

Iranian Intellectuals and the Bahá'ís

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Clothe not the truth with falsehood, and hide not the truth when ye know it. (Qur'an 2:42)

The Baha'i community of Iran came into being 160 years ago. For 160 years, the Baha'is of Iran have been harassed, wronged and persecuted. For 160 years, Iranian intellectuals have ignored the plight of Baha'is of that country. But no more.

In 2008, Iranian intellectuals discovered their voice to speak in defiance of tyranny and on behalf of human and civil rights of the Baha'is and to lament over the crimes perpetrated against this beleaguered minority community.

It is recognized that we are living through a major turning point in the emancipation of the Baha'i Faith in Iran. There is no longer a conspiracy of silence about the Faith, maintained through coercion against those who would publicly appreciate the nonviolence, inclusive principles, and spiritual ideals of the Baha'i community.

Harassment of Baha'is is pervasive and includes many incidents of all of the following:

- Arrests and detention, with imprisonment lasting for days, months, or years. In cases where the Baha'i is released, substantial bail is often required.
- Direct intimidation and questioning by authorities, sometimes with the use of high-intensity lights and physical mistreatment.
- Searches of homes and business, usually with Baha'i books and other items confiscated.
- School expulsions and harassment of schoolchildren.
- Prohibition on Baha'is attending universities.
- Court proceedings where Baha'is are accused of promoting propaganda against the government "for the benefit of the Bahaist sect."
- Monitoring of the bank accounts, movement, and activities of Baha'is, including official questioning of Baha'is requiring them to give information about their lives, actions, neighbors, etc.
- Denial or confiscation of business licenses.
- Denial of work opportunities in general.
- Denial of rightful inheritances to Baha'is.
- Physical assaults, and efforts to drive Baha'is out of towns and villages.
- Desecration and destruction of Baha'i cemeteries, and harassment over burial rights.
- Dissemination, including in official news media, of misinformation about Baha'is, and incitement of hatred against Baha'is.
- Evictions from places of business, including Baha'i doctors from their offices and clinics.
- Intimidation of Muslims who associate with Baha'is.
- Attempts by authorities to get Baha'is to spy on other Baha'is.
- Threatening phone calls and letters to Baha'is.
- Denial of pension benefits.
- Denial of access to publishing or copying facilities for Baha'i literature.
- Confiscation of property.

We are all Iranian Baha'is

By Ali Keshtgar

On August 15, 2008, the online journal Gooya News published the following analysis by the Iranian journalist, Ali Keshtgar. The original Persian text may be accessed at: <http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2008/08/075377.php> and translation posted on September 17, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/5>.

The criminal scheme of Baha'i-killing, of which the Hojjatieh Society was the standard-bearer and promulgator before the [1979] revolution – a scheme whose carriers came to power with the emergence of the Islamic Republic – is at its foundation a felonious thought intended to bring about religious cleansing through the murder of all Baha'is.

During the past 30 years under the Islamic Republic, our Baha'i countrymen have persistently been the subject of dual discrimination – threat and repression. Their only offense has been that they believe in the Baha'i teachings. In their own native land, they are barred from many occupations, nor are they allowed to openly worship in accordance with their religious percepts – and indeed the government has treated these Iranian brothers and sisters as criminals.

From the very beginning this perilous thought existed among some leaders of the Islamic Republic: that the Baha'is were mahduru'd-dam – meaning, that their blood could be shed with impunity. Indeed, the same leaders considered that the killing of Baha'is was a necessity and would win Divine Rewards. Until the present time this felonious thought, which in its essence encompasses the most abject criminal intentions and has such figures as Ali Khamenei as its prime designers and supporters, has resulted in the savage murder of many of our Baha'i countrymen.

Periodically during the past thirty years, in such towns as Shiraz, Kerman, Mashhad, Tehran, Karaj and other locations throughout the country, a number of our Baha'i fellow-citizens have been murdered by the most brutal means. In none of these heinous events, were the murderers – who were always agents and authorities of the security agencies of the Islamic Republic – prosecuted, and no governmental agency heeded the complaints of the family of those thus exterminated.

If there had been no barriers to this planned genocide, such as international laws or global reaction, then no doubt by now the leaders of the Islamic Republic would have fully implemented their atrocious scheme.

At different periods during the past 30 years, we have witnessed the mobilization of certain pressure groups associated with the [Islamic] regime for the implementation of this plan. We must, however, remind the leaders of the Islamic Republic that their plan is indeed the same fascist scheme which has led to racial and religious genocides, for which some instigators have been tried in international courts on the charge of “crimes against humanity.”

The policy of the leaders of Islamic Republic towards suppression of religious minorities in general, and of Baha'is in particular, has always been to advance their intentions [for genocide] through agents and officers of the Security and Basij agencies, so that they can claim that their crimes had been committed by people [not by the government] and had come about as a result of public religious biases.

However, during these three decades:

- Never has anyone been brought up on charges of murder, persecution or threat against the Baha'is.
- Never have the leaders of the Islamic Republic condemned these crimes.
- Unceasingly, the policy of discrimination and suppression of Baha'is has been followed.
- Great threats have been instantly leveled against every lawyer and human rights organization which has spoken in defense of the civil rights of Baha'is.

Because of the intense sensitivity of this regime towards the Baha'is in Iran, when it comes to defending the civil rights of Baha'is, human rights activists and organizations have either remained silent or have not engaged the issue to any notable measure. In truth, the intensity of the government's discrimination against the Baha'is has been to such an extent that human rights activists have also come to accept this discrimination and have routinely conducted themselves in accordance with the same discriminations.

In the course of recent waves of suppression of the Baha'is, Mrs. Shirin Ebadi [Iran's only Nobel Prize laureate] has agreed to defend the imprisoned Baha'is. After she announced her readiness to provide legal defense to these Baha'is, the official news organs of the Islamic Republic, including the newspaper that speaks for the Islamic Republic, claimed that this undertaking by Mrs. Ebadi is due to the fact that her daughter had accepted the Baha'i religion. It should be clear that the claims of official news organs of the Islamic Republic is to instill fear in Mrs. Ebadi and to discourage her and her colleagues from defending the imprisoned Baha'is.

Unfortunately, the reaction of Mrs. Ebadi to this allegation was as if she considered being a Baha'i or becoming a Baha'i a shameful act and equated this accusation against her daughter as a "curse." In a radio interview with the Persian segment of Radio France Internationale on the last Thursday, 17 Murdad [7 August 2008], three times Mrs. Ebadi referred to the allegations of the Islamic Republic against her family as a "curse." In fact, she could have dismissed these baseless accusations – which no one believes anyway – without insolence towards the Baha'is.

Considerable evidence proves that we have not come to view religious freedom and equity to such a degree that we would respect the religious beliefs of others to the same extent as our own beliefs. Until it remains so, governments can continue with their policy of discrimination and suppression of religious minorities.

In view of the government's antagonistic policy toward Baha'is, the protection of the civil rights of Baha'is and opposition to official or extralegal discriminations against this segment of Iranian society has gained a particular significance in the arena of human rights. The most effective way to break religious discrimination against the Baha'is is that all human rights activists and organizations should adopt the defense of complete religious rights and equality, and opposition to all forms of religious bias, as their foremost principle. Moreover, this message should not be limited to ad hoc measures of human rights defenders.

When the regime attacks the Baha'is, we must all write and say, "We are all Iranian Baha'is!"

The Baha'is and Higher Education in Iran

By Ahmad Batebi

Batebi (b. 1977) came to international notice through his appearance on the July 17, 1999, cover of The Economist magazine, holding up a shirt splattered with the blood of a fellow protester. This photo, which has been called "an icon for Iran's student reform movement", was taken during the Iranian student protests of July 1999 in Tehran. Following its publication, Batebi was arrested, tried in closed-door proceedings, found guilty of "creating street unrest", and sentenced to death. After seven years of torture and imprisonment, he managed to escape, and it is believed that he now lives in the United States. The following essay was first published on Tuesday, September 2, 2008, in Persian in the journal Rooz: http://www.roozonline.com/archives/2008/09/post_8980.php and a translation posted on September 17, 2008 at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/6>.

From the first hours of 27 July 2008, the results of the nationwide university entrance examination were available on the official website of the National Organization for Educational Assessment. However, after entering their personal data on the registration website, most of the Baha'i applicants were confronted with the strange system response, "incomplete file". At present there are no exact statistics on how many Baha'i applicants have been rejected on the base of "incomplete file"; in light of the imprisonment of the leaders of the Baha'i community in Iran, perhaps such statistics will never become available through official means.

Since university seats are limited in Iran, a nationwide examination is administered to identify the best candidates for higher education. This examination is typically given once a year and is known as the National Entrance Examination [*Kunkú*]. The National Organization for Educational Assessment and Evaluation is a division of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. This organization is responsible for administering nationwide tests which identify candidates for college entrance.

However, "incomplete file" is the most perplexing response to student applicants in place of an actual diploma. This is because if the file of a student is indeed missing some important piece of information such that that he is disqualified from receiving a diploma, then according to the regulations of the Organization for Assessment that student is disbarred from participation in the national examination, and under no circumstances would a permit card be issued for him to attend such an entrance exam.

Interestingly enough, alleging that the file is incomplete means that Baha'i applicants can no longer appeal to the country's judiciary for recourse or to outside sources, because under such conditions it is impossible to show that the file has actually been completed.

The same situation for the Baha'i students occurred last year as well, but unfortunately repeated and extensive appeals yielded no action and no investigation by the government, the parliament, the judiciary, or any of the oversight agencies. It is understood that the same pattern will be repeated again this year and that once more, a large contingent of the brightest students of Iran will be deprived of higher education – the most natural right of every citizen. Even if the Baha'i youth of Iran were allowed to participate and pass college entrance examinations, they would still not be immune from the menace of a vengeful ideological government. To illustrate this point, I draw the attention of the esteemed readers to a letter of suffering by Hesam Mithaqi – a student deprived of the right to education.

In 1385 Sh [2006] I participated in the nationwide college entrance examination and was accepted in the bachelor program for English translation in the Sana'i Institute of

Advanced Studies in Isfahan. Early in the first semester, our professor in the Islamic studies class inquired, “Do we have any religious minorities in the class?” Miss Reza’i [a Baha’i], a Christian student and I declared that we were among the religious minorities. I also added that I intended to minor in Islamic studies. The instructor then asked me to name my religion, but since I knew that mentioning the word “Baha’i” would not be prudent, I avoided a direct answer. However, the instructor insisted and I stated that I followed the Baha’i Faith. After that session, Miss Reza’i and I together went to the instructor and suggested that in view of the pervasive circumstances it would be best for him to avoid a discussion of the Baha’i Faith in the class and university, since it might result in complications for us, and even for him. He accepted and from that date no such discussion took place in our sessions. At the conclusion of the second semester and after we had received our transcripts, we were notified on 14/4/86 [5 July 2007] that back in Farvardin [March 2007] the university had received official instructions for our expulsion. In response, the school authorities had written to their superiors explaining their unwillingness to expel any student in the middle of a semester, and requesting a reconsideration of the original decision. However, they had been confronted with a hostile response. Consequently, they decided to send us along with a letter to the Organization for Assessment so they could determine our status. After we had gone to the aforesaid Organization and some time had passed, we were told to refer back to the university as their decision would be communicated to the school. However, we stated, “We must return to school with your decision.” We were then delivered into the custody of the Organization and told to refer to the Organization’s office in Tehran, on Karim-Khan Zand Avenue, for a response. Also, the reference number of a letter was given to us (86/4/18, m/1/270) and we were informed that the letter had already been sent to the Organization for Assessment’s office in Tehran.

When we visited the Organization’s office in Tehran, we met with Dr. Nurbakhsh. He said that he had worked diligently to secure the rights of the Baha’is and was laboring to secure an avenue for our university attendance. He also suggested that we should not approach various governmental offices as it would bear no fruit.

After visiting the above-mentioned office, we went to the Science Ministry and there learned that a letter sent by our university to that Ministry had gone missing! However, one of the officials indicated that the said letter was with Dr. Muslemi. When we approached Dr. Muslemi, he denied all knowledge and said that he had sent the file to the Organization for Assessment. At the same time, I wrote a letter to Isfahan’s representative to the Islamic Parliament, Dr. Kamran, although his secretary would not give me the letter’s reference number. I also wrote via The letters given to the students are numbered: 86/391/4, 86/390/4 and 86/390/4. email to many other members of the Parliament and the office of the President, all of which went unanswered. To this day, I continue visiting the offices of the Science Ministry, the Organization for Assessment, the Agency for Revolutionary Education, and offices of representatives of the Parliament and other governmental agencies. However, no logical response has been given to this date, and everyone pretends that they are uninvolved and refers me to other offices. Now that two semesters have passed since my dismissal from the university, I have not received an official letter of expulsion. In accordance with the regulations of the Science Ministry, if a student fails to attend two semesters his expulsion is issued automatically. Therefore, I am now considered an expelled student.

Also, I have tried to receive exemption from military service and – unbelievably! – they have me recorded as a student in the Sana’i Institute of Advanced Studies. Because of my exemption as a “student”, therefore they have refused to grant me a general exemption.

It is bizarre that Baha'i youth are barred from attending universities, but must enlist for military service.

Article 30 of the Islamic Republic's constitution requires the government to provide all citizens with free education up to secondary school, and to expand free higher education to the extent required by the country for attaining self-sufficiency.

However, after the Islamic Revolution we have persistently witnessed that nearly all Baha'i students have been expelled from Iran's institutions of higher learning because of their religion, and none were permitted to attend universities.

Moreover, starting four years ago, outwardly permission was granted for Baha'i students to enroll in universities. However, every year saw a large segment of these students prevented from enrolling in schools for various excuses, such

For the entire period of 1980-2004, no Baha'i was admitted to any institution of higher education in Iran. Since 2004, a handful of Baha'is have gained admittance. In order to educate its youth, the Baha'i community of Iran has formed its own university, where a worldwide network of instructors provides lectures through electronic and internet means. This university has now been forced to suspend its operations as well at the demand of authorities in Tehran.

As incompleteness of files, and those who were able to enroll were mostly expelled on the basis that they were Baha'is. Separate from these difficulties that the Baha'i youth of Iran have been confronting, this summer has witnessed many diverse incidents of persecutions visited upon the Baha'i communities in many cities of Iran.

Moreover, the leadership of the Baha'i community was seized [on May 14, 2008] and to this date remains in Evin prison. These seven Baha'is are: Mahvash Sabet; Fariba Kamalabadi; Afif Naeimi; Saeid Rezaie; Vahid Tizfahm; Jamaloddin Khanjani; and Behrouz Tavakkoli.

These individuals are incarcerated in section 209, administered by the Security and Intelligence Ministry. For the first time, on 20 June 2008 they were allowed a brief contact with their families; in more recent days they have been permitted a second brief contact with their loved ones. However, Behrouz Tavakkoli has been denied all communications with the outside world. According to reports, the period of their imprisonment has been renewed, and they continue to languish in solitary confinement – despite the fact that Jamaloddin Khanjani and Behrouz Tavakkoli suffer from various ailments, including digestive and skin conditions.

In the course of these events, an interesting development is the proclamation of Ayatollah Montazeri regarding the civil rights of the Baha'is of Iran. He, as one of the highest ranking clerics outside of government, openly proclaimed:

In the Name of God

With greetings,

The congregation of Baha'ism not having the heavenly book like those of Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians in the constitution [of the Islamic republic of Iran], are not considered to be among the religious minorities. However, since they are citizens of this country, they have the rights of citizens and the right to live in this country. Furthermore, they must benefit from Islamic compassion, which is stressed in Quran and by the religious authorities.

The civil rights mentioned above should inevitably include all provisions enunciated in the constitution of the Islamic Republic. In this regard, Article 20 of that document proclaims:

All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria.

And Articles 22, 23, 28, and 30, respectively, state:

- Article 22: The dignity, life, property, rights, residence, and occupation of the individual are inviolate, except in cases sanctioned by law.
- Article 23: The investigation of an individual's beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.
- Article 28: (1) Everyone has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, if it is not contrary to Islam and the public interests, and does not infringe the rights of others. (2) The government has the duty, with due consideration of the need of society for different kinds of work, to provide every citizen with the opportunity to work, and to create equal conditions for obtaining it.
- Article 30: The government must provide all citizens with free education up to secondary school, and must expand free higher education to the extent required by the country for attaining self-sufficiency.

This decree was issued on 14 May 2008. The Persian original can be found at:

<http://www.bahai-egypt.org/2008/05/ayatollah-montazeri-decrees-bahais.html>.

Without doubt, the problem of the Islamic regime with the Baha'i Faith is based in ideology. However, the question is: Why is the Shiite sect ruling over the people of Iran, despite the fact that the Baha'i Faith believes and respects the foundation of all other religions, especially Islam, is solely attacking the Baha'is when other religious minorities, such as the Christians, the Jews or the Zoroastrians are not under similar pressure? From the perspective of this writer, the Shiite persecution has two reasons:

- The appearance of this religion after Islam, as the last divine religion, which according to their belief, is sent by Almighty God for the salvation of the world of humanity.
- The close proximity of certain teachings of the Baha'i Faith to key beliefs of the governmental authorities, such as the phenomenon of the Lord of the Age, or the doctrine of Mahdaviyat, or eschatological views.

The authorities firmly believe that these issues are the foremost foundation of the divine legitimacy of the Islamic regime, while simultaneously they are also the largest differences between this sect (namely, the Shiites) and all other sects of Islam. The Baha'is believe that the Qa'im of the House of Muhammad was manifested in 1844 and has left behind a copious body of writings. Further, the Qa'im prophesized the imminent appearance of another Person and that Person is Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith. Also, the Baha'is believe that the teachings and exhortations of the Baha'i Faith are consistent with the needs of the present age of humanity, the current state of maturity and development of the world, and the requirements of the people over the course of the next several centuries, and that it is this religion that will prepare mankind for the next stage of its global civilization.

This belief of Baha'is from the perspective of Shi'i law is erroneous. This belief is also the principle foundation for the pressure on the followers of the Islam teaches that at the end of time, the Promised Mahdi will appear and will right all wrongs. The Baha'is believe that this promise was fulfilled in the Person of Baha'u'llah, the Founder of their religion. Qa'im means the One Who will arise. For the Muslims He represents the Promised One, and for the Shi'is He also represents the Twelfth Imam, Who went into hiding in 873 AD, and is expected to reappear at the "end of time" to bring justice and equity to the world.

Baha'i Faith, and has caused the basic human rights and civil liberties of the vast majority of our Baha'i fellow-citizens, despite being native Iranians, to be denied to this day. In accordance with a certain traditional reading of Shi'i law, in a society in which a majority are Muslim, the people of the Book are not permitted to proselytize their religion. Therefore, in accordance with the same understanding, in such a society discussion of Baha'i beliefs is also forbidden. However, it is imperative to point out that the phenomena of understanding and discernment is personal, and is the sole prerogative of the individual. One person cannot think for another person.

Similarly, every belief is personal – and religious convictions are in like manner personal and not societal. Consequently, to attain to faith is a matter of personal conviction – one cannot order a society to accept or reject certain beliefs. Nor can a society be instructed through a public declaration or announcement to renew or change the beliefs of a people. Therefore, it should be evident that when it comes to matters of belief and religious persuasion, the views of a certain leader or a school of thought or even government cannot be overrule the will of individuals in that society.

Belief and convictions to any religion is a matter of faith and personal understanding. Therefore, it is illogical to expect that such an acceptance could be left to the judgment of others. It is absurd to think that some other person can act as the agent of belief of all others, and on behalf of other people he would be charged to study, to ponder, to doubt, to question, to meditate, to trust in God and to ask for His confirmations and eventually to come to believe. When it comes to gaining faith, one cannot accept a deputy or surrogate.

To recognize and come to faith requires the most personal and deepest exercise of one's conscience. Each of us, in our own unique way, arrives at this recognition and acceptance which entails the innermost aspects of our spiritual and psychological commitment. How can such a thing be delegated to someone else?

From another direction this question can be raised: Are individual Muslims exempt from the duty to study, contemplate and decide on the validity or the falsehood of claims to Qa'imiyat? Or has God, His traditions, divine teachings and Islamic law left this matter exclusively for the inquiry of religious leaders and the jurists of the age?

In accordance with Shi'i jurisprudence, is every Muslim not duty bound to first consider the claim of every claimant with his own eyes, mind and discernment, and to look for the right signs and evidences, and only afterwards, in case it is needed, to consult with ecclesiastics and ask for their views? Is each and every Muslim not obligated to carefully consider, read and assess with his own mind the writings of such claimants to Qa'imiyat, and only then, if necessary, to consult with others, perhaps even ranking clerics?

