", but omits to cite either the circumstances of the invitation or the response to it - both of which are detailed in the same passage.

At the time of the invitation, news of the martyrdom of the Báb (the Prophet-Herald of the Bahá'í Faith) and the massacre of 20,000 of His followers had spread to the west and had aroused much sympathy and interest among Europeans. Bahá'u'lláh, the most prominent follower of the Báb (who had not yet declared His own mission) was exiled by the Iranian government and imprisoned in Baghdad. His plight attracted the sympathetic attention of the British consul-general in Baghdad, who offered Him the

protection of British citizenship and also offered to arrange residence for Him in India or in any other place agreeable to Him. Bahá'u'lláh declined these offers and chose instead to remain a prisoner in Baghdad.

It was not unusual at that time, nor is it unusual today, for government officials to offer aid and sanctuary to those they perceive as being the victims of oppression in other countries. This kind of intervention is commonly recognized as being humanitarian and non-political in nature. The attempt to portray the humanitarian assistance offered to Bahá'u'lláh as being part of a sinister project of colonial expansion is clearly ridiculous.

The reference (allegedly drawn from the same book, but actually to be found in a letter written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to an individual Bahá'í) to the "anxiety" of the government of France to send Bahá'ís to the French colonies in Muslim Africa is likewise taken out of context and is deliberately misleading. The true facts are that the French Ambassador in Teheran, greatly impressed by the Bahá'í teachings and by their effect upon the people who embraced them, suggested that Bahá'ís might go to Tunisia and teach their faith there. 'Abdu'l-Bahá duly mentioned this suggestion in a letter to one of his followers but, as it happened, nothing ever came of it. Clearly, this incident cannot seriously be used to suggest, or prove, any form of collusion between the Bahá'í Faith and the French government to promote colonial expansion in Africa.

5. *Certain Bahá'ís are alleged to have held high political office during the reign of the late Shah.*

Bahá'ís are forbidden by the laws of their faith from becoming involved in partisan politics or from holding any political post. The report (pp 27/28) accuses the Iranian Bahá'ís of not adhering to this principle of their faith, alleging that certain people identified as Bahá'ís held prominent political positions during the reign of the late Shah. These accusations are refuted below.

*It should be noted in this connection that, during the reign of the Shah, it was common for unscrupulous politicians to attempt to discredit their political opponents by accusing them of being Bahá'ís. Such accusations were either entirely without foundation or were based upon the fact that the fathers or families of the individuals concerned had once been Bahá'ís. It is, however, a basic principle of the Bahá'í religion that the gift of faith springs from the free choice of the individual and cannot be automatically and blindly inherited from an earlier generation. A person is a Bahá'í only when he freely declares himself to be a Bahá'í.*

It is true that *Dr. Ayadi*, a Bahá'í, served as personal physician to the late Shah. He was appointed to this *non-political* position not only because of his skill in medicine but also because of his personal integrity and trustworthiness. It is untrue to state (as does the report) that he was "the man behind the whole pharmaceutical market".

*General Khattani*, Commander of the Air Force, *Mrs. Parsa*, Minister of Education, and *General Nasiri*, Head of SAVAK, were never Bahá'ís and never claimed to be Bahá'ís.

*General Sani'i*, Minister of War, was once a Bahá'í but was expelled from the Bahá'í community when he accepted ministerial office in the government - in accordance with the Bahá'í law forbidding Bahá'ís to hold political office.

*Parviz Sabeti*, Director-General of SAVAK, *Mansur Ruhani*, Minister of Agriculture, and Prime Minister *Amir Abbas Hoveida* were never Bahá'ís and never claimed to be Bahá'ís. Their alleged membership in the Bahá'í community was based on the fact that their fathers were, or had once been, Bahá'ís.