Based on what principle or judgment should Muslims make their beliefs, or disbeliefs, the same, and dependent on the views of religious clerics and mullahs? Every Muslim has the spiritual and religious duty to fully investigate the truth or the falsehood of the claim to Qa'imiyat by himself. The right to come to a conclusion regarding the genuineness or fabrication of a claim to the Qa'imiyat by its various claimants belongs to all people.

Divine tradition has always been that the Messengers of God have addressed each and every person directly, and not merely the religious clerics of the age (such as the absurd claim of the Islamic Republic to have exclusive contact with the Lord of the Age). Therefore, the acceptance or rejection of the claim to Qa'imiyat is a matter for all people and not the sole domain of the 'ulama. The divine message is for all and not just for a few. Whether to accept or reject the Baha'i Faith and all its exhortations and teachings, like any other spiritual doctrine, requires deep contemplation, study and research.

For what reason then is the Islamic Republic, having thorough command over all financial and media resources of the nation, and maintaining belief and insistence on its own divine and absolutely unquestioned mandate and ideology (which is a belief in Islam through the Rule of the Religious Jurists) and its persistent injection of this belief into all elements of the nation, so afraid of any contact between the people and not only the Baha'is but every religious minority group?

Is it not the case that the government believes that Islam (its version of the Rule of the Religious Jurists) is the most complete, unadulterated and precious religious thought, and no other religion enshrines the same truth and validity? Therefore, why are the authorities so afraid of the followers of other religions, particularly the Baha'is?

Is it not true that a Muslim should be able to ask his questions from others in complete liberty, and that others are also enjoined to have the freedom to share and expound without any restriction or constraint their beliefs and religious convictions? Given this fact, then the Baha'is in all Islamic societies must be given complete and unhindered freedom of expression.

If I were a Shiite

By Reza Fani-Yazdi

Reza Fani-Yazdi is an Iranian-American human rights activist and freelance writer who has published extensively on the plight of Iranians under the current regime. On August 8, 2008, he published the following article in the online Persian journal Iran-Emrooz: <http://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/politic/more/16525/>, and translated on September 17, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/7>.

If I were a Shiite, if I were a high-ranking Shiite cleric, if I were sitting in the place of the object of emulation of the Shiites, then at the same time that I would love the Shiite creed, I would also think about humanity. My heart would ache over all the atrocities that have been done to people – Shiite or otherwise. And when I saw records of the barbaric tortures that have been carried out in the prisons of the Islamic Republic, tears would pour from my eyes.

At the same time, if I had any courage and had the rank of a religious cleric, if the craving for political power and the lust for the trappings of leadership had not blinded my eyes and turned my heart into a stone, I would do the same thing that Ayatollah Montazeri did in the 1980s, through his peerless bravery and without concern for the implications of his action on his own person.

When he acted, Ayatollah Montazeri was not a member of the Mujahedin,[1] nor was he a supporter of any of the Marxist or leftist groups. He was one of the architects of the Islamic regime; he occupied the seat of the deputy Supreme Leader and the “hope of people and the Imam”. But when he witnessed the slaughter carried out by the regime and the inhumane tortures in the nation’s prisons and when he heard about the carnage taking place within the prison walls, then not only did his heart ache and his eyes weep, but he also loosened his tongue to strongly protest and oppose such tyranny.

He sacrificed his entire political position and future leadership in defense of human virtues. He defended the Mujahidin, who had cravenly assassinated his own son, as well as the communists and Marxists whom he had no reason to like and indeed may not have had any sympathies for at all. He condemned the regime’s numerous massacres and the medieval tortures of that murderous decade. In carrying out his historic duty, in the strongest voice possible, he denounced the serial massacres of prisoners throughout the country which were taking place on the instructions of the powerful ruler of that time, Ayatollah Khomeini, and he deplored them as crimes against humanity – thereby parting company with the cruel and murderous leadership.

Ayatollah Montazeri denounced Khomeini’s leadership at a time when no one else would dare complain about the vicious and murderous deeds of the “Imam”. Many of those who today array themselves in opposition to the government, or who appear in the cloak of reform and who pretend that from birth they have been defenders of democracy and human rights – not only at that time – when Montazeri spoke courageously in denunciation of Khomeini, they did not utter a word against any of the criminal deeds of the regime and its leader – indeed many of them closely collaborated with the regime in implementing those tyrannical and barbaric policies. Not only did they refuse to provide any support whatsoever to Ayatollah Montazeri, but in fact they arose in opposition to him, or with their calculated silence they aligned themselves with the murderers and thereby helped to further isolate and marginalize Montazeri.

The latest effort of Ayatollah Montazeri in defending the civil rights of the Baha'is is yet more evidence of his historic bravery.

The significance of his remarkable defense of the Baha'i community and the civil rights of the Baha'is is underscored even more when, even after his declaration, we still find only a handful of religious intellectuals who concur in supporting the civil rights of the Baha'is. And the one or two who have found the courage to speak in support of the civil rights of the Baha'i community have gained this courage after the brave pronouncement of Ayatollah Montazeri – as otherwise, most likely they would have continued with their deafening silence on this vital issue.

The defense by Ayatollah Montazeri of the Baha'i community of Iran speaks of his deep commitment to human rights.

Whether as a Shiite cleric or from the position of a devoted Shiite, it is most evident that Ayatollah Montazeri has no sympathies towards the Baha'i community or the followers of that religion. In fact, from his religious perspective and jurisprudential convictions, most likely he considers the Baha'i Faith to be a wayward sect and an opponent and enemy of the Shiite creed.

Nevertheless, he has defended the civil rights of the Baha'is of Iran, and has signified that they possess all the rights associated with such citizenship.

The historic import of this verdict is in the fact that during the past 150 years, not a single religious authority has shown the same courage in defending the rights of the Baha'is – particularly at a time when the government in the name of "Islam" has devoted itself to the suppression of the followers of this religion.

Ayatollah Montazeri's defense is a new chapter in the acceptance of the civil rights of the Baha'is, a right recognized by one of the highest religious authorities among Shiite centers. I don't know whether if I had been a high ranking cleric, or if I had been the source of emulation of the Shiites, or if I had been the deputy supreme leader of the nation, I would have had the courage, the humanity and the deep conviction in human virtues and human rights which prompted Ayatollah Montazeri to defend his imprisoned opponents. I don't know if I could have acted as nobly as he has.

As far as I recall, many leaders of political groups, many even among the rank and file, have become very happy about the suppression of their opponents at the hands of the Islamic regime. They have never complained when the principals of various parties and political groups were tortured in the most barbaric manner and dragged before sham television shows to confess to their "guilt".

Husayn-Ali Montazeri is among those rare figures in the contemporary history of Iran who has defended his adversaries, even has defended those who assassinated his own child. His defense of the Baha'is and their entitlement to live and enjoy civil rights is yet another demonstration of his deep belief and his understanding of the rights of all people, including those with whom he disagrees.

If I Were a Muslim Lawyer

During all these years, as a courageous lawyer, Mrs. Shirin Ebadi has consented to defend those who have often been rejected as clients by other lawyers. She has time and again demonstrated this audacity.

Agreeing to defend the civil rights of the imprisoned Baha'is is her latest courageous act.

However, because she decided to defend the imprisoned Baha'is, the Security authorities have recently attempted, through the nation's official reporting agency, IRNA, to

elevate the “cost” to her to the level of a charge of apostasy, in a filthy and malicious plot. In this official scheme, IRNA has announced that her daughter has become a Baha’i and has then proceeded to claim that Mrs. Ebadi herself has also become a Baha’i, and that it is her change of religion from Shiism to the Baha’i Faith which has prompted her to defend the civil rights of the Baha’is.

To neutralize this malicious campaign against her, Mrs. Ebadi announced in a press conference that she was a Shiite and proud of her adherence to that religion, but that she also would continue to defend the civil rights of the Baha’is.

It appears that some friends have been annoyed that she has said that she is a Shiite and is proud of being a Shiite.

What would I do in this situation if I were a lawyer and a Muslim Shiite and at the same had enough courage and professional ethics, and if I was committed to defending the human rights of other citizens? Would I defend the civil rights of the followers of the Baha’i Faith?

Would I be willing, as a lawyer, to defend those who have been incarcerated on the grounds of being Baha’is, particularly in a country in which Baha’is enjoy no rights whatsoever?

Would I defend Baha’is, when as their lawyer I stand accused by the official news organ of the nation – which is the voice of organized crime and of the dreaded security apparatus of Iran – of the charge of apostasy, and have been threatened with death?

And if I had the courage to defend the Baha’is, would I remain silent in the face of an evidently false charge of apostasy by the security and intelligence agencies of the nation, or would I express my pride at being a Muslim who is willing to defend the civil rights of the Baha’is?

I am not sure how many among us, if we lived in Iran, and were a Shiite (and actually believed in our religion!), and were a lawyer, and if our life was constantly threatened by both the official authorities and by their hired thugs, would continue like Mrs. Ebadi to defend the Baha’is. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Shiite lawyers in Iran, and very few of them would contemplate taking on such a case.

When Shirin Ebadi says she is a Shiite, she is not lying. She is a Shiite, in the same way that Ayatollah Montazeri is a Shiite. She has now agreed to defend the Baha’is and their leaders in the courts of the Islamic Republic after three decades in which the silenced Baha’is have been brutally suppressed, even though there are thousands of other lawyers and legal scholars in Iran.

Why shouldn’t she express her pride at being a Shiite at the same time that she has arisen to defend the rights of the Baha’is? Should the situation be as the publishers of the Kayhan Newspaper insist – namely, that if she wants to defend the Baha’is then she must abandon her Shiite faith? Is it written somewhere that only the Baha’is are allowed to defend the Baha’is?

I can be a Jew and be proud that I’m a Jew. I can be a Christian and be proud that I’m a Christian. I can be a Shiite and be proud that I’m a Shiite. I can be a Baha’i and be proud that I’m a Baha’i. I can have no religion and be proud that I’m irreligious. But at the same time that I am proud of my convictions, if I stood up to defend the rights of others, then I could also be proud of my humanity.

A New Year and a New Trick

By Human Rights Activities of Iran

Human Rights Activists of Iran filed the following report (No. 87-1032) on Wednesday, September 17, 2008, at http://www.brairan.com/Archive_87/1055.html and appeared in English on at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/10>.

After announcing the results of the national college entrance examination in 2008, many of the Baha'i applicants noticed that instead of their grades, the notation "incomplete file" was listed against their names. However, like the previous years, a few Baha'i students were missed by the system and were able to receive their grades and enroll [in universities] in their chosen major.

Since the academic years 2006 and 2007, a few Baha'i students continue to be enrolled in universities and are receiving education. Most of those that entered college during these years though have been expelled and their efforts to be reinstated remain fruitless to this day.

Similarly this year, after a limited number of Baha'i applicants received their grades, it was expected that at least a few of them would be able to enter universities.

However, this year the authorities thought of a new scheme to prevent the Baha'is from entering institutions of higher education. That is, they made the university registration only available through Internet and the form for registration was given a box for religion, which offered five choices: Shiite, Sunni, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Jewish. If the student did not select one of these options, the computer system did not allow him to complete the registration process.

However, this scheme is against clauses 14, 3 and 9 of Article 3 of the Constitution and also contradicts Articles 19, 14, 20 and 30 of the same Constitution. For instance, Article 20 of the Constitution states:

All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria.

However, under their new scheme, the phrase, "All citizens of the country, both men and women" means only those that believe in one of the five religions mentioned on the university registration forms; otherwise the rest have no right to education.

Under the principles and teachings of the Baha'i Faith, dissimulation of one's belief is not permitted. Therefore, to ask the Baha'is to make such a selection compels them to contemplate an act that stands contrary to their religious provisions and convictions.

In the years past, since the registration form for universities was on paper and required to be completed by hand, the Baha'i students could leave blank the box for religion or put a line through it and thereby secure a seat in their chosen educational institution – though of course at later stages they would be expelled anyway.

However, this year, in a more iniquitous and unfair way, a large number of the nation's talents will remain behind the closed doors of universities and like previous years, no agency, organization or ministry would be willing to explain and respond this illegal and appalling development.

I am a Baha'i too!

By Khosro Shemiranie

Shemiranie was born in Iran, studied in Germany and lives in Canada. He is a freelance writer specializing in analytical articles on the socio-political issues of Iran and violations of human rights. The following is a translation of his recent article published in Shabrgon online journal, vol. 15, No. 995, Friday, September 12, 2008, available at: <http://www.shabrgon.com/index.php?news=1959>. A translation was posted on September 17, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/11>.

I want to cry out: "I am a Baha'i! For as long as belief in the Baha'i Faith is viewed as a crime, consider me a Baha'i too! For that, you can end my meager pension, you can stop me from going to university, and you can abuse me in grade school and high school! You can seize me, bind me, imprison me, torture me, separate me from my family, burn my house, confiscate my tools through your religious laws, prevent me from earning bread for my children, execute me and at the end, expel me from Iran – my sacred land!"

It is more than 150 years that, leaning on the Shiite clerical establishment, the governmental apparatus of Iran has been determined to suppress the Baha'is of that land. At times these suppressions have been so extremely intense that border on criminal insanity and at other times they have been more subtle and insidious – but always, always they have been present.

The fact that rulers, desiring to maintain their power, and religious priests, fearing the loss of their demagogical influence, have ordered and issued verdicts to suppress [the religious minorities] perhaps is not surprising. Most of the prominent men of history have sacrificed humanity for the sake of more power. And to protect their materialistic domain and riches, with utmost deviousness, the ecclesiastics bereft of spirituality have always and in all parts of the world, turned to corruption and the killings of the innocents. Unfortunately this historical trend is not surprising either.

What causes astonishment is the silence of the society – a society which at times actively collaborates with these barbaric deeds.

It is no secret that what has befallen the followers of the Baha'i Faith in Iran has often come about through our own hands. In response to every authority that issued an order or every akhund that produced a religious verdict, tens, hundreds, nay, thousands, of us proceeded to perpetrate harm upon the Baha'is and on occasions reddened our hands with their blood. But, why?

The collaboration of various sectors of society with the centers of power and the religious authorities can be attributed to ignorance, and one could say that every society has its share of ignorant individuals, who are used and exploited by influential and powerful elements or its ecclesiastic orders. But what about the group that calls itself progressive, intelligent, on the intellectual vanguard, supporter of the people, and such names, and its claim to moral authority has filled every ear?

Should we close our eyes to the truth that almost every political organization, whether on the left or the right, religious or secular, nationalistic or otherwise, in the most self-serving way have colluded in this suppression? Was not providing the theoretical justification for this suppression [of the Baha'is] the best support of the oppressors?

One of the most widespread notions for justifying suppression of the Baha'is was: "The Baha'i creed is not a religion, but a political organization in service of imperialism."

Did we ever ask: Based on what evidence, what document, do we formulate such an absurd claim?

The Tudeh Party of Iran was one of the most prominent promoters of the above notion, though it was never able to produce a single document in support of its claim. However, the manufacturing of this undocumented theory prompted the silence – and at times the supportive silence of the intellectuals – over the suppression of the Baha’is after the Islamic Revolution. The painful truth is that such a theory not only gained currency among the supporters of the [Tudeh] Party, but it also received widespread acceptance among the groups opposing the Tudeh.

The point of referring to these realities is not to analyze the role of this Party or the part of Iranian intellectuals in consenting to the suppression of the Baha’is. Most evidently, this is an issue that deserves much greater exploration, requiring careful scientific research and presentation of various documents and testimonials – a task which to the present has received woefully little attention.

The purpose of this essay and raising the points above is to say: Now that we have begun to understand the concept of human rights, then even if we thought “the Baha’is are a political organization in service of imperialism”, we have no right to condemn them without proof and substantiated documentation.

We know today that the mass condemnation of all Baha’is – like mass condemnation of any other strata of the society – is an evident neglect of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is this Universal Declaration which we use to denounce the execution of the underage, affirm unlawful any interference with free assemblage or association, and uphold that repression of students and women is barbaric and illegal.

If we truly are defenders of the right of all humans, now is the time to raise our voice in unison and cry aloud: “For as long as the followers of the Baha’i Faith are suppressed and imprisoned for their religion and convictions, we are all Baha’is!”

Despite the evident threats to her, Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, in a courageous deed, has accepted to defend the Baha’i prisoners in Iran. She, however, is under considerable pressure and, in order to be able to continue to discharge this task, she was forced to affirm that she and her daughter are not members of the Baha’i Faith.

If all of us, or at least a considerable number of us, who claim to be promoters of human rights, were to join forces, perhaps Shirin Ebadi – this brilliant legal defender of peace and human rights in Iran – could raise her head high and tell Kayhan and all those inconsequential, malicious people behind Kayhan, who are more evil and vile than Satan, that: It is none of your business what religion I or my children adhere to!

We must praise the courageous act of Shirin Ebadi and hasten to support her and all defenders of human rights in Iran.

And until such time that mere following of the Baha’i Faith in Iran is the source of discrimination and punishment, I, Khosro Shemirani, am a Baha’i too!

Nabil's Narrative: What History has Forgotten

By Dr. Soheila Vahdati

Dr. Vahdati is an Iranian-American human rights activist and freelance writer who has published extensively on the effects of the death penalty, women's rights and gender issues in Iranian journals. Some of her learned articles are available at: <http://soheila.com/Edam/indexEdam.htm>. On September 4, 2008, Dr. Vahdati published the following article in the online Persian journal Iran-Emrooz: <http://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/bright/print/16613/>, which appeared in translation on September 18, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/13>.

The narrative of Nabil Zarandi, also known as *The Dawn-Breakers*, is an account of many historical episodes which took place in our nation [Iran] some 150 years ago, including the suppression of the *degar-andishan*¹ – though at that time this phrase was not used to describe them. A survey of the book's contents, absence of a readily available publisher, and its scarcity for individuals like me, all demonstrate that this book has been obscured from public view, and underscores the severance of our historical memories from the events portrayed in the book.

Our discussion, though, is not centered on the historical details narrated in the book – the claim of Siyyid Ali-Muhammad the Bab, the rise of the Babis and their propensity for militancy, the role of Tahirih Quratu'l-'Ayn or other women in this movement and the eventual suppression and bloody massacre of its followers. The point of our concern is the obscurity of the events, and indeed how all these occurrences have been forgotten.

Clearly, Nabil Zarandi's account is written from an avid religious perspective, and as such it should not surprise anyone if devoted Muslims have ignored it. However, one wonders why has this book escaped the notice of secular Iranians and the intellectuals on the left?

It must be recognized that the Babis, and after them, the Baha'is and the Azalis – whoever they were and whatever they claimed or aimed – that they were an integral segment of our society and a part of our history. That is, it was a stratum of our society that gave rise to this movement. The "Why" and the "How" of this issue are questions that must be explored by historians and researchers. However, the need for answers to these questions, and the need for discovering our own historical identity, is a matter that pertains to all of us Iranians.

In the midst of all this, the role of *degar-andishan* [heterodox thinkers], particularly the activists on the left, in highlighting and exploring these questions, should be more evident than other segments of the society, since they are farther away from religious prejudices and closer to the essence of this aspect of our history.

At this time when we are thinking of building a memorial for the mass killings of 1988, it is also timely to ask ourselves: Why is it that in the past we never thought about raising a memorial for the Babis and Baha'is of Tehran who died through public execution, often at the hand of the masses and by the most barbaric and gruesome means?

My purpose at this juncture is to raise this question: What happened that we closed our eyes to the reality of the public mass killings of the previous century (the 19th century) which took place on the foundation of Othering of fellow Iranians?

Consider what Nabil has written:

The fourteen disciples of the Bab, who had been captured, remained incarcerated in the house of Mahmud Khan Kalantar ... Tahirih was also confined on the upper floor of that same house. Every kind of ill treatment was inflicted upon them. Their persecutors sought, by every device, to induce them to supply the information they required, but failed to obtain a satisfactory answer. ... Convinced of their powerlessness to bend their will, they referred the matter to Mahmud Khan, who, in his turn, submitted their case to the Amir-Nizam, Mirza Taqi Khan, the Grand Vazir of Nasiri'd-Din Shah. ... Mirza Taqi Khan immediately issued a peremptory order threatening with execution whoever among these fourteen prisoners was unwilling to recant his faith. Seven were compelled to yield to the pressure that was brought to bear upon them, and were immediately released. The remaining seven constitute the Seven Martyrs of Tihran.

Nabil then goes on to offer a description of the execution of these seven individuals before a congregation of people, which clearly expresses their firmness in their convictions to the last breath.

In other parts of the book, Nabil reports in detail the suppression of the followers of the Bab and the persecutions visited upon their families.

Identifying suspicious individuals through those already seized and mass arrests – much the same as happened during the first decade of the Islamic Revolution – also occurred at the height of Baha'i persecutions:

Men, women, and children in the capital trembled at the ruthlessness with which the enemy pursued their victims. A youth named Abbas, a former servant of Haji Sulayman Khan, and fully informed, owing to the wide circle of friends which his master cultivated, of the names, the number, and the dwelling places of the Bab's disciples, was employed by the enemy as an instrument ready to hand for the prosecution of its designs. ... He was taken through the streets of Tehran and directed to point out everyone he recognized as being a follower of the Bab. A number of people whom he had never met or known were in this manner delivered into the hands of the Hajibu'd-Dawlih's assistants – people who had never had any connection with the Bab and His Cause. These were able to recover their freedom only after having paid a heavy bribe to those who had captured them. Such was the greed of the Hajibu'd-Dawlih's attendants that they specially requested Abbas to salute as a sign of betrayal every person whom he thought would be willing and able to pay large sums for his deliverance. They would even force him to betray such persons, threatening that his refusal would be fraught with grave danger to his own life.

It appears that the history of *degar-andishan*, at least from the period that Nabil has narrated, is one that has been consigned to be forgotten. Nabil's account is a part of history that dominant suppressors have managed, with considerable success, to remove from our collective memory. If we had known about this history, perchance a few decades ago we would have thought of building a memorial for those who suffered execution merely on the grounds of their religious belief. And if we had raised such a monument, perhaps it would

have then served as a moral barrier to such waves of barbaric brutality as have occurred ever since.

However, it is a source of joy that some of our historians are undertaking a thorough reevaluation of that period (the 19th century Babi movement). Nonetheless, those of us that are apprehensive of the loss of our collective memory and worry that our present generation's history will be forgotten as well, must look back on the past with much greater care and humanity – and greater use of the scholarly tools of history – and fight against forgetting all those “Other” martyrs of the past. The time has come when through careful reflection such questions should be asked: How does historical forgetfulness occur and through what mechanism have we been separated from our recollection of history?

On the Side: A Point with our Baha'i Friends

Before all else, as an Iranian, I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation for the precious historical treasure house that the Baha'i community has preserved for our nation. Under the most difficult circumstances of oppression and suffocation, the followers of the Baha'i Faith have labored to safeguard the writings of their religion and documented history of this land, and have ensured that these records have been shielded from the destruction of blind prejudice.

The time has come for all of us to exert efforts to widely disseminate these writings. Even though up until the present the preservation of these documents has been due to the labors and efforts of the Baha'i community, the truth is that these historical records belong to all humanity and every member of society has the right to have access to them. Fortunately, by now a number of Baha'i libraries are available on the worldwide net, which provide access to many of the Baha'i sources, including Baha'i Reference Library and the vast collection of H-Bahai, which are most treasured. However, printed books still remain the easiest way to read.

This copy of the Nabil's narrative, which I received through the kindness of a Baha'i friend, was published by the Baha'i Publishing Trust of Iran for the third time. This book, however, has not been printed by a publisher outside of Iran, and is not available to the general public. Necessary corrections have not taken place in the text, and proper annotations have not been made to its content. Nor is it evident that experts in the field of history have critiqued, evaluated and correlated it with other historical accounts, or closely scrutinized its details.

Nabil's narrative was first translated from Persian into English, then from English into Arabic and finally from Arabic into Persian by Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari. According to Dr. Abbas Amanat in his introduction to the second printing of *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran 1844-1850*, the original manuscript of this book in Persian is kept at the Baha'i World Centre. However, as a researcher, after three decades, Dr. Amanat has not been given access to this text on the grounds that a room is not available for researchers at that Centre.

At this historical juncture, all of us Iranians are with one another. We all have the right to know, and we all bear the responsibility to answer the right of others to know. We must take each other's hands and trust one another, so that we may preserve our collective memory and rescue from the clutches of oblivion these heinous historical events and the identities of those who suffered as result of these crimes.

This is the only sure way that will prevent such atrocities from being committed again in the future.

Redeem a Shameful History by Defending our Baha'i Countrymen!

By Behrouz Setoodeh

Setoodeh is a prominent political activist and often writes informed political essays for Iranglobal website. This article was posted at http://www.jamali.info/minorities/?page=170508_A1 and extracts from it were translated and posted on September 23, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/20>.

One of the ill effects of the coming to power of Ahmadinejad's apocalyptic gang has been increased pressure and efforts to discriminate against the Baha'i community of Iran. Among the news received from Iran during recent months has been details of the destruction of Baha'i homes in Abadeh by the Hezbollah of that city, as well as threats against their lives and the arrest of Baha'is in Shiraz. These reports caused profound alarm among all Iranians outside of Iran and provoked the deep indignation of human rights groups throughout the world. The news services further report that in order to continually increase pressure on all religious minorities in Iran, particularly our much-wronged Baha'i citizens, seven (7) Baha'is leaders were arrested by the government through the hands of its nefarious Mehdist agents.

It can be said with complete confidence that after the Revolution of 1979, the Baha'i community, among all religious minorities of that country, suffered most at the hands of the Islamic regime. By now, hundreds and hundreds of Baha'is have been falsely charged as spies or apostates by corrupt and criminal mullahs, and have been incarcerated, tortured or hanged.

Indeed, the enmity of criminal akhunds toward Baha'is, who are the religious descendants of the reformist movement of the Babis, has deep historical roots. During the Qajar era, the Babi movement – which aimed at reforming Islam, eliminating cruel and medieval religious laws, removing discrimination against women, land reform, abolition of priestly pulpits and the mullahs' authority, and many other reforms – was eagerly welcomed by the oppressed Iranian society of that time. The Babi movement challenged the authority of both the ruling class and the religious ranks, and confronted them with a social and popular revolt.

Eventually, through the religious rulings of depraved mullahs, Nasiri'd-Din Shah issued orders for the mass killing of the Babis, which resulted in thousands of them and their families, young and old, being massacred, thereby adding another chapter to the crimes committed by the criminal mullahs in this land cursed by their presence. ...

After the barbaric massacres of the Babis during the Qajar period, some of the Babis were able to rescue themselves from the bloodbath and migrated to other locations. Among them were groups of Baha'is who settled in Palestine, which at that time was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. [Baha'u'llah and his family were exiled from Iran against their will and eventually were sent to the penal colony of Akka by the Ottoman Sultan in the hope that they would perish there. Translator.]

Later on, after the defeat and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and its replacement with British colonialism in Palestine, the Baha'is residing there were allowed to practice their religion freely and to establish their center in that region. This very fact once again provoked the mullahs against the Baha'is, and on every occasion and every time they ascended pulpits, they incited the ill-informed masses and presented the Baha'is as "servants and agents of British imperialism".

In 1948, after the formation of the state of Israel, the deceitful and criminal mullahs added a new charge to their former accusations that the Baha'is were "servants and agents of the British" by claiming that they were "servants and agents of Zionism" as well.

When the mullahs came to power [in 1979] in Iran and established their reign through the Islamic regime, in addition to the previous two charges against our Baha'i countrymen a third one was now added by the imposter and hypocritical mullahs: they are purported to be "servants and agents of global imperialism and worldwide Zionism".

It should be noted that the central core of the Islamic Revolution was formed from Islamic groups and organizations which during the Pahlavi regime, under the umbrella of the Shah's promotion of modernism, even at that time were engaged in suppressing the Baha'is of Iran. After the 1979 Revolution, these same organizations rewrote their dark and sinister history of abusing the Baha'is of Iran as a history of combating the Shah's regime in order to bring about a free and independent Iran.

The most famous of these anti-Baha'i Islamic groups was known as the Hojjatieh Society (which presently is active under different names), in which mullahs like Mesbah-Yazdi (the spiritual guide and support of Ahmadinejad), Jannati, Khazali, Makarem-Shirazi, and dozens of other well-known mullahs operated. After the 1979 Revolution they came out of their dark medieval caves and climbed onto the shoulders of the deprived and hardworking people of Iran.

The Baha'is of Iran were among the first religious and social groups of our nation that became targets of unrestrained and fanatical attacks from reactionary and mindless orthodoxy even before the mullahs had seized absolute power and were still protesting the Shah's regime. And when the government of the Islamic Republic was formed [in 1979], the Baha'is of Iran were the first group for whom hanging gallows were erected.

What great shame there is upon all political parties and activists in Iran, large or small, that when the tale of "combating imperialism" was woven by the ruling authorities, we closed our eyes to all the killings, atrocities and violence inflicted upon our Baha'i countrymen – a carnage that unfolded before our own eyes and in the full view of history. For this failure, we owe a profound apology to this group of our fellow-citizens – an apology which has long been neglected and remains unspoken to this day.

While the past is gone, we can still rectify these past mistakes by now defending the Baha'i leaders of Iran, who some time ago were seized by the clutches of Islamic fascists and are presently under the weight of torture and imprisonment – and through this defense to some degree redeem a shameful history. ...

We must recognize that when the Islamic Republic arrests en masse all the Baha'i leaders, an ominous plan against this group of our countrymen is certainly taking place. This plan must and can be defeated.

If all the Iranians who care for human rights, liberty and social justice were to join hands in defending our fellow-citizens who are Baha'i, most assuredly we would be able to repel this ugly ghoul and bloodthirsty Islamic regime.

Do not forget that the fascists of the Islamic Republic can far more easily achieve their criminal and barbaric objectives when people are silent or remain indifferent, or the world looks the other way. ...

Montazeri's Admirable Defense of our Baha'i countrymen

By Behrouz Setoodeh

Setoodeh's essay in Persian was published at <http://sokhansara.com/HTML/bahai.htm> and a translation appeared on September 30, 2008, at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/21>. Mr. Setoodeh is a prominent political and human rights activist.

Unlike Khomeini and Khamenei and other criminal mullahs in Iran, Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri has not acquired his religious standing through deceit and political conniving. Throughout his life, he has demonstrated that, unlike other mullahs whose eyes are blinded by power and wealth, he considers compassion and human honor as high virtues. In a historic and courageous verdict, he has announced that “the Baha’is of Iran are entitled to civil and human rights.”

In the days to come this verdict and its public proclamation will undoubtedly provoke and fuel the wrath of the apocalyptic regime of Sayyid Ali Khamenei and Ahmadinejed against Mr. Montazeri and his circle of supporters, and will loosen waves of attacks and slanders against our Baha’i fellow-citizens. However, what is important is that after 150 years, at long last, someone ranking among the high ecclesiastics and objects of emulation by Shi’a believers has arisen to defend the human rights and the citizenship of the Baha’is of this country.

With this wise and timely verdict, Mr. Montazeri, as an object of emulation of a large segment of the Shi’a society, has now claimed a special place in the history of human rights activism in Iran. Without doubt this has evoked the admiration of all Iranians and the Baha’i community, placing him in the estimable position of a Muslim divine who is protective of religious minorities.

Prior to this, in the dark decade of the 1980s, Mr. Montazeri protected the lives of political prisoners from the devouring clutches of Ladjevardi’s gang (who were protected by Khomeini), thereby saving the lives of thousands of heterodox thinkers in Iran. Had it not been for the efforts exerted by a group of emissaries, led by Mr. Nasiri, his son-in-law, whom he sent to investigate the condition of prisons and torture-cells of the regime, thousands more heterodox thinkers would have savagely perished in dungeons. Indeed, it can be said with absolutely certainty that the scope of the 1988 massacre of political prisoners would have been far greater had Montazeri not intervened.

Mr. Montazeri’s proclamation regarding the “equality of civil rights of Baha’i citizens” not only is a fatal blow to the putrefied body of the beliefs of the present leadership and the Hojjatieh stranglehold over the regime, it is a courageous step that warns those who falsely claim to be promoters of reform that indeed in this day and age, when the people of Iran are deprived of even the smallest elements of human rights, reform does not only mean pleading and bartering to send a few more representatives to the phony Islamic parliament. True reform means insistence on human and natural rights of all individuals – the same rights that the Islamic Republic has denied to all individuals and strata of society in Iran, and has trampled under all circumstances.

When, as one of the highest ranking clerics, Mr. Montazeri officially recognizes the rights of the Baha’is of Iran, from that moment on no excuse or justification remains for the claimant to the mantle of reform to continue disregarding equal rights for all religious minorities in Iran, unless they officially announce they are in fact one of the followers and supporters of Sayyid Ali Khamenei or one of the power-seeking mullahs.

As the author of this short essay, and indeed as an Iranian citizen and a defender of universal human rights, who considers his own rescue from the death chambers of Evin prison to be a result of Mr. Montazeri's efforts to save political activists, and also as someone who under the dictatorial regime of the Shah was a close friend with his assassinated son, Muhammad Montazeri, I greatly admire Montazeri's courageous efforts towards recognizing the civil rights of our Baha'i countrymen. And I wish him a long and happy life.

New Academic Year in Iran: But What about the Baha'i Students?

By Behrouz Setoodeh

Setoodeh is a prominent political activist and often writes informed social and political essays for Iran-Global online site. The following article was posted on September 15, 2008, at Iran Global (<http://www.iranglobal.info/I-G.php?mid=2&news-id=131&nid=autor>) and Peykarian (http://www.peykeiran.com/article_body.aspx?ID=12745). With author's kind permission, extracts from this essay were provided on October 3, 2008, in translation at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/23..>

With the commencement of each new academic year, hundreds of the most talented Iranian students who have earned the highest scores in the national college entrance examination come face to face with the next stage in the college entrance process — namely, an inquisition about their religious beliefs, only to discover that because they are Baha'i, they are barred from attending institutions of higher education.

Interestingly enough, the Islamic Republic regime has agreed to accept Baha'i students at universities upon only one condition — namely, to lie about their religion and pretend that they are Muslims. However, since none of these Baha'i students are of such low moral character that they would be willing to speak a lie and feign that they are Muslim, then none of them are able to attend university. ...

A recent letter by one of the Baha'i students who successfully passed the national entrance exam speaks to this painful reality that each year, some of the most talented Iranian young men and women are deprived of education. At this point, I would like to share the text of a letter by Hulaku Rahmanian, who is one of the hundreds and hundreds of Baha'i students who have been barred from entering college in Iran solely on the ground of religious belief. It is most praiseworthy that this letter was published by the esteemed organization Human Rights Activists of Iran:

I am Hulaku Rahmanian, a 19 year old Baha'i youth. During the academic year 2006-07, I majored in mathematics and physics in pre-university classes and intensely prepared myself for the upcoming national college entrance examination. I passed all the prerequisites with remarkable success and was hoping to receive an excellent ranking in the national exam.

I participated in the national exam of 2007. When preliminary results were announced, I learned that I had the 54th highest score in the province and the 76th in the nation. I was certain that with such a score I would be able to gain admittance into any field in any university in Iran. For this purpose, I marked 26 different preferences on my application form.

Completely unexpectedly, though, when the final results were announced on the official site of the Organization for Assessments, I noticed that the phrase "failed" was placed against my name.

Immediately I went to the Organization's offices in Tehran and then in Karaj. In both places, I was told bluntly that the reason for my failure was my religion — being a Baha'i. However, they attributed this decision to other authorities without naming them. And finally when they named the deciding authorities and I went to their offices, they denied any responsibility and referred me back to the Organization for Assessments.

In this manner, I could find no one willing to accept responsibility for this decision. So simply, I was stripped of my natural right to enter a university despite the fact that I had more than adequately proven my capability and had placed exceptionally high on the ranking ladder.

A little while later, I went to the Organization for Assessments to receive my ranking certificate in mathematics and physics exams. The appropriate person said that within a week the certificate would be mailed to my house. Three weeks went by and no certificate was received. I returned to the same office and once again filled in the request form. Once again a long while passed and no certificate was received.

I returned to the same office, and this time the responsible person gave me a phone number, and said that I should call that number and inquire about my situation.

I called the number and found out that the person at the other end was very familiar with my request and file. He asked about my religion. When I told him I was a Baha'i, he immediately announced that I had "failed" in all my entrance exams.

In such manner, not only I was deprived of my right to enter a university, I was also robbed of my ranking in the exams.

Towards the end of 2007, I registered for the 2008 national exam. Once again, I studied hard to be ready in all subjects and took the exam. However, this time, instead of posting the preliminary results, the official site of the Organization for Assessments posted a notice: "Due to incomplete application, write to the National Organization for Assessment in Karaj at Post Office Box 31535-3166."

I immediately went to the Organization's office in Karaj and once again, the same exact discussion as last year's took place, and I was told that while my application has no shortcomings, since I was a Baha'i it prevented further processing of the application. Nevertheless, they referred me to the Section for Selection of Instructors and Students, located at the Tehran office of the Organization.

Together with a few other Baha'i friends who also had suffered the same discrimination, we went to the office of this Section. At first, they said we must return to the Karaj office. However, by our insistence we were able to meet with the official in charge of the Section. He claimed that for several years now, he had been trying to secure the right of the Baha'is to enter universities. But when we asked him to name some of the things he had tried so that we could also try the same avenues, he refused to answer, and was unable to say which governmental agencies he had approached.

At the end, after an hour of discussion, without any written commitment and without even receiving our written missives, he dismissed us by saying, "Leave here, as you are wasting my time."

So I continue to have no recourse for earning a seat in an institution of higher education merely on the grounds of my religion, the Baha'i Faith. It should be highlighted that various provisions and articles of the Islamic Republic's constitution advocate equality and equity, such as:

- Article 3: “free education and physical training for everyone at all levels ... the abolition of all forms of undesirable discrimination and the provision of equitable opportunities for all”
- Article 14: “the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and to respect their human rights.”
- Article 19: “All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like do not bestow any privilege.”
- Article 23: “The investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.”

Despite all the above provisions, I have no agency and nobody to turn to for appeal or protest.

Given current circumstances, it appears that this will be yet another year in which I will not be admitted to any university.

This was the exact text of a letter by an Iranian Baha’i youth, who participated with several million other students at the national college entrance exam and ranked in the top 100 in the nation.

One is compelled to ask: What is behind the regime’s discriminatory and inhumane outlook, that it would bar its own most able body of college students from further education?

Here we are not talking about thousands and thousands of students who in the last thirty years have been seized on charges of sedition, atheism and apostasy, and dragged from classroom to torture cells and imprisoned in dungeons, of which thousands have perished on the gallows. Indeed our discussion is centered on the plight of young men and women about whose religiosity, piety and rectitude of conduct no trace of uncertainty can ever be entertained. The problem is that before the governing regime of Iran the religiosity and piety of this sector of our countrymen is not recognized or accepted. ...

When it comes to our Baha’i citizens, it must be recognized that for them to tell a white lie or a convenient falsehood or to conceal their true religion through dissimulation is against everything they stand for and believe in. Indeed in their religion, under no circumstances is it permissible to speak other than absolute truth, and any deed that results in being two-faced or conniving or deceitful is considered the most abhorrent of all deeds.

In fact, one could argue that it is this strict adherence to integrity, honesty and truthfulness, and avoidance under all circumstances of lying, dissimulating, or telling half-truths, which has caused untold difficulties and brought much harm upon the Baha’i citizens of our country. Consider: Had the Baha’is been willing to lie about their religion, every one of the hundreds of them who were slaughtered during the early days of Revolution could have saved their lives and walked out of jail.

The point is not why the Baha’is don’t lie: the point is that truthfulness is a virtue and we too must learn it.

It is a fact that the discriminatory policies and suppression of the Islamic Republic has encompassed all heterodox thinkers, particularly religious and tribal minorities, in addition to marginalizing half of Iran’s population — namely, women of that country.

However, discriminatory actions and persistent pressures on the Baha'is of Iran has assumed a completely different dimension, to the extent that this inhuman policy of the Islamic regime regarding our oppressed Baha'i countrymen includes such draconian measures as deprivation of education, exclusion from holding government jobs, and receiving their rightfully earned pensions, and much more.

What I have written in the past in some of my essays and commentaries is that the enmity and hostility of the gang of mullahs against the Baha'is of Iran is not a recent phenomenon, but has deep historical roots. This issue goes back 160 years ago to an era when within the corrupt ecclesiastical system of the time a few farsighted scholars recognized the necessity of religious reform within the Shi'a fold, and invited people in this direction. Within a short time, a massive movement for reform of the Shi'a creed and an opening for social reform was organized.

In truth, more than 50 years before the Persian Revolution of 1906-11, for the first time, the Babis of Iran (the spiritual ancestors of the present-day Baha'is) were the ones who insisted on the fundamental need for civil laws, the equality of men and women, removal of the veil by women, land and agricultural reform, and many such modern concepts. The Babis also taught that the Iran Shi'a community no longer needed an intermediate between the people and God, known as "mullahs". That is, each person could communicate directly with God and understand for himself God's teachings, thereby eliminating the corrupt class of mullahs.