6. *Bahá'ís are accused of being agents and political supporters of Zionism.*

*The report (p.27 para 1) cites the well-worn accusation that, since the Bahá'í World Centre is in Israel, the Bahá'í Faith must in some way be identified with Zionism, and also asserts that this means that the Bahá'í Faith is not a religion but is a "political entity created and nourished by anti-Islamic and Colonial Powers."*

The Bahá'í World Centre was established in the last century, long before the State of Israel came into existence, and has nothing to do with Zionism. The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, was exiled to the Holy Land in compliance with the order of two Islamic governments (Iran and Turkey). He remained in the Holy Land until His death in 1892, His Shrine was raised there, and the Holy Land thus became the world spiritual centre of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh Himself directed that the world spiritual and administrative centres of His faith must always be united in one locality. Accordingly, the world administrative centre of the Bahá'í Faith has always been and must continue to be in the Holy Land. It cannot be relocated for the sake of temporary political expediency.

References are made later in the report (p.28 paras 4 and 8) to the Bahá'ís sending "millions of dollars" to Israel to "support the Zionist regime". This allegation is entirely without foundation. The funds sent by Bahá'ís the world over (including those in Iran) to the Bahá'í World Centre are solely and exclusively for the upkeep of their holy Shrines and historic sites in the Holy Land, and for the administration of their faith.

It should be noted that other religious communities contribute towards the maintenance of their holy places in Israel without attracting the charge that they are financially supporting the government of Israel. Similarly, the Shiite Muslims send financial contributions towards the upkeep of their holy places at Najaf and Karbala in Iraq. Should the fact that Iran and Iraq are at war suddenly draw down the charge upon the Muslim Iranians that they have lent financial aid to the Iraqi government? Yet this is precisely the nature of the spurious allegation being made by the Iranian government against the Bahá'ís.

7. SAVAK documents adduced to support allegations against Bahá'ís.

*The report (pp.28/29) summarizes the contents of various documents allegedly extracted from the files of SAVAK, which purport to implicate Bahá'ís (or alleged Bahá'ís) in a variety of anti-Islamic activities.*

It is impossible for the Bahá'í International Community to comment upon these documents because it has not seen them. It might, however, be asked how and why - since the present Iranian government has itself discredited SAVAK - the documentation produced by this organization has suddenly become relevant and "authentic" where Bahá'ís are concerned?

The hostility of SAVAK towards the Bahá'ís is well attested. A SAVAK memorandum linking the bureau with the operations of the fanatical anti-Bahá'í organization Tablighat-i-Islami was published in the Iranian daily newspaper Mujahid on 9 June 1980, and one of the final acts of SAVAK in 1978, shortly before the fall of the Shah, was to attempt to divert public attention away from disaffection with the regime by mounting violent attacks on the Bahá'ís. During raids organized by SAVAK on Saadi village near Shiraz, 150 Bahá'í homes were looted and burned down. The Bahá'í International Community has in its possession an announcement by Ayatollah Mahallati, the most prominent religious leader in Shiraz, telling Muslims that such attacks against the Bahá'ís were the machinations of SAVAK, and warning them not to participate.

8. Specific cases of accused Bahá'ís.

*The report cites the cases of five Bahá'ís, tried in February 1980, who were "proven guilty in the Court of Justice" but whose sentences were commuted (p.31).*

These trials actually took place in Shiraz, under very questionable circumstances, and the Bahá'í International Community cannot comment upon the veracity of the evidence or charges. We do, however, have reliable and up-to-date information concerning the fate of these Bahá'ís.

1. Enayatollah Ehsanian - stated in the report to have been released for lack of evidence against him. True.
2. Ja'far Sha'er-zadeh - stated in the report to have been released on compassionate grounds. He was, in fact, re-arrested approximately one month ago and is currently in detention in Shiraz.
3. Sattar Khosh-Khu - stated in the report to have been found guilty of supporting Zionism and to have been given a two-year prison sentence. He was, in fact, summarily executed in Shiraz on 30 April 1981 (approximately 14 months after his trial).
4. Enayatollah Mehdi-zadeh - stated in the report to have been released. He was actually released after spending ten months in prison.