This religious belief quickly spread among the Iranians, and many came to recognize that in the Court of the Divine Lord each person stands responsible for his or her own actions, and there is absolutely no need for akhunds or mullahs to tell us the path to salvation or to attend to the affairs of the society.

Indeed, the enmity and hostility of the mullahs towards the Baha'is goes back to that time, when some perceptive individuals arose to destroy the corrupt ways of the ecclesiastics in Iran – a clerical establishment which through deceit and false reports from the holy ones had enveloped and submerged the entire society for centuries in the darkness of superstition and backwardness.

It was at that time that the mullahs started calling this group of progressive-minded and reformist Iranians [i.e. Baha'is] as the "wayward sect" and issued verdicts proclaiming their apostasy and the legality of slaughtering them.

When secular and religious powers were fused into a single entity in 1979 under the name "Islamic Republic", the mass killings, discriminations and persecutions of religious minorities, particularly the Baha'is, which had been halted during the Pahlavi regime, were now infused with a new vigor. This time, with much greater scope and in a systematic manner, under the leadership of Khomeini, all the killings and harassments were rehabilitated. The new Islamic government promulgated new laws and secret orders to institutionalize discrimination against religious minorities and to give the new waves of persecutions the cover of law.

It was during this dark era that pressure, persecution, maltreatment, harm and injury against the Baha'is of Iran, as the result of the historic backdrop that I have explained above, was more intense and extensive than against any other religious minority in our country.

In the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the only religious minorities which enjoy some measure of recognition are Christianity, Judaism and the Zoroastrian religion. Nowhere in the Constitution are the Baha'is mentioned. That is, their very existence as a religious community is denied by the Islamic government. And this opens the clear and unhindered path for the hoodlums and thugs ruling the government of Iran to continue to

call this religion a “wayward sect” and to persist in killing, harming and persecuting its members.

In order to some degree to comprehend the depth of the systematic discrimination of the ruling regime and their anti-human and anti-Iranian laws, it is sufficient only to look at the way that the Islamic regime deals with Baha’i students. Through this, one can understand that a regime that portrays itself as God’s vice-regent on earth actually deprives our Baha’i countrymen of one of the most basic civil rights — namely, the right to education.

The right to education is among the most basic and fundamental rights that every country on earth has recognized for its citizens — every government adheres to this vital right. I cannot think of any other location in the world, other than the Islamic Republic of Iran, where we can find a society that deprives its citizens of the right to study, continue their education and attend institutions of higher education solely on the ground of religion. Nowhere else in the world, other than the backward and ignorant men ruling Iran, can we find a regime that merely for their political or social views would expel students from university, would imprison, torture and then summarily execute them in the most brutal way.

Indeed, it will not be long that history will recall, with great revulsion, that during the opening years of the 21st century, the Iranian regime deprived its own citizens of education and advancement in the sciences solely on the ground of religious or political views. ... In the final analysis, defending the right of Baha’i students to education and access to universities must remain the foremost objective of all student activists and all groups engaged in bringing about human rights in Iran.

We must discard the shameful slogan of a “wayward sect” which ill-intentioned mullahs conceived over a century and a half ago against our hapless Baha’i citizens, and which they have with the loudest voice used to subjugate this religious minority.

We must recognize the Baha’i Faith and afford this group of Iranians full religious recognition.

We must all embrace the dictum of “religious liberty” and the “equality of all religious groups in Iran”.

We must never lose sight of the line that divides true reform and the true defense of human rights, from those who falsely use “reform” and “human rights” to gain power and subjugate other citizens.

We must stand up for every form of liberty, equality of rights, the rights of minorities and religious groups, respect for those who think differently than us, and elimination of all discrimination in favor of the Shi’a creed in the Constitutional Law of Iran.

New Threats Against the Baha'is of Iran

By Hasan Zerehi

The following report was filed by Hasan Zerehi, the editor-in-chief of Shahrvand, a Persian weekly published in Toronto, Canada. This essay (report no. 1197) was posted on Wednesday, October 1, 2008:

<http://fa.shahrvand.com/>. It was also posted on Asre-Nou on Thursday, October 2, 2008, <http://asre-nou.net/> and appeared in translation on October 7, 2008, at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/38>.

The Islamic Republic regime has arranged for the collection of signatures on petitions against the Baha'is at Friday congregational prayers and other venues. These semi-official petitions demand the “dissolution” of institutions – apparently intending the Baha'i Faith [N.b.: All Baha'i administrative institutions were voluntarily dissolved in 1981, and have never been reinstated.].

Thoughtless actions, like the latest episode of collecting petitions at Friday congregational prayers and other venues, clearly threaten Baha'i families in Iran.

In a land where the followers of this religion [i.e. the Baha'is] have grown their roots in the same soil and environment, yet where they have no right to attend universities or pursue their studies, such provocations have no result but to encourage promoters of religious bigotry and hoodlums supporting the government in their efforts to further harass and persecute the Baha'is – all of this because Baha'is are prohibited from telling lies regarding their religion.

I have said that the Baha'is are prohibited from telling lies. Why is this important? Because certain elements in the regime urge the Baha'is to avoid writing “Baha'i” on application forms for jobs, schools or other such needs so that their application is not denied based on religion. However, our fellow-citizens who are Baha'is and whose religious teachings severely forbid them from telling lies, continue to speak truthfully and willingly forgo their right to jobs and schools, and persevere in spite of new obstacles in their path.

On the other hand, since when does it make sense that in order to eliminate and dissolve a religious body – an ambition of Muslim clerics – people in the streets and bazaars should sign petitions in support of such a thing? If this was the right method, then everywhere that a religious majority lived, they would vote to eliminate and remove all religious minorities.

Because of thirty years of threats by the Iranian regime against the Baha'is – who wherever they live in the world consider themselves Iranian and have been advocates of Iranian culture, language and traditions – some people have fallen for the government's false propaganda against our Baha'i countrymen. The Baha'is, who at one time lived securely and peacefully like other religious minorities, now have no security for their lives, possessions or occupations.

The Baha'is not only have to endure the regime's broad suppression and persecution like all other Iranians, but because of their religious beliefs must endure many other forms of intolerance and discrimination specific to them as well. Imagine a Baha'i girl who has scored well in the national college entrance exam, who has also overcome various quotas for her race or gender, who will find herself at the impossible-to-overcome religious barrier placed before her, who despite all her excellent qualifications must remain home and be forever deprived of education. Contrast this against Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

Everyone has the right to education... Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

And Iran is a signatory of this Declaration!

Our citizens in Iran must be vigilant and not fall for the deceptive and unwise provocations of the regime. They must recognize the Baha'is as our esteemed countrymen, who have the right to their religion, beliefs and convictions, and who live in accordance with their own teachings.

Regrettably, due to a false atmosphere that the Islamic Republic has created against the Baha'is, Iranians living inside the country have no opportunity to support this stratum of their fellow countrymen. However, it is incumbent upon those of us Iranians who live outside of Iran or are of other nationalities, to arise to make the world hear the clamor of the suffocation of Iranian Baha'is, and not allow a prejudiced and theocratic regime to portray the face of Iran in an even more repulsive and abhorrent light.

How can one expect a regime that insults and denigrates the Sunnis, whose worldwide population is many times that of the Shi'ite, in such a way as if they were thoroughly non-Muslim, to treat other religious minorities in a manner worthy of the high ideals of Iran? Therefore, it is the duty of us Iranians living throughout the world to provide our complete and wholehearted support to our Baha'i countrymen as well as followers of other religious groups who have been discriminated against by the Iranian regime, and to demonstrate to the entire world that the oppressive and reactionary deeds of the leaders of Iran has nothing to do with being a true Iranian – a people whose land is a home to people of diverse religions, cultures and languages.

Do not allow the Baha'is of Iran to continue live in their own land in an atmosphere of fear, terror and hopelessness.

We must defend the civil and human rights of the Baha'is and all other heterodox and free thinkers in Iran from both religious and political persecution.

Attack on the Baha'i Faith at a Conference on the History of Iran and the British Empire

The report below is in two parts: (1) extracts from remarks at a recent conference in Tebran provided in translation, and (2) a response from the perspective of the present translator against the accusations stated at the Tebran conference. The materials are translated from Persian and were posted on October 7, 2008, at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/44>.

Part 1: What Was Said at Tehran Conference

Tehran University was the host for a conference held on Tuesday, October 14, 2008, on the subject, "Iran and British Colonialism". This conference was organized by the Institute for Political Studies and Research, a Tehran-based organization with strong ties to Iran's theocracy. A number of well-known figures spoke at this gathering. Iranian Students News Agency has provided a synopsis of the conference and extracts from various talks at:

<http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1215518&Lang=P>

<http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1215105&Lang=P>

<http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1215463&Lang=P>

The subject of colonialism and imperialism is a highly-charged topic in Iran's modern political discourse, and often facts and a great deal of fiction are intertwined for political gain by various factions.

While much was covered during this conference on Iran's view of the attempts by "western" powers such as England and Russia to subjugate the Middle East in general and Iran in particular, for the purpose of this report I will confine the discussion to remarks about the Babi and Baha'i Faiths, which essentially rehashed the age-old accusation that these religious communities were created by the British and Russian powers in order to advance their colonial designs.

The second speaker at the Conference was Hujjatu'l-Islam Va'iz-Zadeh Khurasani, whose talk was titled, "The role of Britain in creating religious sects in Islamic countries". He stated that the first portion of his talk would focus on British interference in Iran, while the remaining part of his presentation would be to analyze the role of British and Russian colonialism in the formation of Babism and Baha'ism.

As part of his presentation, Va'iz-Zadeh stated, "In the 18th century, England had an agency called the Colonial Ministry, which was charged with promotion of universal ignorance and illiteracy, spread of orthodoxy and prejudice, proliferation of hopelessness and insecurity, and much more. ... From another direction, England had a hand in creating various sects, such as the Babis and the Baha'is, and advanced the interests of Wahhabis as well." He continued, "The role of Britain and Russia in creating Babism and Wahhabism was very strong."

In continuing his discourse on the history of the Babi and the Baha'i movements, the speaker added, "These two sects emerged from the Shaykhi school of thought, which was led by Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i. Siyyid Ali-Muhammad the Bab, who presented himself as the 'Bab' within this movement, first stated that he had the station of being 'the gate of

knowledge', then claimed that he was 'the gate of the Lord of the Age', and eventually claimed divinity for himself."

The speaker added, "The initial role in the formation of these sects resided with Russia; it was then assumed by the Britain, and the connection of Russia and Britain with these religious creeds in Iran and other Islamic countries from the time of exile of Mirza Husayn-Ali [Baha'u'llah] to Baghdad should be a topic of further research."

The same News Agency reports on another speaker, Hujjatu'l-Islam Hamed Qara'iti, who examined the role of Britain in the political development of Iran during the last century. This speaker suggested, "British colonialism advanced its interests in Islamic countries through the Babi and the Baha'i sects." He added, "During the Qajar era, England advanced its plans in Islamic regions through Babism and Baha'ism, so that by the use of these sects she could attain her objectives."

Part 2: A Response

The preposterous suggestion that the Babi and Baha'i Faiths are the creation of British and Russian imperialism is the tool of choice of Iran's mullahs and has been repeated for many decades without an iota of credible evidence. To better understand the issue, let us examine its historical backdrop:

The growth and diffusion of the Baha'i Faith in Iran (and globally) has been a source of considerable concern to Iran's ecclesiastical orthodoxy, who have historically viewed this expansion as a competition and a threat to their authority and power. This perceived threat stems from a number of the teachings of the Baha'i movement which challenge traditional Islamic belief, including principles that call into question the need for a ministry or priesthood. This bold assertion by Baha'u'llah, prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, has been treated by the Shiite clergy with hostility, as it is a threat to their doctrinal legitimacy and social prestige – not to mention their financial well-being.

By the end of the 19th century, there was a growing dissension within the Qajar state, and thus charges of subversion and conspiracy against the Baha'is increased in the hope of drawing public attention away from the government and its problems, and instead toward the evils of the "wayward sect". In the early 20th century, the Baha'is were seen as being non-conformists in a society seeking for uniformity and fearful of losing its perceived unique Shiite culture due to outside threats. By the 1940s, the clerical and the state agencies were stating broadly that the Baha'i Faith was entirely manufactured by colonialists and imperialists in order to destroy the "unity of the Muslim nation" and that those who did not share the beliefs of the Muslim nation were agents of foreign powers.

By the 1960s the cynical disdain for the Baha'i social message among pro-religious intellectuals had increased, and charges of spying and connections to foreign powers were added to the previous charge of Baha'is being heretics. This new attitude towards the Baha'is by this time had passed beyond the circle of mullahs and had become rampant among the secular Iranian middle class.

Some observers have noted that while Iran's sovereignty was recognized in the 19th century, Britain and Russia meddled in the country's affairs to further their own interests, and that groups that have trans-national ties like the Jews and the Baha'is are viewed with great suspicion by Iranian nationalists.

It is true that the Russian and British governments had a formidable presence in the 19th-century Iran and competed for political, economic and territorial influence. The support of Britain during the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11, the Anglo-Russian convention which allowed Russia and England to partition Iran into spheres of influence,

the occupation of Iranian territory during the First World War by the British, Russia and the Ottoman forces, as well as the coup d'état of 1921 which was backed by Britain, all encouraged the development of conspiracy ideas related to foreign powers. Opponents of the Baha'i Faith, particularly Shiite clerics, used this atmosphere to allege that the Baha'i religion was also a product of Russian and British governments who were striving to weaken Islam and create divisions in the Iranian nation.

The basis of many of the conspiracy theories relating the Baha'i Faith to Russian influence is a fictitious memoir attributed to Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgorukov (also known as Dolgoruki), who was the Russian ambassador to Iran from 1846 to 1854. The memoir states that Dolgorukov created the Babi and Baha'i religions in order to weaken Iran and Shiite Islam. This document in many ways is the functional equivalent of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which was a fraudulent anti-Semitic tract alleging a Jewish plot to achieve world domination. The fictional memoir was first published in 1943 in Mashhad, Iran, and shortly thereafter published again in Tehran with some of the most glaring historical errors corrected. The book still contains many historical errors and has been refuted by many non-Baha'i scholars (e.g. see <http://www.iranian.com/main/2008/sacrificing-innocent>).

This memoir states that Dolgorukov used to attend gatherings of Hakim Ahmad Gilani, where he would meet with Baha'u'llah. However, Gilani had died in 1835, three years before Dolgorukov's arrival in the country. There are numerous other errors relating to the dates and timing of events that the memoir describes, including descriptions of events after the deaths of those who supposedly took part or when the people involved were young children, or when they were in different parts of the world.

Actually, Dolgorukov's interaction with Baha'i history was very limited. In 1852, when the entire Babi community fell under suspicion, many Babis, including Baha'u'llah, were arrested in a sweep. When Baha'u'llah was jailed by the Shah, his family went to Mirza Majid Ahi, who was married to Baha'u'llah's sister and was working as a secretary in the Russian Legation in Tehran, and asked him to go to Dolgorukov and request him to intercede on Baha'u'llah's behalf – and Dolgorukov agreed.

After Dolgorukov and Iran's Prime Minister pressured the Shah to either produce evidence against Baha'u'llah or to release him, the Shah agreed to free Baha'u'llah, but decreed that he be banished from Iran. Dolgorukov offered Baha'u'llah and his family the opportunity to migrate to Russia, but the latter refused. Instead, Baha'u'llah chose to go to Iraq and settle in Baghdad.

The memoirs, however, extend this assistance to all facets of Baha'u'llah's life. In one edition of these fictitious memories, Dolgorukov is said to have provided money for Baha'u'llah to build a house in Akka; however Dolgorukov died in 1867, before Baha'u'llah arrived in Akka. Thus newer editions of the memoir state that Dolgorukov sent money for a house to be built in Edirne, where Baha'u'llah lived prior to being exiled to Akka. As Dolgorukov had left the Russian diplomatic service in 1854 and died in 1867, he was unable to interact with Baha'u'llah in ways described by the fictitious memoir.

The suggestion of British ties is even more preposterous, and is based completely on false evidence. In a biography of Iran's famous Prime Minister, Amir Kabir, the well-known Iranian intellectual Firaydun Adamiyat (recently deceased) stated that Mulla Husayn, the Bab's first disciple, was in fact a British agent who was recruited by Arthur Conolly, a British intelligence officer, explorer and writer. Adamiyat states that the evidence for this allegation appears in Conolly's book, "Journey to the North of India Overland from England through Russia, Persia, and Affghaunistaun". However, no mention of Mulla Husayn or the Bab

appears in the book. In later editions of Adamiyat's biography on Amir Kabir, this fabrication has been removed.

The accusations of ties to the British also were made because of the knighting in 1920 of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas, Baha'u'llah's son, by the British Mandate of Palestine – an act that antagonists claim to be a reward for the political relations between the Baha'i Faith and Great Britain. Abdu'l-Baha was, however, awarded this knighthood for his humanitarian efforts shortly after World War I. During the War years, Palestine suffered an intense famine caused by the Ottoman government's mismanagement as well as a major infestation of locusts (for details see the diary of Dr. Habib Mu'ayyad at <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com>). In response, Abdu'l-Baha encouraged his followers in the region to cultivate, store, and distribute grain to the famine-stricken people after the war.

Baha'is have also been accused of ties to global Zionism, an international political movement formed in the 19th century in support of the reestablishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. A common way in which this claim is advanced is by pointing out that the shrines and holy places of the Baha'is are located in Israel. However, Baha'u'llah was banished from Iran to Baghdad in the Ottoman Empire, and later exiled by the Sultan of the Ottomans, at the Shah's behest, to territories further away from Iran and finally to Akka in Syria, which only a century later was incorporated into the state of Israel. Baha'u'llah died in 1892 near Akka and was buried in that vicinity. Following his death, Abdu'l-Baha assumed the leadership of the religion until his passing in 1921, and was buried in Haifa, then in Palestine. Another important figure for Baha'is buried in current-day Israel is the Bab, whose remains were transferred to Palestine and buried in Haifa in 1909. Israel was not formed until 1948, almost 60 years after Baha'u'llah's death, 40 years after the Bab's remains were brought to the region, and 27 years after Abdu'l-Baha's death.

Baha'is have also been accused of supporting the state of Israel because they send financial support to their international headquarters, located in Haifa, Israel. These financial contributions, however, are sent for the maintenance and upkeep of the Baha'i shrines and historical sites and for attending to the humanitarian affairs of the Faith's global community. Much the same way that Shi'ite Muslims of Iran are praised for sending money out of the country to Iraq and Jerusalem for the upkeep of their religious shrines, the Baha'is contribute financially to the upkeep of their own shrines, which happen to be located in Israel due to an accident of history.

For further reading on this subject, kindly consult the following on-line article and cited sources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegations_of_Baha'i_involvement_with_other_powers

End the Persecution of Baha'is

By United Republicans of Iran

On Thursday, May 29, 2008, the organization United Republicans of Iran demanded the immediate release of the Baha'i leaders incarcerated in March and May of that year through a proclamation posted at: <http://www.iranrepublic.org/>.

Protesting the arrest of leaders of Baha'i community in Iran

We demand that the violation of human rights of our fellow Baha'i citizens in Iran to stop and their prerogative to exist as a religious minority enjoying equality with followers of other religious minorities to be recognized.

Seven officials of the Baha'i community have been kept detained in Iran since May 14. Six individuals were arrested on May 14, and another person has been incarcerated for the past two months. The arrests have continued in recent days. For instance three individuals have been imprisoned in the northern Iran. According to the spokesperson for the government of Islamic Republic the detainees are accused of acting against the national security of Iran. Minister of Information and Attorney General, without referring to these arrests; have charged them with serious offense. During the last thirty years, the followers of Baha'i faith in Iran have been under constant threat and persecution by the state because of their beliefs. Even the mere fact of belonging to the Baha'i faith is considered a crime in the eyes of Islamic Republic. The recent arrests demonstrate that a new round of assault is on the way against our fellow Baha'i citizens. In Islamic Republic citing a threat to the national security instead of presenting real evidence against the accused is a common practice. In the past thirty years individuals belonging to IR opposition have often been detained based on similar charges. The detainees have been subject to torture and harassment and while incarcerated, without being able to defend themselves, have been repeatedly incriminated in the media. In recent years we have witnessed incarceration of secularists and religious minorities on numerous occasions, while the charges made against the jailed individuals have never been proven in any court of law.

The recent arrests of the leaders of the Baha'i faith indicate an obvious transgression against this religious minority group and it is suggestive of a very apparent breach of their basic human rights. Freedom of religion, ideas and beliefs are the essential rights of every citizen and the government can not violate them especially because the tenets of such rights have been named in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the government of Iran has signed it.

The United Republicans of Iran strongly condemns the arrests of the leaders of the Baha'i faith and the charges made against them. We hereby demand their immediate release, cessation of their persecution and harassment, and recognition of their community as a religious minority equitable with other religious minorities in Iran.

International Committee of the United Republicans of Iran

Why Islamists Persecute the Baha'is

By Amil Imani

On Friday, June 6, 2008, Amil Imani, an Iranian intellectual who has written on discrimination against the Baha'is of Iran in the past, posted the following essay

http://www.amilimani.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=107&Itemid=2, which was also posted at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/59>.

This is the best of times and the worst of times, as the saying goes. Humanity is struggling on the one hand to free itself from the vestiges of its barbaric past while embarking on an exhilarating new way of life. It is the same story. The old is doggedly fighting the new on many fronts. And the new in this case is a huge paradigm shift of ideas and beliefs that demands total eradication of all. This has kept mankind in a quagmire of wars, injustice and misery.

In this realm of ideas, religions play pivotal roles and the old and the new clash, often violently. Ideas and beliefs are our software that determines how we behave. And the software of the past is no longer working because it is out of phase with the needs of the time as well as infected with destructive viruses.

Even a cursory look is enough to show that the software of Islam, over time, is so greatly manipulated by numberless sects, sub-sects and schools that it can hardly be considered a unitary belief system. And people are their ideas. Any assault on beliefs and ideas provokes the assailed to action.

This clash of beliefs is the reason for Islamists to unleash their power against the upstart iconoclastic Baha'i faith. In fact, the Baha'is revere Islam and respect all other religions. Baha'i faith has many teachings in common with Islam, so much so that some call it "Islam light," because, while it retains some of Islam's principles, it also abrogates a number of outdated and counterproductive Islamic laws and practices. Baha'is say their faith is not a wrecking ball that aims to demolish the schoolhouse of God called religion: a badly divided schoolhouse where everyone claims to worship the same God, yet keep oppressing, fighting and killing each other in the name of the same God.

Baha'is have a very rosy and possibly unrealistic view of humanity. They say that their goal is for every human being, irrespective of any and all considerations, to be granted all his God-given rights and be allowed to worship his creator the way he sees fit. They have a sort of lovey-dovey vision of the world where everyone will live as a valued member of the larger human family. Apparently they have hit a responsive enough cord with some 6-7 million people of the world from every ethnic, religious and national stratum. This vision may not convert the remaining 6-7 billion people any time soon, but it sure beats hands down the Islamists' idea to force the world under their so called Ummeh with its stone-age shariah law.

Baha'is believe that God sends his teachers to his school, from time to time with new lessons, to help advance the people to a higher and higher level of humanness. Trouble is, they believe, that people cling to the old school-work and the old teacher and doggedly resist accepting the new teacher and his teachings. Baha'is think of God's prophets as renovators who come from time to time to tear down walls of separation and to bring God's children together in an open-air general classroom out of their own foolishly walled-in dungeons of exclusivity and ignorance.

Below are some of the Baha'i teachings that clash heads on with Islam's and provoke the Islamists to do all they can to destroy the new religion.

- The people of God. Muslims believe that they are the chosen people of Allah and recognize no other system of belief as legitimate. Baha'is believe that all people are the chosen people of God: that there is only one God, one religion of God, and one people of God, the entire human race.
- Pearls on a string. Muslims contend that Muhammad is the seal of the Prophets; that God sent his last and final messenger to mankind, and any other claimant is an imposter worthy of death. Baha'is believe that God has always sent his teachers with new and updated lessons to educate humanity and shall do so in the future. There have been numberless divine teachers in the course of human history who have appeared to various people. They say that these teachers are like pearls on a string and that Baha'u'llah is the latest, but not the last pearl.
- Independent thinking. Blind imitation is anathema to Baha'is. Baha'is believe that the human mind and the gift of reason should guide the person in making decisions about all matters. To this end, they place a premium on education and independent investigation of truth.
- Baha'is consider the education of women as important as that of men, since women are the early teachers of children and can play their valuable part by being themselves educated. By contrast, Muslims look to religious authorities for guidance and often deprive women of education and independent thinking.
- In recognition of the importance of independent thinking, no one is born Baha'i. Once one is born to a Muslim, he is considered Muslim for life. If he decides to leave Islam, he is labeled apostate and, apostates are automatically condemned to death. By contrast, every child born in a Baha'i family is required to make his own independent decision regarding whether or not he wishes to be a Baha'i. Freedom to choose and independent thinking are cherished values of the Baha'is, in stark contrast to that of the closed-minded Islamists.
- Religion or science. Baha'is believe that truth transcends all boundaries. Scientific and religious truth emanate from the same universal source. They are like the two sides of the same coin. To Baha'is, science and religion are as two wings of a bird that enable humanity's flight toward the summit of its potential; that any religious belief that contradicts science is superstition. Muslims believe that their religious scripture and dogma, irrespective of their proven falsehood, are superior to that of science.
- Gender equality. Muslims hold the view, expressly stated in the Qur'an, that men are rulers over women. Baha'is reject this notion and subscribe to the unconditional equality of rights for the two sexes. This Baha'i principle emancipates one half of humanity from the status of subservient domestic to that of a fully participating and self-actualized human. It aims to put an end to the heartless exploitation of women and demands that women be treated with all due respect under the law.
- Participatory decision-making. Islam, by its very nature, is patriarchal and authoritarian. Baha'is believe in the value of decision making through the practice of consultation; a process where everyone, irrespective of any and all

considerations, has a voice in making decisions. This participatory decision-making principle abrogates a major prerogative of Islamic clergy who have been dictating matters to their liking and advantage. Also, at all levels of society, including the family, all affected members have the opportunity, even the responsibility, to make their views known without fear. Baha'i teachings clearly emphasize this commitment to a democratic decision-making in their scripture, "The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions."

- World-embracing outlook. Baha'is love their native countries, yet extend that same love to the entire planet and its people. Baha'is believe that love has no limit and need not have limits. One can love his country and love the world at the same time. This love of the world is frequently used as a pretense by the Islamists to accuse the Baha'is of Iran as traitors to their own homeland. It is for this reason that the present mullahs ruling Iran falsely claim that the Baha'is are agents of the Zionist Israel and its American sponsor.
- Eradication of prejudice. Prejudice of any type is alien to the Baha'i faith and severely undermines its pivotal principle of the oneness of humanity. Muslims are notorious when it comes to prejudice. Prejudice against others is thoroughly exploited by the Islamists. In contrast, Baha'i scriptures say, "...again, as to religious, racial, national and political bias: all these prejudices strike at the very root of human life; one and all they beget bloodshed, and the ruination of the world. So long as these prejudices survive, there will be continuous and fearsome wars."
- Abolition of priesthood. A major point of conflict involves the abolition of the clergy. Baha'is believe that humanity has matured enough that it no longer needs a cast of professional clergy to serve peoples' religious needs. By one stroke, this Baha'i teaching puts hundreds of thousands of mullahs and imams out of business and arouses the powerful cast of the do-nothing clergy to fight to retain their highly privileged parasitic positions.

It is imperative for the free people of the world to defend freedom of conscience, including freedom of religion, irrespective of one's own personal belief. It is for this reason that as a person who is not a Baha'i, I find it my solemn duty to speak up on behalf of a peaceful people, severely-persecuted by the savage Islamists.

A Professor's Account of the Expulsion of His Baha'i Students

By Saeed Hanaee Kashani

Professor Saeed Hanaee Kashani teaches English literature at Shaheed Beheshti University. These reflections were posted by him on Monday, November 3, 2008, at Fallosafab.org site, which is a site dedicated to "the Journals of M.S. Hanaee Kashani",

http://www.fallosafab.org/main/weblog/item_view.php?item_id=254&category_id and appeared on November 4, 2008, in translation at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/96>.

Last Monday, I was teaching a class at 8 o'clock in the morning. My students and I were reading aloud a text in English. Suddenly, I noticed that without having the text before them, two of my students were sitting politely with their hands crossed over their chests and just staring at me. I asked them, "Did you forget to bring the text with you to class?" One of them responded, "We have been expelled from the university and only came to bid you goodbye."

Uncontrollably I asked them, "Why?" He responded, "What do you mean, 'Why'? Are you asking why we've been expelled?" Perhaps he was surprised that I had asked such a question. He meant, "How could you not know?!" He wanted to explain further, but I stopped him and said, "Very well. It is not important." I knew the reason for their dismissal. However, when I had seen them in class, I had thought that perhaps the issue had been resolved in an agreeable way. That is why I had been hesitant and had asked.

When the class had concluded, the one that was older came forward and said to me, "We have been expelled because we are Baha'is. I just wanted to say that the reason for our expulsion is due to our religious convictions and not due to any moral failings."

One of them was a middle aged man, nearly bald and partially gray-haired. He appeared to be about 45 years old. The other was a female and about 20 years old, and she was my best student.¹

One or two weeks earlier, when I had received a letter from the university's security office instructing me to prevent these two from attending my classes, I had imagined all sorts of reasons, except religion. I never thought that these two students were Baha'is. Truly, how could a person know such a thing?! You can't discover a person's religious convictions and beliefs by reading their facial expressions – unless someone had invented signs displaying their religion. That is why the first thought that had occurred to me was that perhaps they had seen these two speaking extensively with each other, or perhaps conjectured other things about their relationship. And perhaps these two had heard about such theories and did not wish to have a bad reputation.

I asked him, "Why were you expelled after two years? Did they not know that you were a Baha'i and only now have they discovered it? Had you concealed your religion from the authorities?"

He said, "No. I have been trying to get into a university for the last 25 years. In 2004, through his insistence on following the country's Constitution, President Khatami and Mr. Mehrpour managed to secure our rights to attend institutions of higher education. But now,

¹ Based on reports from Iran, it appears that the two Baha'is mentioned in this account are Hasan Momtaz and Shahrzad Ghanoooni. The latter's sister, Setareh, was also a bright student at Tehran University and recently expelled for being a Baha'i.

other forms of civil rights are available to us, except this one [i.e. attendance at colleges and universities].”

I was deeply puzzled. How is it possible that someone whose family are openly practicing Baha’is, and who lives in the midst of Muslims, and who for 12 years has studied in elementary and high school, is told when he reaches university that he is barred from further education?! How is it that a person can enter into wedlock, have children, pay taxes, serve in the military, fight in wars, but is not permitted to go to university?! Why should university be the thing that some people are not given the right to enter? And why after all these struggles, after appealing to the country’s Constitution, which finally won them the right to attend colleges, have they once again been suspended from this right?

In response to him, there was not much I could say, except to express my regrets. A few days before this exchange, I had lunch with one of my friends and colleagues, a man who is deeply learned, devoted and is recognized as a distinguished figure. He said, “Other students in the department have come to me and asked that professors take a leading role in helping these two students.” It was this comment that made me realize that the problem that the two students had did not stem from some immoral behavior, but rather it was based on religion.

My friend continued, “I said to them that there was nothing we could do. Even under normal circumstances we are all under all sorts of pressures and attacks, and certain quarters call us by all sorts of names, such as secular, irreligious, etc, etc. That’s enough trouble for us, and we don’t need to be painted as Baha’i sympathizers too. This is an issue that should be resolved through Constitutional Law. 98% of the people have voted favorably for this Constitution and according to its text, only the recognized religions may enjoy civil rights. We cannot act against the explicit text of the Constitution.”

Hearing these words was deeply perplexing. Being agitated, I responded, “But the Constitution is not like that. It requires much interpretation. Was it not Ayatollah Khomeini who said in Paris that Marxists will enjoy every form of civil rights in an Islamic Republic, and that a head-cover was not necessary for women? Was it not Ayatollah Motahari who wanted to bring Marxist professors to the divinity school? Was it not Dr. Shariati who made the Qur’anic verse, “There is no compulsion in religion,”² a slogan for his books? Was it not only recently that Ayatollah Montazeri defended the civil rights of the Baha’is? Have the Baha’i students who come to our colleges not studied for 12 years in elementary and high schools of the Islamic Republic? Are their lives and possessions not protected by law?”

My friend shook his head in affirmation and said, “Yes, Ayatollah Montazeri has recently defended them.” But he remained adamant that perhaps the Baha’i students had not identified their religion on the forms for the national college exam and that their true religion was discovered only now.

However, he did not wish to continue the discussion and I said no more. All day, though, I was thinking that I should not procrastinate in what I had wanted to say about “religion and liberty”. Are religion and religious liberty not synonyms? How can we approach this question and discover an answer?

² Qur’an 2:256

Minorities in Iran

By Jahanshah Rashidian

The following essay appeared on Monday, November 10, 2008, at http://www.agoravox.com/article.php3?id_article=8872 and reposted at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/186>.

The Islamic Republic of Iran places the Shiite sect of Islam at the heart of the state apparatus. The “Islamisation” of all life, based on Khomeini’s own interpretation of Islam, is the central policy of the Islamic ruling elite.

Religious minorities, which include the Sunnite sect of Islam, Christian, Jews, Zoroastrians and Baha’is comprised about 10% of the population after the Iranian revolution, most of them Sunnite Muslims who also suffer from discrimination as national minorities. In addition, increasing numbers of Shiites, especially after the inception of the IRI, are non-believers.

In an interview with United International on November 8, 1978, Ayatollah Khomeini said: “In an Islamic Republic, all religious minorities can freely celebrate all of their religious ceremonies and the Islamic government will protect them to the best of its ability.” Later he said again, “The religious minorities, such as the non-Shiite Muslim population, are Iranians and must be respected.”

Masses of religious minorities joined the revolution against the Shah’s regime, despite the religious character of its leadership, with the understanding that tolerance would prevail. Short after the revolution, their schools have been closed and their teachers dismissed—Christian schools were initially closed, then reopened due to pressure, while the harassment of Christians continues. According to the IRI’s Constitution, religious minorities are not allowed to hold high-ranking government jobs. According to the interpretation of the Constitution, they are rejected from lower level jobs as well, even factory work. They are subjected to Shiite dress codes, holidays, and prohibitions on liquor and music. They are under the jurisdiction of the Islamic tribunals.

The IRI’s Constitution enjoins Muslims to respect the rights of non-Muslims, unless they “conspire against Islam or against the Islamic Republic of Iran.” It is up to the Shiite clergy to decide what constitutes a conspiracy.

The regime has issued decree forbidding non-Muslims from renting the upper story of a house where Muslims live the lower floor. It has forbidden the use of Muslim cadavers for medical research while recommending the use of non-Muslims. It has enacted a new tax structure in which non-Muslims pay dues, called “Jazyeh”, an echo of the old laws of tribute. Religious minorities are forbidden to enter barber shops, communal baths, grocery stores and other public places.

The Bill of Retribution, a criminal law which mandates stoning, the amputation of limbs and the gouging out of eyes as punishment, regards the lives of religious minorities as worth half those of Muslims.

The 75,000 members of the Jewish community have been suspected of being pro-Zionist. Many Jews have been forced to leave the country and some have been executed. Zoroastrians, adherents of the ancient Persian faith and representatives of the pre-Islamic culture, are also systematically persecuted. In their capital city of Yazd, young girls have been kidnapped by “Pasdarans”, Islamic revolutionary guards, taken to the home of the Ayatollah

Soddoughi, gang raped and forcibly converted to Islam. Their families' complaints went ignored and they were not allowed to visit them. In one case, the announcement was made of a marriage between a girl and a Pasdar.

In November, 1979, the Assembly of Experts declared Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism the only officially recognized minority religions, leaving the Baha'is without constitutional protection. The Baha'i faith was founded in Iran in the 19th century and believes in the essential oneness of all great religions, honoring all of their prophets, including the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. After the Sunnite sect of Islam, they are the largest of the religious minorities, numbering a half million. Because of its root in Islam, Baha'i faith is viewed as heretical and particularly threatening by the Shiite clergy.

Baha'i faith actively seeks converts and has attracted a predominantly prosperous and modernized membership. Organized opposition to the Baha'is has existed since before the IRI. The Hojjatieh sect, to which President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad belongs, has started their "holy" war against them under the Shah. At that time, a number of Baha'is had important commercial holding, such as Pepsi-Cola; they also preached non-intervention in politics.

Since the inception of the IRI, the Baha'is' religious centers and property have been confiscated and their shrines destroyed. Their members in the armed forces have been given choice of converting to Islam or being dismissed. In August, 1980, their entire governing board was kidnapped and disappeared; six months later, their successors were arrested, charged with treason and executed. Other Baha'is have been fired from their jobs, driven into exile, and arrested for conspiring against Islam and killed.

The oppression of religious minorities, especially the Baha'i faith, is not incidental; it is part of the nature of the IRI and continues today.

There is no Provision for Apostasy in Law

By Hashem Aghajari

This report was posted on Monday, October 6, 2008, on Radio Zamaaneh site by Maryam Mohammadi at http://radiozamaaneh.com/humanrights/2008/10/post_300.html and appeared in translation on November 24, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/197>. Professor Siyyid Hashem Aghajari (b. ~1957) is an Iranian historian, university professor and a critic of the Islamic Republic.

In many Islamic countries last Tuesday, and in Iran on Wednesday, observances were held in celebration of the 'Id-e Fitr, which marks the conclusion of the sacred fasting month of Ramadan. One such observance took place in Tehran in the office of the Organization to Foster Unity under the auspices of this institute. [This Organization was originally established to strengthen unity between universities and seminaries. However, now it is now a political student organization with reformist and conservative factions. Translator.] It is noteworthy that the theme of this gathering was, "Freedom of Faith and the Rights of Religious Minorities."

Regarding this seminar, the reason for it and the significance of conducting it on 'Id-e Fitr, a report has been prepared, and an interview took place with Muhammad Hashemi, a member of the Central Committee of the Foster Unity Organization and one of the organizers of this seminar. My report follows.

The main speaker at this gathering was Hashem Aghajari, a university professor and a political-religious activist, who in 2002 was first sentenced to death for giving a speech in Hamadan University and then after two years of imprisonment was freed. Excerpts from his talk are as follows:

- "People are different and think differently. Everyone searches after the Truth. But no one may employ the Truth that they have come to believe as a mechanism for forcing, compelling and suppressing others into a homogenous nation."
- "Are they [i.e. Iran's clerical leadership] more concerned with Islam than the Prophet Muhammad was?! Time after time we find in the sacred Qur'an that God directly addressed the Prophet and admonished Him, 'You are not a sovereign over them; You are not a tyrant and never should become one.'" [This appears to be a reference to Qur'an 50:45, "and thou, O Muhammad, art in no wise a compeller over them, such that you force them to accept faith." See also Qur'an 6:107 and 39:41. Translator.]
- "Nowhere in the sacred Qur'an do we find a verse sanctioning the use of force to compel others to a certain belief. If stories of battles and the use of arms are seen in the Qur'an, one should infer that permission is granted to kill the murderer and to exact punishment upon the oppressor, and such. That is, those who have suffered and been wronged are permitted to kill and wage jihad [holy war] when faced with oppression and, for the purpose of removing that tyranny."
- "The sacred Qur'an is very clear regarding the situation of the followers of other religions; that is, the followers of the religions of Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and the Mithraists. The Qur'an instructs us to live in peace and harmony with individuals who believe differently than we do."

In another section of his talk, Aghajari stated:

- “The traditions of the Prophet are very clear. What did the Prophet do when He arrived in Medina, or entered triumphantly into Mecca at the height of His might?!”
- “After His migration to Medina, He established a treaty with all other-religious groups of that town and acted in accord with that agreement, which established the corpus of common and civil obligations.”
- “In the treaty that the Prophet established in His first year in Medina, He did not compel the followers of other religions to become Muslim. The only thing that was forbidden in this treaty was collaboration with enemies against Medina. The government was in the Hands of the Prophet and the Muslims, but He did not impose His will on others.”
- “A portion of history of the Prophet’ in Medina is about battles. You should study these wars. In which of these did the Prophet engage in battle to impose His religious convictions? The Jews who had established a treaty with the Prophet and were faithful to that treaty enjoyed their rights.”

In another portion of his presentation, Aghajari continued:

- “Today’s claimants, who in the name of the rule of religion and diffusion of Islam cling to force and compulsion, should tell us according to which verse of the Qur’an are they using violence as means of imposing their religion and belief on Iranians?”
- “You surely know how the Prophet treated the Christians of Najran. The Christian sovereignty over Najran remained intact. Their churches in Najran were preserved. Their priests, their religious leaders, would come to Medina and converse with the Prophet. The Prophet used only logic and deduction to confront and converse with them. And when they refused to accept [Islam], they continued to live in their town, Najran, with full liberty and all the rights they had previously enjoyed.”
- “In my view, despite the fact that the foundation of Islam in this world at this time is not the perfect manifestation of Islam, and in the experience of Muslims this history comes with distortions and diversions, nevertheless in the same history we see that freedom of belief, freedom of religion and freedom of worship not only were available to followers of all religions, but even to materialists, who not only were not investigated and persecuted, but would freely associate with Muslims and engage Muslim thinkers in discussions.”