5. Mohammad-Reza Hesami - stated in the report to have been fined and released. He is, in fact, still in prison and has not at any time been released.

*The stated purpose of including these details in the report was to make it "crystal clear" that "not a single person in the Islamic Republic of Iran is tried and punished merely because of his/her particular ideology or set of principles." (p.30 para 7).*

Even if it were to be assumed, for the sake of argument, that the details of the cases cited in the report were true, it is difficult to see how isolated cases such as these could justify the pervasive and continuing persecution of the entire Bahá'í community of Iran.

*Despite the repeated denials of the Iranian government, it is clear that the persecution of the Bahá'ís is based solely upon their religious beliefs.*

During the past four years, one hundred and eighteen Bahá'ís have died for their faith in Iran. No evidence exists to support any of the charges brought against those who were executed. In the very few cases in which a Bahá'í has been willing to recant his faith, he has immediately been released and all charges against him dropped - while his fellow believers who refused to recant have been executed.

Two Bahá'ís very recently executed in Shiraz - Mr. Habibu'llah Awji on 16 November and Mr. Ziya'u'llah Ahrari on 21 November - were offered their freedom by the trial judge if they would agree to recant their religion. In the case of Mr. Ahrari, the court verdict - published in the Teheran daily newspaper Kayhan on 22 November - clearly stated that the principal charge against him was his membership in the Bahá'í community.

Membership in the Bahá'í community was first recognized by the courts as a capital offence in March 1981, when Mr. Mihdi Anvari and Mr. Hidayatu'llah Dihqani were tried and executed in Shiraz. In the case of Mr. 'Azizu'llah Gulshani, executed by hanging on 29 April 1982, the charges against him related solely to his Bahá'í activities. (These charges were detailed in Kayhan on 29 April 1982).

All the Bahá'ís executed during the past two years were prominent believers whose executions were intended to intimidate the rank and file of the Bahá'í community into recanting their faith. Most compelling is the fact that the authorities have twice eliminated the membership of the national governing body of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran. On 21 August 1980, all nine members of this body were arrested by revolutionary guards and have since disappeared without trace. On 27 December 1981, eight members of the national governing body that replaced them were secretly executed in Teheran. Their execution, initially denied by the authorities, was finally admitted by the President of the Supreme Court of Iran, Ayatollah Musavi Ardibili, at a press conference on 5 January 1982.

The executions and disappearances are part of a systematic campaign to eradicate the Iranian Bahá'í community and obliterate all traces of the Bahá'í Faith from Iran.

The other elements of the campaign are the confiscation and destruction of all Bahá'í community properties and holy places in Iran (now accomplished) and the denial of the most basic human rights to thousands upon thousands of innocent Bahá'ís. This denial has been expressed in many dehumanizing ways, such as dismissal from employment, denial of pensions, confiscation of private property and denial of schooling to children. (An article in the newspaper Kayhan on 25 November 1981 reported the expulsion of 43 students from the University of Shiraz because of their membership in the "misguided Bahá'í group").

Many of the notices dismissing Bahá'ís from their jobs have clearly stated that membership in the Bahá'í community is the reason for the dismissal, and many of the notices have stated that the individual concerned will be given back his job if he will publicly recant his faith. In a communiqué published in Kayhan on 8 December 1981, the Ministry of Labour stated that dismissal for life from government service had been decreed by the Islamic Parliament as "the punishment for anyone who is a member of the misguided Bahá'í group".

It is clear to the Bahá'í International Community that the allegations contained in the report circulated by Iran in the General Assembly represent an attempt to conceal, and to divert international attention from, the fanatically religious motivation of the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, and to undermine the good reputation which the Bahá'í community enjoys throughout the world.

*The Bahá'í International Community emphatically refutes all the charges levelled against the Bahá'ís by the Iranian government and its spokesmen, most particularly the charges of political involvement and espionage, and strongly appeals for the establishment of an independent body to investigate the entire situation.*

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