[The remainder of article includes interviews with other participants and attendees; since this section does not bear on the main theme of this conference it remains untranslated -- translator.]

Human Rights for All Iranians of Whatever Religious Persuasion

By Hashem Aghajari

Siyid Hashem Aghajari (b. circa 1957) is an Iranian historian, university professor and a critic of the Islamic Republic's government. The above was a portion of an interview with him published by Norooz News on Saturday, November 1, 2008, at: <http://norooznews.ir/news/9385.php>. It appeared in translation on November 24, 2008, at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/201>.

In a meeting with the members of a non-governmental organization, Tulu' Iranian Farda [tomorrow's dawning of Iranians], a discussion about religion and superstition took place in which Hashem Aghajari stated that he considered the root of superstition in Iran rests on social norms. He stated, "In recent years, unfortunately superstition has become more widespread in our country, and the cause of this must be carefully investigated."

According to an authorized reporter, Aghajari warned about the growing tendency of Iranians to superstition by saying, "This issue, which typically has psychological roots, has even taken hold among the educated class. In sum, superstition relates to social traditions and not to religious teachings. We have to be careful not to cross the boundary of these two things."

He then proceeded to divide rights into two categories: human rights and the rights of citizenship. He said, "Human rights relate to the rights of all humans solely because they are human." Aghajari added, "All the rights mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights pertain to the entirety of humanity. With a traditional reading of religion and religious texts, particularly in Islam, we can recognize the sensitivity of religion towards human rights."

He further noted, "I believe that all Iranians, of whatever religious persuasion, solely on the ground of being human beings, enjoy human rights and the right of citizenship." In another portion of his presentation, this university professor argued that human rights enveloped the downtrodden stratum of society. He emphasized, "In their fights and campaigns, women and laborers were among the groups which made a profound difference and fought for democratic values. They forced the bourgeois political order to accept democratic ways." ... He continued, "Human rights and democracy do not cause colonialism by themselves. However, in the course of history, they have been used as instruments for colonization."

Freedom of Belief and the Rights of Religious Minorities

By Hashem Aghajari

This report was posted on October 4, 2008, at Gooya online:

<http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2008/10/077278.php> and appeared in translation on November 24, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/205>. Siyyid Hashem Aghajari (b. ~1957) is an Iranian historian, university professor and a critic of the Islamic Republic. He was sentenced to death in 2002 on the charge of apostasy for a speech he gave on Islam urging Iranians to “not blindly follow” the clerics. In 2004, after a domestic and international outcry, his sentence was reduced to imprisonment.

At the invitation of the Committee for Investigation of Willful Arrests, a group of human rights activists and families of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience gathered on Wednesday afternoon [1 October 2008], so they could explore the concept of the peaceful coexistence of religions in accordance with Islamic teachings and discuss the role of freedom of belief within the Islamic framework. Towards this objective, on Wednesday, 1 October 2008, a session under the title “Freedom of Belief and the Rights of Religious Minorities” was conducted.

In this session, Hashem Aghajari, a professor of history at the university, spoke. However, prior to his presentation, Aghajari thought it important to offer a preamble:

The followers of other religions and beliefs among our countrymen must recognize that they are not the only ones subject to discrimination. We are faced with a regime and an administrative apparatus that in addition to non-Muslims, or those who perhaps have no belief in any of the divine religions, imposes discrimination on Muslims as well. Today we witness that in this land, in the name of the Shi’a creed, various limitations have been imposed on the Sunnis. Discrimination also exists within the Shi’a circle as well. In recent years, the Imami Shi’as of Sufi proclivities or various Dervish orders have beheld the destruction of their religious centers.

In this manner, Hashem Aghajari commenced his expansive talk on the session’s theme, and added his regret that heterodox thinkers and religious minorities have suffered oppression in the name of religion and Islam. He stated:

Today we witness a very narrow definition of “Us” versus “Others” given by the government and the nation in such a way that it affords rights to only one minority group among the wide circle of Muslims and our fellow Iranians: namely, those who have a particular understanding of Islam and Shi’ism – more specifically, the Shi’ism of the clerics who believe in the doctrine of the rule of jurists – and even within that small circle, to a smaller group who believes in a fundamentalist interpretation of religion.

This must be contrasted with the fact that in the Holy Book of us Muslims – that is, the Qur’an – and in the Prophet’s traditions, His character and ways, as well as others among our religion’s leaders and the Imams, and

even the history of Islamic societies, have all demonstrated that a diversity of beliefs and heterodoxy was welcomed.

He then referred to the passage of the Islamic Penal Code which had passed the [Iranian] parliament, which for the first time, officially, raises the issue of apostasy and laws pertaining to apostasy, and he suggested that this was a peculiar innovation. He stated that the passage of this law could be the basis of an effort to impose certain pressures on our countrymen – all in the name of defending religion and belief [i.e. orthodoxy].

Aghajari continued his comments by raising this question: Where in religion has sanction been granted to suppress the diversity of beliefs?

He said there is absolutely no connection between belief and coercion in the sacred Qur'an. He added, "The sacred Qur'an has explicitly proclaimed that religion should not be a matter for compulsion. Therefore, by considering the verses of the sacred Qur'an, based on responsible actions, one cannot justify the use of force, coercion and authority to impose religious belief or prevent freedom in the choice of belief and convictions."

For this reason, Aghajari considered unity of thought and belief to be unattainable other than through the instrumentality of teaching and education. This is because according to his opinion, if God had wanted to, He could have created a uniform system of belief; whereas destiny has decreed a multiplicity of belief systems.

Consequently, he added, "Those who wish to impose uniformity and homogeneity, not through teaching but rather through force, which at times may be clothed in the garment of law, stand in opposition to Qur'anic logic. This is because nowhere in the Qur'an has it been sanctioned to impose belief through compulsion."

Therefore, Aghajari arrived at the conclusion that "People are different and think differently. Everyone searches after the Truth, but no one can employ the Truth that they have come to believe as a mechanism for forcing and pressuring others to homogeneity [of belief]."

By stating that the situation of the followers of diverse religions is very clear in the Qur'an, this history professor [Aghajari] stated that the Qur'an instructed us to co-exist in peace and harmony with those who believe differently. In referring to the traditions of the Prophet of Islam in dealing with followers of other religions, Aghajari asked, "Which of the Prophet's battles was to impose His beliefs upon others?"

In continuing his remarks, he referred also to the history of Islam in support of his comments. "Despite the fact that the history of Islam is not an exact manifestation of Islam and this history contains certain distortions, nevertheless in the same history we find freedom of belief, religion and conviction – not only for the followers of other religions, but also for materialists who did not fall under investigation – nay rather they were freely and openly allowed to debate Islamic thinkers."

The history professor then considered the oppressions in Islamic history as political oppressions, which remain unrelated to religious identity, as they were an issue of [political] domination. He said, "All the critics and oppressors of the tyranny and oppression of the Bani Umayyah, whether Shi'a or Sunni, became objects of harm and injury."

While saying "ideology, hegemony and wealth are instruments for suppressing society", Aghajari explained that in Islamic societies this issue – namely suppression – takes place under the rubric of religion.

In continuing this discussion and raising another point, he referred to the book, *Millal va Nahal* [people and bees], and stated, "Certainly, the treatment of heterodox thinkers

in the history of Islam in the Middle Ages was more humane than the same group in European history.” He then continued his remarks,

In the past, political groups often occupied the same “identity space” as religious groups, and for this reason, political conflicts would be commingled with religious conflicts. Today, however, this commingling of identity has given way to a separation of identities. Today, religious identity is a global identity and is divorced from geographical boundaries; it is a form of correlation of belief and faith. But what remains as a true and immutable identity is nationalism and citizenry. The Islamic nation and the nation of Iran are both identities: one is a religious unity and the other is the unity of land and nationality.

Therefore, he considers that the mixing of these two identifies is very dangerous. Referring to the history of the last one hundred years, and emphasizing the oneness of the rights of the people of this land as enshrined in the Constitution after the Islamic Revolution, Aghajari stated, “If anyone acts treacherously towards this covenant, then we cannot expect its authority to endure. In this foundational law, freedom of belief has been recognized and the followers of other religions have been permitted to enjoy the rights of being Iranians.”

He added, “The experience of the last three decades has brought advances in the deduction of religious law and jurisprudence, at least among new-thinking clerics.” He referred to the view of Ayatollah Montazeri regarding the rights of citizenship of the Baha’is and said, “Here we are talking about how the realm and the right of citizenship is not just civil rights. This expression has the meaning and implication that the realm of Iran is a single entity and belongs to all the people of Iran. The people own this realm and rule over it. Therefore, each and every one of them is a citizen of this land.”

In emphasizing the role of government towards the nation and saying that all the members of the Iranian society enjoy the same equal rights, Aghajari stated:

Today we have reached this concept of liberty in which freedom does not mean mere majority rule; this is because this deduction can become antagonistic to liberty by itself, and lead to totalitarianism. Therefore along with this objective, the right of minorities based on principles of human rights must be considered.

While expressing joy over the fact that the concept of citizenship was entering the discourse of religious jurisprudence, he hoped that in the future we would witness the emergence of clerics with a new vision of humanity. He asked, “How is it that in Iran those who deprive “Others” of the right to participate in the government, the right to vote and the right of free expression, religion and speech, expect that other countries should nevertheless grant the same freedom and rights to their [minority] co-believers?”

Aghajari considered this type of view and method as contradictory, because if Others are suppressed in Iran, then in effect the Shi’as have issued a blanket license for the entire world to suppress their co-religionists [i.e. other Shi’as]. Consequently, Aghajari concluded that the main foundation of majority rule must be built on human rights for all.

Another section of Aghajari’s talk was an exploration of these questions:

Why are we today confronted with this paradox that some are worried over religious conversion [away from the Shi'a creed], and in order to confront this phenomenon are willing to appeal to the law of apostasy, while at the same time Islam is fast growing in the heart of Europe? Why in Iran do we have to force our people to wear the hijab [head and face covering for women], but in other societies girls freely chose to wear the hijab? Where in history do we find that a lasting faith can be built on flogging, compulsion and execution? Should not those in control of the levers of power reexamine their methods, and recognize that their unjustified demands are the primary reason why people are turning away from Islam?

In another part of his presentation, the history professor considered the phenomenon of fear of Islam in Europe, as separate from terrorism, and stressed, "A singular process which cannot be resisted is the diffusion of a religion."

Aghajari then raised the following question, "Would the use of force have a positive effect in confronting youth who are converting to Christianity or in the spread of the Baha'i religion?" He added that based on the logic of the Qur'an, a conviction that is not borne out of liberty is not a belief. Islam means choosing freely and intelligently. Even though God expects people to believe in Him, nowhere in the sacred Qur'an do we find a verse sanctioning the execution of those charged with apostasy.

In exposition of this theme, such questions were raised as, "Who is the apostate?" "What is apostasy?" "Would someone who searched and selected a belief system be considered an apostate?"

In addressing these issues he stated, "In defining apostasy, many clerics have considered the elements of 'ignorance' and 'rebellion' as intertwined. Therefore, real apostasy is not converting to another religion for the sake of truth, even if the person has committed an error. This is truth-seeking, and anyone seeking the truth may make a mistake." He then posed the question: "Should we kill a truth-seeking but mistaken individual?"

In continuing, Aghajari pointed to the view of some clerics who have expressed apostasy not as a religious belief but rather as a political action, and said, "Apostasy has existed as a political concept in all post-modern societies. Fortunately, our new-thinking clerics have taken important steps in this area as well. In the religious rulings of many of clerics, apostasy has no punishment and is subject to no penalty. Many clerics even have conditioned the implementation of corporal reprimands on the presence of the Sinless Imam [i.e. the Hidden Imam]."

In pointing to the changing times and conditions, Aghajari referred to historical analogy and said, "At that time [i.e. the time of Muhammad], political factions and religious groups were mixed." For this reason, he said, regarding some clerics' reliance on the death penalty in the early days of the spread of Islam that this sanction [i.e. the death penalty] was not because of a change in belief, but rather due to committing treasonous political acts. At the end, he spoke of the turning to a reactionary reading in religion which is in opposition to the fundamental human rights of the people. However, he thought it important to emphasize that the suppression of heterodox thinkers was not dictated by religious logic; rather it was the necessity of power. "The logic of force and domination is different from the logic of religion."

At the conclusion of Hashem Aghajari's talk, it was time for the families of political and religious prisoners to speak regarding these prisoners. [This portion is left untranslated as it did not bear on the main theme of this conference -- translator.]

Which Religion Has Authorized the Suppression of Ideas?

By Nader Karami

Nader Karami of Rooz Online has published a report of the Conference on Freedom of Ideas and Rights of Religious Minorities, which was held on October 6, 2008, at:

http://www.roozonline.com/archives/2008/10/post_9439.php. Prof Hashem Aghajari spoke at this conference and his comments, and Karami's report, appeared on November 29, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/268>.

At the invitation of the Committee to Pursue Arbitrary Arrests and concurrent with Eid-e Fetr [end of Ramadan celebration] a group of human rights activists and families of political and ideological prisoners gathered at the offices of the Organization of Iran's Graduates for a ceremony entitled "Freedom of Ideas and Rights of Religious Minorities" and to protest the legalization of death penalty for apostates and recent clashes with members of other religions.

At the start of this conference Hassan Assadi, the spokesman for the Committee to Pursue Arbitrary Arrests and the organizers of the conference said the goal of this gathering is to "promote a progressive and compassionate view of Divine religions based on peaceful co-existence among all people".

Stressing the right to freedom of religion as a fundamental human right in international laws, he said: "In recent months cases have been reported to the Committee to Pursue Arbitrary Arrests that show an increase in judicial confrontations with members of other religions or those who have converted to other religions. Today's meeting is in fact to discuss views that show this backward interpretation of religion and that it does not meet the requirements of the modern world."

But as the main speaker of this conference, Dr. Hashem Aghajari, professor of history at Tarbiyat-e Moddaress [Teacher Training] University said: "Our compatriots who follow other religions should know that discrimination is not limited to them. We are dealing with a hierarchical system that, in addition to non-Muslims, discriminates against those who do not believe in any of the Divine religions and Muslims alike. Today we can see that in this land and in the name of Shi'ism there are limitations for Sunni Muslims. This discrimination has extended even to Shi'i sects when Sufis and Imami Shi'is and the Dervishes have seen the destruction of their religious centers in recent years."

Hashem Aghajari said he was sorry that this discrimination against those who think differently or follow a different religion is done in the name of religion and Islam. He said: "Today we are seeing an extremely limited definition of "us" and "them" of government and people, to the extent that only a small minority from the vast array of Muslims and Iranians, those who adhere to a special understanding of Islam and Shi'ism, and within Shi'ism only those who adhere to the principle of faqih [religious jurist] and velayat-e faqih [principle of rule of religious jurist], and even within this circle those who adhere to a fundamentalist interpretation of religion can enjoy rights. And all this limited interpretation is happening when the Holy Book of Muslims, the Qur'an, the prophetic tradition, the life of the prophet and religious leaders and Imams, even the history of Muslim societies shows that they accepted and welcomed other thinkers and followers of other religions."

He then referred to the ratification of the Islamic punitive law in the Majles in which for the first time the concept of "ertedad" [apostasy] and punishment for "mortad"

[apostate] has been discussed. He said this is a novelty and ratification of this law will give justification for pressures against our compatriots in the name of defending religion.

Posing the question, where in religion do we find authorization for suppressing ideas, Aghajari said: "There is no connection between ideas and compulsion in the Holy Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an clearly states that there is no compulsion in religion. Therefore, based on the verses of the Holy Qur'an, we cannot, on the pretext of responsibility, use force and compulsion in imposing religion and preventing the freedom of choice."

For this reason Aghajari says uniformity in ideas and beliefs is only possible through compulsion and propaganda. According to him, if God wanted to he would have created a single umma [community] with a single belief, but he created different ideas.

He continued: "Those who want to create uniformity through force instead of persuasion, and sometimes in the guise of the law, are standing in opposition to the logic of the Qur'an. Nowhere in the Qur'an do we find authorization for force to impose an idea."

Aghajari then concluded: "People are created different and they think differently. Everyone is seeking the truth but no one can impose his truth or belief on others through compulsion to create uniformity."

Stating that the situation of followers of other religions is very clear in the Qur'an, this professor of history then said: "The Holy Qur'an orders us to live in peace with other religions." Referring to the tradition of the prophet in dealing with other religions, Aghajari said: "Which of the wars of the prophet was to impose an idea by force?"

On the strictness and severities in the history of Islam, Aghajari said: "These severities were more political not religious in nature; they had to do with political dominance. All critics and opponents, Shi'i or Sunni, were oppressed by the Umayyads [first caliphs in Islam]."

Referring to the last one hundred years and the emphasis that the post revolution constitution has on the rights of all people in this land, Aghajari said: "If anyone violates this covenant then he cannot claim legitimacy through this document. In this law the freedom of thought is acknowledged and the followers of other religions are to enjoy the rights that all Iranians enjoy."

He said the experiences of the past three decades show progress in the area of the shari'a [Islamic law] by the progressive faqihs. He especially referred to the views of Ayatollah Montazeri about the Baha'is and their citizenry rights and said: "Here we are talking about the land. Citizenry rights are not just civil rights. This means that Iran is a land that belongs to all the people of Iran. These people own the land and rule the land therefore each and everyone is a citizen of this land."

Continuing, Aghajari stressed the issue of government versus people and that all members of Iranian society have equal rights. He said: "Today we have arrived at this understanding of freedom that it is not just the rule of the majority because this logic can lead to acts that violate others' freedoms and to totalitarianism. Therefore along with the rule of the majority what becomes important is the rights of the minority based on fundamental human rights."

This religious researcher said he is happy that the concept of citizenry is entering fiqh [religious jurisprudence] and hoped that in the future we would have a fiqh in line with modern man. He asked: "How is it that those in Iran who do not allow the "other" to participate in the ruling establishment, do not respect their freedom of ideas and religion and speech, expect that their co-thinkers be given the same freedoms in other countries?" Aghajari said this viewpoint is contradictory in nature, "if this kind of oppression of the "other" is allowed in Iran then we are giving the authority for the same kind of oppression

around the world.” Aghajari then concluded that the red line of the ruling majority should be fundamental human rights.

In continuing Aghajari posed some questions, including “Today we are facing the paradox of those who are worried about people changing their religion and to deal with this they resort to the law of apostasy. At the same time Islam is growing rapidly in the heart of Europe. Why must we force women to wear the hejab [Islamic veil] while in other societies women freely choose to wear the hejab? Where in history do we find that the endurance of a faith is achieved through lashes, force, and hangings? Shouldn’t those in power revise their policies and know that these actions are one of the main reasons for people running away from Islam?”

Posing the question, is using force the way to deal with the young converting to Christianity and the expansion of Baha’ism, Aghajari said: “Based on the logic of Qur’an, a faith that is not chosen out of freedom is not really faith. Islam means free and informed choice. Even though God wants man to believe in him but in the Qur’an we do not have any verse that authorizes the punishment of death for an apostate.”

In describing this issue he posed more questions: Who is an apostate? What is apostasy? If someone chooses a faith after doing research on it is he an apostate? He continued: “Many of our jurists have defined apostasy by referring to ignorance and animosity. Therefore apostasy is not accepting another religion based on truth, even if the person has made a mistake. It is seeking the truth and any human being seeking the truth may make a mistake.” Thus, he asked: “Do we kill a person who is seeking the truth but makes a mistake?”

In continuing Aghajari referred to the views of some jurists who have said apostasy is a political concept not an ideological one and said: “Apostasy can be found in the politics of all pre-modern societies. Fortunately some of our progressive jurists have taken important steps in this area. In the fatwas [religious edicts] of many jurists there is no punishment for apostasy. Many jurists have even said the requirement for carrying out a punishment is the presence of an immaculate Imam.”

Referring to the change in times and the issue of semi-proof, Aghajari said in those times the political and the ideological were combined. That is why when some people refer to the punishment of death in the first years of Islam it was not because of an ideological change of heart but for political treason.

At the end of his talk Aghajari talked about a contracted reading of religion and that this kind of interpretation is in conflict with fundamental human rights. He said suppression of those who believe in other faiths is not out of the logic of religion but the logic of force and power. He concluded: “The logic of force and dominance through power is different than the logic of religion.”

After Aghajari’s talk, Asadi Zeydabadi referred to Hashem Aghajari’s death sentence for apostasy after his speech in Hamedan and said the speech in that episode should be a message to those who want to enter apostasy as a crime in the country’s judicial system. He addressed them and said: “It is better that you do not ratify a worn out law that society today does not accept.”

Seeking Help from the Head of Judiciary

Also at this conference, Mansour Osanlou’s mother who was too sick to go to the podium, asked Mazrzieh Mortazi Langaroudy, member of the society for defense of prisoners, to read a note to those present about the latest condition of his son.

Marzieh Mortazi Langaroudi referred to the bylaws of prisoners in Iran. Considering the positive points in these bylaws, as recounted by the wife of Mansour Osanlou, Langaroudi talked about the efforts by his family in asking for a temporary release due to his medical condition, something which has not occurred so far despite their efforts.

Osanlou's medical condition was another issue discussed at this gathering. Putting hand cuffs and chains on his feet when transferring him to the hospital was something that many families were affected by and protested.

Thus, along with Parvaneh Osanlou, Mansour Osanlou's wife, who had asked Ayatollah Shahroudi to help her family, Mortazi Langaroudi also asked Shahroudi for his help in reviewing Mansour Osanlou and other political prisoners' condition.

After presenting a report on the condition of this labor activist [Osanlou], the issue of the Kurdish activists' hunger strike in prison came up. Giving a short description of their condition due to the concerns of human rights activists became the next topic of discussion at the gathering.

Kurdish Prisoners and Hunger Strike

At the request of the organizers of the conference Mohammad Ali Towfiqi, the political and civil activist, gave a short description of the bad condition of these prisoners, especially Hedayat Ghazami and Sabah Nasri, the two Kurdish students. He said: "Without a center-periphery look and while supporting these prisoners, national forces should ask that they end their hunger strike and pursue other ways to bring attention to their problems."

Then Asad Zeydabadi, as representative of the Committee to Pursue Arbitrary Arrests asked these prisoners to end their hunger strike on the occasion of Eid-e Fetr.

Threatening Families of Political and Ideological Prisoners

Wife of Alireza Sarrafi, the minority rights activist in Azarbayjan, also described her husband's situation for those present at the conference. She talked about threats against the family after the arrest of her husband.

At this moment Mansour Osanlou's mother who had come and stood by Alireza Saffari's wife because she was upset, asked the people present at the gathering to try harder to find out about the condition of prisoners and for their freedom.

The problems that were created for some Iranian families who had traveled to Iraq to visit their family members who are living in Ashraf camp was the other issue discussed. One of these people who had participated in this gathering on the afternoon of Eid-e Fetr, gave a short report on the condition of his child who is a prisoner. Yazerlou talked about big collaterals he had to put down for her spouse and child. She talked about her child's physical condition in prison and that he is awaiting a trial on 15 Aban [5 November].

Radicalism and Contempt

By Shirin Ebadi

The following are excerpts of Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi's speech while receiving an honorary doctorate – her twenty-third – from Poitiers University in France and posted on Rooz online: http://www.roozonline.com/english/archives/2008/12/radicalism_and_contempt.html and also on December 8, 2008, on <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/370>.

Values such as human rights are international standards that apply to all cultures and religions across national boundaries. For this reason, it is meaningless to speak of eastern or western, or, Islamic and Christian human rights.

However, the equality of individuals belonging to diverse traditions and religions with respect to human rights is accompanied by another principle, which is the equality of individuals in entitlement to “respect” and “social esteem.” Simply put, the principle that human beings must not be subjected to discrimination because of their race, religion or tradition.

This point is of more importance today, particularly in European nations such as France. It is so because Europe's demographics have changed very much in the aftermath of the Second World War and particularly in the past twenty years, and the number of immigrants who have arrived from various backgrounds and most of whom are interested in retaining their national and native heritage is increasing.

Unfortunately, there are many radical groups in the immigrant community with members from the second or third generation of immigrants. This means that European education and socialization has failed in achieving its goal. A while ago an Arab woman opened up to me to share the story of how she had left her homeland with so much difficulty to come to Europe to give her children a chance to grow up in an open society. She had left behind annoying traditions such as mandatory Hejab [Islamic covering for women] to come to Europe, but now her fifteen year old daughter – who was born in a European country and has European citizenship – had suddenly decided to appear with a kind of Hejab in society that, more than anything else, resembled a kind of radicalism. This mother told me that had she known that her daughter would choose such a path, she would never had left her homeland and suffer hardships of immigration. She wanted my advice, and now I pose this question to you and French intellectuals: what happened to this girl that has attracted her to radicalism?

The natural reaction of a person looked upon with contempt is radicalism and engagement in exaggerated behavior in preserving things that he or she regards as signs of identity, especially when higher social values are not yet grasped. For some time now a phenomenon has emerged in certain European societies that has left a mark on schools and educational institutions, and that is belittling and looking down on non-European cultures and religions. We often hear reports that in certain schools Muslims are insulted and students who are not “European Christians” are shunned by others. This phenomenon is visible on other levels among the families of these students.

Without a doubt, however, events such as September 11 and the Madrid attacks and, in general, increasing terrorist activities that know no logic but bombs and violence have been very influential in spreading such views. But are all Muslims terrorists? Are radicalism and superstitions simply products of immigration? Is any woman who wears the Hejab a Bin Laden ally and propagator of Taliban's ideology?

This is where we have to, before anything else, begin with schools. If we do not teach European children and teenagers that respect for diverse civilizations is the basis of mutual recognition, we will witness more disruptions and divisions in the future, all of which arise out of lack of tolerance for others.

We will have peace only when we include others in the future that we envision for ourselves.

Globalization will be regarded as a positive historic development only when it is able to increase the chances of "global peace" and reduces present inequalities in the world. Otherwise, hoping to change today's tragic conditions in the future will not be based on reality.

Proclamation by Karaj Prisoners in Support of their Baha'i Countrymen

By Karaj Prisoners

Human Rights Activists of Iran posted this proclamation on May 29, 2006 under the heading, "In support of our Baha'i countrymen" at: <http://www.iran-bra.blogfa.com/post-47.aspx>, and it was reposted on December 8, 2008, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/373>.

Subsequent to the arrest of the 54 Baha'i youth in Shiraz who were conducting humanitarian activities, but were arrested on the false charge of "activities against the State", on May 28, 2006, the political prisoners of Reja'i Prison (also known as Gawhar-Dasht Prison) in Karaj issued the following "proclamation in support of our Baha'i countrymen":

In the Name of the Creator of Liberty!

The news of the arrest of 52 of our Baha'i fellow-citizens in Shiraz is indeed a source of grief for everyone who hears it.

Although the news of suppression, persecution and harassment of minorities in Iran under the rule of the akhunds [clerics] is not new, the complications for Baha'is of that area has reached a new height of difficulties. This is particularly the case since under the Islamic Republic Baha'i minorities have never been accepted as a recognized minority. From the very beginning of the revolution until the present day, the mere fact of being a Baha'i is considered a crime.

This discrimination demands the persistent attention of human rights activists, so that along with defending the rights of minorities in this country, they would exert every effort indefatigably to ensure that the Baha'is are included on the list of the recognized minorities of Iran.

We, the political prisoners of Reja'i Prison in Karaj, not only condemn this inhuman deed by the liberty-killing regime of the mullahs, but also ask that the Baha'i religion be given the status of a recognized minority group, and that their rights, just as the rights of all other religious minorities, should be respected.

Unity, Struggle and Victory!
Political Prisoners of Reja'i Prison in the town of (Gawhar-Dasht) Karaj.

Destruction of Baha'i Cemeteries: A Systematic Anti-Baha'i Campaign

By Human Rights Activists of Iran

The Vahid Mazahib [The Religious Group] of the Human Rights Activists of Iran posted the following report along with a video on December 9, 2008, at:

http://www.brairan.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29:2008-12-09-14-25-13&catid=31:2008-12-06-06-28-40&Itemid=58, and was reflected at:
<http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/385>.

Among the various problems confronting the Baha'is of Iran, one can point to the systematic destruction and desecration of their cemeteries as a significant element of their ongoing persecutions. Of course, these destructions are not a new development in recent years, nor limited to only certain areas of the country; nevertheless desecration of these cemeteries has increased considerably in recent months across the entire country.

Among them is the [Baha'i] cemetery at Darzikola, near the town of Qa'emshahr, which has been assaulted several times. [Note: Several postings on this subject are available on Iran Press Watch, which can be accessed by searching, Darzikola.]

The land for this cemetery was bequeathed to the Baha'i community of that region about 100 years ago by the late 'Abdu'l-Ghani 'Abdi. It is located at marker Km 2 on the highway connecting Qa'emshahr to Firuz-Kuh. The cemetery is walled on three sides and faces the highway on the west and southwest sides — this portion is fenced in by barbed wire.

In 1983, the neighboring Muslim residents objected to the burial of one of the Baha'is. However, through the persistent efforts of the Baha'i community they were able to overcome this objection and obtain permission to bury the deceased at the Darzikola cemetery.

On 12 May 2008, the Department of Intelligence of Qa'emshahr, without designating a new location, warned the Baha'i community about the use of their cemetery at Darzikola. Because of this issue, two prominent members of the Baha'i community of that region were imprisoned. Of these two, Mr. 'Ali Ahmadi continues to be incarcerated until now.

Eventually, on the morning of Thursday, 23 October 2008, an attack on this cemetery using large bulldozers resulted in 80% of the graves being thoroughly demolished and only a handful of remaining unmolested. After the Baha'is reported this assault, several ranking military officers and the Qa'emshahr's representative to the Islamic Consultative Council [i.e. national parliament], Mr. Ezatu'llah Akbari, came to the site; however, without paying the least attention or undertaking any investigation, they then left the location.

After this incident, this cemetery was severely attacked two more times. The first of the two subsequent assaults was on 3 November 2008; however, the Baha'is were present at the cemetery at the time and prevented further destruction of graves. However, the second time, on 22 November, the attack took place at 4 o'clock in the morning by a group of unknown assailants who had their faces covered. After they cut off the electricity to the site and removed the gravestones, they proceeded to level the ground and thoroughly obliterate any trace of gravesites. It so happened that one of the Baha'is came upon the men in the course of their destruction, but he was severely beaten and abused by the assailants.

Those familiar with the situation believe that ever since a certain “Movahhed” became the Chief of Intelligence in the province of Mazandaran, reactionary and extreme groups have gained support for their illegal and inhumane activities.

'Ashura Ceremonies and the Baha'is

By Akhtar Arjmandi

Akhtar Arjmandi maintains a blog dedicated to the defense of Iran's Baha'i Community where she refutes attacks made against Baha'is in the Iranian press and in Persian anti-Baha'i polemical works. The following report was published on her blog on January 12, 2009, and translated by Omid Ghaemmaghami on January 13, 2009 at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/742>.

Anti-Baha'ism is beginning to take on new dimensions! Until now, Baha'is were accused of being cohorts of the Pahlavi regime and held responsible for every offense and setback that occurred in Iran before the Islamic revolution. More recently, every Mulla in Iran has been blaming the Baha'is for everything that fails to conform with his vision of the Islamic Republic.

In the past few days, I came across two astonishing reports. First, the Isfahan branch of the Iranian Qur'an News Agency (IQNA) announced that Ayatollah Tabataba'i, the Friday prayer leader in Isfahan, declared in a speech following Friday prayers at Imam Khomeini Square last week, "This year, in the ceremonies mourning the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him), many of the inappropriate behaviors that called these ceremonies into question were less visible and many of the customs that were innovated in the Qajar period, after the creation of the Baha'i sect, were less noticeable." Two days later, the Iran Student Correspondents Association (ISCA) published comments from a discussion with mid-level cleric Mojtaba Kashani, a member of the central parliamentary organization Ansar-e Hezbollah, during which Mr. Kashani, introduced by ISCA as "a specialist in religious affairs," stated, "The best way to eliminate the religious values associated with an event like 'Ashura – an event that is part and parcel of an exalted Islamic foundation and the principles of religious knowledge – is to make these rituals and ceremonies of mourning completely meaningless and empty." He then confidently declared, "A large measure of the harm that has befallen some of the eulogies and mourning ceremonies in the last ten years has been deliberate and premeditated, and without a doubt, Baha'ism and the CIA have had a major influence in this regard."

I can only say [in the words of Rumi], "amazement upon amazement came with such tales." On the one hand, hearing this new idea repeated by two men two days apart from one another suggests that there is some level of centralized planning or collaboration taking place in the area of anti-Baha'ism in Iran which suits what is happening on a given day. On the other hand, this collaboration is not very careful when it comes to details: One cleric connects "the inappropriate behaviors" during 'Ashura with the birth of the Baha'i religion in Qajar Iran, while the other states that "the harm" Baha'is have perpetrated against 'Ashura occurred in the last ten years. What is more, all of these statements are being made when two Baha'is imprisoned in northern Iran are being punished for refusing to participate in 'Ashura mourning rituals!

The Friday prayer leader in Isfahan did not explain just how Baha'is introduced new "innovations" in the 'Ashura ceremonies during the Qajar period. Nor did the Iran Student Correspondents Association (ISCA) seek an answer to the question of precisely what role the Baha'is have had in recent decades "to render meaningless" the mourning rituals of millions of Shi'a in Iran. One did not ask and the other did not say since they are both well aware that their reports are absurd and utterly baseless. They know well that what they seek

to destroy is the Baha'i name. How this is to be done or how fatuous and inconsistent their means may be matters not.

Perhaps these gentlemen are aware that the Baha'i Writings speak of all of the Shi'i Imams, and in particular Imam Husayn, with deep love and respect, and that Baha'is have a special Tablet of Visitation for Imam Husayn that is profoundly beautiful. In my opinion, these strange lies may have been fabricated as a result of a certain trepidation on the part of the clerics about the effect that the same Tablet of Visitation can have on the hearts of the Shi'a, together with a fear on their part that Iranians will realize that in contrast to what their religious leaders have shown them, Baha'is are in full harmony with the values of true Islam.

Such accusations about 'Ashura mourning rituals are slung despite the fact that Baha'is each year mourn and commemorate peacefully and quietly the observance of the passing of their faith's Founder and the martyrdom of His forerunner. Moreover, in accordance with their religious precepts, Baha'is abstain from uncontrollable outbursts at the passing of family members or friends. The memorial gatherings held by Baha'is to commemorate someone's passing testify to this. These gatherings are dedicated to prayer and meditation – meditation on the fact that we too will one day die just as the person whose death we are today mourning. If there is one thing Baha'is are eager to spread among their countrymen, it is this spirit of thoughtful reflection. Don't accuse them of promoting self-flagellation!

Baha'is Living in Iran with No Human Rights

By Wahied Wahdat-Hagh

Dr. Wahdat-Hagh is a Senior Fellow with the European Foundation for Democracy in Brussels. This essay was published on December 12, 2008, and appeared in German and English at:

http://europeandemocracy.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13278&catid=4&Itemid=22, and posted at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/789>.

Universal human rights are being trampled underfoot in the Islamic “Republic” of Iran. In particular, the Baha'is in Iran are regarded as people with no rights.

On 10 December, Human Rights Day, the organisation known as Human Rights Activists In Iran recalled a demonstration held in Tehran on 7 December 1953. At this demonstration, intended to show solidarity with the then prime minister Mossadegh, three Iranian students were shot dead: Shariat Razavi, Ghandchi and Bozorgnia. Since then, 7 December has been known as Student Day in Iran.

This year, too, several hundred students gathered in front of the main building of Tehran University. Their demands included the release of students from Iranian prisons and an end to discrimination against Iranian women.

State ban on education for Baha'is

On 7 December 2008, Human Rights Activists in Iran published a statement by two Baha'i students issued on behalf of all Baha'is not allowed to study in Iran. Navid Khanjani and Hesam Misaqi linked this statement to the events of 7 December 1953.

Today, 55 years later, many young Iranians are denied the right to university education. For more than 30 years, the Iranian Baha'is have had no civil rights. Until 2004, they did not even have the right to sit the university admission exam. While it is true that a few have enrolled in the past few years, most of them have been driven out of university, again solely because of their religious beliefs. A handful of Baha'is are currently allowed to study at Iranian universities in an attempt to limit international criticism.

Cultural crime

Khanjani and Misaqi rightly speak of a “cultural crime” since each year about 1,000 new applicants for university places are turned down and not allowed to study purely because of their beliefs. The students point out that Hossein Amanat, the architect of Tehran University, built before the Islamic Revolution, was a Baha'i. Amanat also built the Azadi Tower, the city's landmark. Today, however, Iranian students who are Baha'is like Amanat are apparently no longer allowed to study at the very university that was designed by a Baha'i.

The first girls' school in Iran was also founded by Baha'is in 1909. It was later closed following pressure from fanatical clerics. Today, the children of those who instituted such schools are no longer allowed to study at Iranian universities.

While Khanjani and Misaqi did not take part in this year's student actions, they nonetheless wholeheartedly supported the Iranian student activists. Khanjani and Misaqi hope that one day they will be free to take part in campaigns involving students of all beliefs and persuasions.

Graveyard desecrations sanctioned by state (and arbitrary detentions)

On 9 December 2008, Human Rights Activists in Iran again reported on the systematic destruction of Baha'i cemeteries. Although the destruction of Baha'i graves is nothing new, this phenomenon has definitely increased over the past few months.

The human rights organization delivered a report on the Baha'i cemetery in Qaemshahr, created on a plot of land given to the Baha'i community by Abdolqani Abdi about 100 years ago. As early as 1983, a number of Muslims living near the cemetery prevented Baha'is burying their dead there. The bodies had to be buried in a cemetery in Darzikola.

This cemetery has been repeatedly vandalized over the past few months. On May 12, 2008, the Baha'i community was warned by the Iranian secret service in Qaemshahr not to bury its dead in Darzikola either.

No permission was granted to establish a new cemetery. At the same time two members of the Baha'i community were arbitrarily detained in the region of Mazandaran. On October 23 the Darzikola cemetery was destroyed by bulldozers, with only a few gravestones surviving the destruction. The Baha'i cemetery was subsequently attacked twice more, on November 3 and November 22, to destroy the remaining gravestones.

The right to freedom of education

The Intelligence Service Ministry has a new representative in the province of Mazandaran. According to Iranpresswatch, it is highly likely that the new representative will use paramilitary forces to desecrate these Baha'i graves.

Iranpresswatch also reported that three Baha'i social workers in Yasuj had been detained on 23 November 2008. Ruhyyih Yazdani, Zulaykha Musavi and Ali-Askar Ravanbakhsh have helped children aged between five and seven from poor families to read and write. They were accused of being a "threat to national security" because they wanted to help children to lead a better life.

As Timesonline reported, on the 60th anniversary of the adoption and proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, professors, clerics, writers and politicians have spoken up for the Iranian Baha'is and called for the right to freedom of education for Baha'i in Iran:

Lord Parekh of Kingston-upon-Hull; Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws; Deborah Orr; Mairead Corrigan Maguire; Nobel Peace Laureate; Professor Stephen Chan; Department of Political and International Studies, SOAS; Professor Geraldine van Bueren; Queen Mary University of London; Professor Peter Finn; Principal, St Mary University College, Belfast; Professor Tony Gallagher; School of Education; St. Mary's University College, Belfast; Lord Gifford; Bishop Idris Jones; Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church; The Right Rev David Lunan; Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; Norman Richardson; Stranmillis College, Belfast; Pierrot Ngadi; Co-ordinator, Refugee Wales; Francis Davis; Director, International Young Leaders Network; Patrick Yu, Executive Director, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities; Professor Colin Sucking; Former Vice Principal, University of Strathclyde, The Most Rev. Keith Patrick O'Brien, Cardinal and Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

Why are they Afraid of the Dead?

By Monireh Baradaran

The original Persian of this essay was posted on January 22, 2009, at http://zamaaneh.com/humanrights/2009/01/post_326.html and a translation by Gloria Yazdani posted on <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/878> on January 24, 2009.

Have you read this news?

Last night, at midnight, a number of plain-clothes officers attacked the Baha'i Cemetery in Qa'emshahr with a lorry and a bulldozer; and set out to remove the tombstones and to level the ground. According to a report from the Human Rights Activists Group in Iran, electricity had been completely cut off in the whole area during this undertaking, and a shot was fired in the air when someone from the neighborhood was caught witnessing the activities. The witness was then seized, his hands and feet were tied up, and he was left alone in this condition in a remote area of the cemetery.

The attack and destruction that took place last night was the third in a series and, in a way, the fiercest of its kind since the destruction on 23 Oct and 22 Nov of this year; and the intent was to erase every trace of the Baha'i cemetery in this area. (Quoted from <http://peykeiran.com/> January 19, 2009)

Another news item on 8 January 2009 was about the destruction of the cemetery in Khavaran.³ This attack was focused particularly on the destruction of the section in which Baha'i martyrs had been buried. This section was entirely demolished by a bulldozer.

Attacking cemeteries and breaking the tombstones of martyrs are not new developments. Tombs of martyrs in Behesht Zahra, including the ones in section 33, where martyrs from the Shah's time are buried, and even the burial places of our great literary and cultural figures, such as that of Ahmad Shamlu, have not remained safe from these sorts of attacks.

Breaking the tombstone of one who is dead is an act of insult and belittlement, as well as a cultural violation. All existing cultures, including our own, cherish special reverence for the dead, for remembering those who are no longer among the living, and for performing special rituals in honor of the deceased. The right to have a designated place for burying one's dead and for performing the associated ceremonies has always existed in every land. This right has in fact been more prominent than the rights of citizenship.

However, the complete destruction and wiping out of cemeteries in the last few days has reached new levels of attacking the dead, in which the authorities have been involved

³ Khavaran is a cemetery located in the South-East part of Tehran. It was designated as a burial place for such religious minorities as Hindus and Christians, as well as Baha'is more recently. It was also used as a mass grave site containing thousands of corpses from the 1981 executions of Iranian prisoners by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

throughout the last twenty-something years. What sort of fear could possibly prompt anyone to commit such acts?

The reason for fearing Khavaran is apparent to everyone: It signifies heinous crimes! We know that aside from the tombs with no names, there are also two mass graves there which were dug in September 1988. Khavaran is a place that binds the families together; and by destroying it the intention is, on the one hand, to destroy criminal evidence, and on the other hand to prevent families from getting together.

Why the attacks on Baha'i cemeteries and their destruction?

The destruction of Baha'i cemeteries is part of the policies concerning the abolition of the citizenship rights of the Baha'is; and in some cases this abolition of rights of the Baha'is includes even their right to life! In the last few months, pressure on the Baha'is, arrests and persecution have increased considerably. How far will these arrests and persecutions go? Are these meant as preparation for massacring our fellow Baha'i countrymen?

Experience in history has demonstrated that massacres of a racial, religious or cultural nature have always endeavored to annihilate the history and culture of the victims. To annihilate the creed of a people, their history must first be wiped clean. Fear of the dead represents the fear of history. A cemetery is not only a place in which religious and cultural practices are honored, it is also a place that holds history within itself – at least the history of a few generations past! A cemetery is a witness to the lives of the people in a country. To destroy a cemetery is to destroy history. A Baha'i Cemetery reminds us that Baha'is have also been part of this land and have lived in this country.

Demolishing cemeteries is a reminder of the crimes committed by the Nazis against the Jews. Attacking Jewish cemeteries and destroying them began in the year 1933 with the coming to power of Hitler, and it was a prelude to their massacre! Even today, in pursuit of that same criminal ideology, Neo-Nazis attack Jewish cemeteries every now and again in European cities, break the tombstones and the memorabilia, and engrave on them the swastika. The destruction of Jewish cemeteries at the time of Nazi Germany was the prelude to the massacre and the physical annihilation of the Jews in an effort to wipe clean their history and any other trace of their existence.

“The Ritually Impure”

There is one common factor between the destruction of the Baha'i Cemetery and that of the Khavaran Cemetery. Those resting in both places are “ritually impure” [“najes”]! According to Muslim interpretations, Baha'is and unbelievers are ritually unclean and untouchable — even their dead! One should stay clear of them at all times! Isolating a people's dead is in effect to seclude the living and to suppress them. Considering a group of people as untouchable based on their religion or belief is very much a part of the belief system of many Muslims in our country.

However, when such a belief becomes part of a government's policies, the field is prepared for the persecution and ultimately for the annihilation of the “untouchables” without it being objectionable to the society. Not only is the culture of considering people of other thoughts as “untouchable” an inauspicious witness to the high elevation of the community's intolerance, but it also brings about violence. The “untouchable” becomes the “Other” being; one who is not one of us, and for whose fate we do not care. We come to consider that although we have not been harmed by him, his non-existence may be for the better.

The culture of considering some as “untouchable” is so deep-rooted in our community that even those who are in opposition to the Islamic Republic have not been able to overcome it! I will give you an example and, by this example, I do not mean to accuse any one in particular. Muhammad Ja’fari, the President of the Newspaper of the Islamic Republic at the time, writes the following about being cellmate with a leftist, in his memoirs of the prisons of the Islamic republic in the 80s [presumably 1980s]:

“My cellmate was a young leftist, and certain matters pertaining to being unclean and untouchable – especially in those days – made cohabitation in such small surroundings very difficult.” (Page 78, vol. 1)

A little while later, he was put together in a cell with a Baha’i. Sadly, he writes:

“I thought to myself, wondering, if they believed in the things they professed, why did they keep Muslims, leftists and Baha’is together in one cell?” (Page 97, vol.1)

The harsh attitude of anti-Baha’i groups towards the Baha’is and unbelievers — which before the Islamic Revolution also created great catastrophes — has now become government policy; this could turn into a disastrous genocide if we do not weary of it!

Violations of the Rights of our Baha'i Countrymen

By Hamid Hamidi

This is the text of a talk given by Hamid Hamidi, a respected Iranian journalist in Europe and the author of a number of learned articles on various themes of human and civil rights of Iranians. This seminal expression was posted on December 20, 2008, at: <http://asre-nou.net/plb/view.php?objnr=1547> and a summary presented on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights in Brussels, Belgium. Its translation appeared on February 23, 2009, at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/880>.

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us accept that in the third millennium the necessary conditions are set for the rite of passage towards democracy and justice, and for the fulfillment thereof in human society and in our own nation, by standing against the violation of citizenship rights and through the application of the Charter on Human Rights with all of its covenants, conventions and supplementary clauses. I wish to commence my discourse with reference to our Baha'i compatriots whose civil and human rights have been violated ever since the inception of the Babi Movement [in 1844] and that of Baha'ism [starting in 1863].

I will begin by asking this fundamental question: How can one define the word "citizen"? I ask in order that within the parameters of that definition, one could attribute it to a group of people and identify the characteristics that would exclude certain people from its domain?

Who is a "Citizen" and what Rights does a Citizen Possess?

Citizens are those individuals in society who are possessed of such rights as being able to participate in compiling a set of codes for social behavior. As such, those members of society who are not given an opportunity to participate in formulating the laws that affect them, but who are duty-bound to obey laws that are legislated by others, are not considered citizens. Some sociologists identify this group of individuals as "subjects"; while others prefer to use such terminology as "rightful citizens" versus "binding citizens" — in order to identify these two ends of the spectrum in society.

If we were to consider the attainment of one's "rights" as the manifestation of the most common objective of the members of human society in today's developed communities, and to credit — within the same framework — the setting of the standards for social behavior with the values of those communities; then given the visible and fundamental differences in these values we would be able to access the progressive path that leads to the acceptance of those common objectives — given the varying degrees of affectability of each of these communities by factors of geographical, economic, political and social natures. It is only through this sort of an observation that one could gain insight into the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights within the developmental progress of Western Civilization.

In other words, through an analysis from this angle, one could reach the reasoning that in principle the Declaration of Human Rights should be considered — both from

philosophical as well as historical viewpoints – as the continuation of a progressive social process from which have evolved the Magna Carta [Great Charter]⁴ of England (1215 AD), the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in France (1789 AD)⁵, and ultimately the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948 AD) by the United Nations General Assembly, which today also endeavors to protect the global nature of humanity.

This does not necessarily mean that Western Civilization has consistently and from its onset championed a progressive process that has culminated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights! It only means that the process has evolved and attained this outcome. At the same time, however, one could also ponder the idea that because the manner in which the members of society benefited from human rights have been more or less intertwined with the will of the leaders of the community, these rights have consequently been interpreted within the parameters of the powers possessed by the leaders; and therefore until recently (and in some communities even now) a person's rights were investigated within the parameters of the rights of a citizen.

This would mean that leaders try to formulate the manner of dealing with their subjects within the limits of their own land and on the basis of the national legal order, which is sometimes influenced by the will of the leader. Therefore, it is important to consider the position which the leader (king, emperor, caliph, etc...) defines for himself with respect to his subjects in determining the path that leads to perfection in the development of citizenship rights; and to ponder the aforementioned hypothesis — meaning defining the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an extension of Western civilization.

Moreover, an analysis of the relationship between the leader and the members of the community indicates how this progressive journey of the development of human rights can be slowed down when a leader attaches the reason for his existence to ideological or divine elements, and deprives the members of the community of their citizenship rights and especially of their right to freely choose their leaders. The same analysis from another angle — that is the relationship between citizenship rights and human rights from the viewpoint that people of all classes are affected by this relationship – will make clear the contradictions between the applicability of some citizenship rights, despite their lack of compatibility with human rights. In view of what has been discussed so far, it can be concluded that: “Citizenship” can be attributed to an individual who enjoys civil, social and political rights; and that having “citizenship rights” means that society would have the right to determine its own fate. Therefore, when the members of a community do not have any right to determine their own fate and future, they cannot be considered citizens.

The political culture dominating human societies is of the “participatory” type. In a participatory culture, members of society are key participants in determining their own fate. Opposite to the Participatory Culture is the “Consumer” or the “Subordinate” Culture. Blind imitation of and reaction to environmental developments are among the special characteristics of a consumer or a subordinate culture. The citizen in relation to his environment eases into a cooperative behavior. Within the framework of social interaction, one's civil identity is constructed and the citizen's mind is developed in a deductive/analogical manner. A mind strictly focused on causation is the exact opposite of a

⁴ The Great Charter of English liberty granted (under considerable duress) by King John at Runnymede on June 15, 1215.

⁵ The Declaration of the rights of man and the citizen, along with the decrees of 4 & 11 August 1789 abolishing feudal rights, was one of the fundamental texts adopted by the Constituent Assembly of France formed in the wake of the meeting of the Estates General.

deductive mind, which evaluates his environment solely based on previously existing hypotheses. A citizen's evaluation of his environment is based on reason; and the citizen prefers the use of his tongue as an instrument for persuading another person among his social interactions — instead of force and power.

Adherence to law is another attribute amongst the characteristics of a citizen. The citizen structures his life on the basis of error-margins and majority belief. Within this path, freedom of speech is considered an inseparable part of the civil life of a citizen. Freedom of speech is considered the mother of all individual and social freedoms. Freedom of speech means that the citizen is able to express — openly and officially — his philosophical, political and religious beliefs without any fear. In principle, the observance or the lack of observance of a citizen's rights — which include civil, social and political rights — is the determining factor for democracy and justice in human societies.

In the event that the aforementioned three-fold rights are not observed, the concept of the word “citizen” will be in question. The observance or lack of observance of the aforementioned rights is directly related to the haecceity ["this-ness" or individuality] of political orders. Democratization in a political environment is a significant instrument in the realization of “citizenship”. A tendency towards despotic politics is a great obstacle for structuring citizenship rights.

Totalitarianism, authoritarianism, despotism or modern dictatorship reduce the definition of citizenship to “subjects” or “subordinate citizens”, in order to force the people to submit to their ruling politics. The individual who ranks below a citizen is one whose behavior is emotional and combined with negative [conflict-preferring] individualism. In negative individualism, one considers attaining maximum individual benefit through every possible means. A citizen models his actions after positive [cooperation-preferring] individualism; meaning he endeavors to attain maximum individual benefit only through legitimate means. Legitimate means here include anything that encompasses respect towards the freedom and rights of others. The concepts of “a modern individual” and “a citizen” are closely intertwined. A citizen is reborn through modernity. Democratic governments create a more suitable atmosphere — in comparison with authoritarian or totalitarian governments — for the fulfillment of the aforementioned concepts.

Governments that are not democratic — while faced with the concept of citizenship and its associated rights — find themselves afflicted with a sort of a political “allergy”, because they do not consider the will of the nation as their source of power and that of their constitution. They try to force the citizen to submit to the ruling politics rather than to help develop those politics.

Constitutionalism by political forces of an authoritarian or totalitarian nature is formed through the twin means of populism and economic/industrial growth. Through these means citizenship rights are directed to follow a political leadership which is not democratic.

Violation of the Rights of the Baha'is

The human and citizenship rights of our Baha'i compatriots have — because of the presence of Shi'ah ecclesiastics in Iran and the Baha'is' lack of official recognition — been visibly violated in different periods in the history in our country. The greatest violation of these rights is that neither in the nation's Constitution, nor in the supplements and amendments thereof, is the belief system of this group of Iranians recognized. It was for this same reason that during the rule of Reza Shah the registration of Baha'i marriages was refused by most

officials through the recommendation of religious clerics and by the direct orders of Reza Shah.

In light of the fact that I intend to speak of the violation of the rights of these fellow countrymen during the Islamic Regime, I find it necessary to make reference to the role which Shi'ah ecclesiastics played in the violation of the rights of these same people in the years preceding the Islamic Revolution.

A Historical Perspective

With the ascendancy of Reza Khan [later Reza Shah] to the rank of Prime Minister in 1923, arrests and the persecution of Baha'is were set in motion by the government and with the support of the leaders of Shi'ah Islam.

By the inauguration and establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty, persecution of Baha'is took an entirely different shape and form. Prior to that, these persecutions were usually instigated locally. Sometimes the Central Government would support these instigations and sometimes it would object to them, fearing that events would spin out of control. With the establishment of the Pahlavi regime and its determination to focus its attention on the country's affairs, the Central Government itself gradually began to be the primary instrument of instigating persecutions. Consequently, while it was mainly ruffians and rascals who were previously responsible for acts of violence, these actions had now taken an administrative form and were often carried out with governmental guidance and direct orders given by legal courts. This was partly due to the fact that by then the Baha'i Community had become considerably more visible, and was establishing administrative centers, Baha'i schools and other social agencies.

Subsequently, in 1934, when a Baha'i school closed one day on a Baha'i Holy Day, the government used this fact as an excuse to close down a series of Baha'i schools (six schools in total) permanently. Moreover, action was taken to ensure that Baha'is were banned from publishing or importing printed matter and from registering their marriages. A great number of Baha'is were fired from their government or army positions. By 1938, getting married became a criminal offence if the marriage was not performed under the regulations of one of the recognized religions. Inasmuch as the Baha'i Faith in the 1906 Constitution was not recognized as an official religion, a number of young men at the time were sent to prison solely for the reason of entering into wedlock! One of the consequences of emerging from obscurity was the fact that the Baha'is were becoming more easily recognizable, and were therefore in greater risk of being targets of persecution. An example of this is the fact that stones were thrown at those attending Baha'i schools throughout the length of their walking journey to school.

The most severe incident of persecution against the Baha'is during the Pahlavi Era took place in 1955. In the course of this year, one of the lower ranking clerics, a preacher by the name of Falsafi, was provided with an opportunity to speak on national radio and deliver incitingly seditious speeches to provoke rascals and ruffians against the Baha'is. A national outburst was the outcome, and violence against the Baha'is led to pillage, looting and a few deaths. This event probably transpired because the Shah felt indebted to the clergy who had supported him in regaining power after the upheaval surrounding Dr. Musaddiq. He felt that

he should offer his debt of gratitude to the clergy by fulfilling any of their wishes which were devoid of any threat to his own power.⁶

After the 1357 [1979] Revolution, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Germany, having refuted the accusation that the "Baha'i" Faith was political, responded to the objections expressed by the leaders of the Islamic Republic against the Baha'is and – among other things – brought to the attention of the author or authors of the book "The Baha'i Faith is not a Political Movement" the sort of difficulties with which the Baha'is were faced during the rule of Muhammad-Reza Shah.

A few of the atrocities committed against the Baha'is are listed below:

1. In the year 1941, a number of Baha'is in Yazd were imprisoned on the charge of being Baha'is.
2. In 1943 Baha'i centers in provincial towns were confiscated and destroyed.
3. In 1946 in Kashan and Shahrud a number of Baha'is were murdered, but the murderers were not pursued or arrested.
4. In 1951 Holy War was waged against the Baha'is and they were accused of being associated with communists.
5. After the speeches delivered in 1955 by Muhammad-Taqi Falasafi, Baha'is throughout the country were harassed and some were murdered.
6. In 1956, the Baha'is appealed to the United Nations about these atrocities.
7. In the years between 1956 and 1963 Baha'i gatherings were announced by the government to be illegal.
8. In September 1978 SAVAK⁷ orchestrated an anti-Baha'i activity in (the district of Sa'diyih) Shiraz with the purpose of diverting anti-government activities by creating an anti-Baha'i uprising. More than 300 Baha'i homes (in the vicinity of Dilgusha) were looted and then set on fire. At the same time, Ayatollah Khomeini made reference to this matter in a speech in Paris.

From the inception of the Babi movement and then the Baha'i Faith in Iran some 20 to 25 thousand Iranians — young and old, women and men — were treated by the blades of ignorance and prejudice, and put to death.

The events of the year 1955, and the incidents surrounding Falsafi, served as a prelude to that which transpired after the Revolution of 1979. After the Revolution, administrative restrictions and elements of violating human rights under the direction of the government were greatly increased. The nature of this situation differed from what was happening before 1977 in that while in the past Baha'is were simply victims of scattered governmental activities, there was now a designed and pronounced conspiracy set in place to wipe out the Baha'i community.

Amongst the many systematic measures taken by the government of Iran against the Baha'is, one can refer to the following:

- Official ban on all Baha'i institutions and activities;
- Arrest and execution of all the members of national Baha'i institutions;
- Arrest and execution of many of the members of local institutions;

⁶ For details surrounding this episode the reader may wish to refer to an article by Bahram Choubineh (translated by Ahang Rabbani) entitled "Sacrificing the Innocent", <http://www.iranian.com/main/2008/sacrificing-innocent>.

⁷ SAVAK is the acronym of the Persian name of the feared Civil Security Organization, which operated during the Pahlavi Era.

- Confiscation of possessions and property of Baha'is, including children's savings bonds;
- Confiscation, destruction and desecration of Baha'i Holy Places and cemeteries.

Among the numerous forms of persecution with which a great number of these compatriots were afflicted, reference can be made to the following:

- Torture and imprisonment;
- The expulsion of all Baha'i governmental employees on both local and national levels;
- Encouraging or pressuring other employers to expel all their Baha'i employees;
- Issuing an official ruling to the effect that governmental pension plans were not payable to Baha'is;
- Instructing the Baha'is to return the retirement funds paid to them previously;
- Mandatory closure of Baha'i businesses and places of work;
- Expulsion of Baha'i students from schools and universities;
- The absence of official marriage certificates for Baha'is led to defaming the integrity of married women and considering their children to be illegitimate;
- The absence of proper burial places for Baha'is after the confiscation of Baha'i cemeteries;
- Excluding Baha'is from rudimentary social benefits such as obtaining coupons necessary for receiving food rations; and excluding Baha'i farmers from being included in farming cooperatives;
- Confiscation of wealth and bank accounts;
- Destruction of homes;
- Deprivation of inheritance rights;
- Being denied passports;
- Forced marriages and forced adoptions;
- Incidents of kidnapping and of execution without legal proceedings.

The official announcement in several instances of the country's Judicial Sector to the effect that if an individual were to injure a Baha'i, to steal a Baha'i's wealth and possessions, or even to kill a Baha'i, he would not be legally pursued, served in practical terms as a green light for anyone to commit such acts. In addition to all that is mentioned above, Baha'is residing in villages have been under such immense pressure during the last three decades that even those living in such villages where Baha'is constituted the majority of the population were forced to leave the country.

The outcome of this was a mass "religious expulsion" which is comparable to the "ethnic cleansing" which took place recently in the Balkans,⁸ inasmuch as vast rural areas in Iran have now been wiped clean of the existence of any Baha'is. This sort of persecution, since it was inflicted in remote areas, has yet to be documented, and therefore is missing from many of the reports.

⁸ Ethnic cleansing in Bosnia during the mid 1990s was the outcome of mass expulsions of civilians. It escalated to atrocities such as internment in concentration camps, mass executions and rapes; and there appeared to be a clear policy to exterminate Muslim Bosnians as a group.

Persecution of Baha'is since the Inception of the Islamic Republic

By taking a look at history and at the various forms of violations of the rights of these fellow countrymen, I continue my discourse:

As mentioned earlier, in February 1979, the district of Sa'diyyih in suburban Shiraz was attacked and more than 300 homes and places of business were looted and set on fire.

In April 1980, revolutionary Guards confiscated the House of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, the Bab, and demolished it to the ground in August. In 1981, this spot was turned into a public square, and a little while later a Mosque was raised in its place — dedicated to the 12th [so-called "Hidden"] Imam of Shi'ah Islam.

From early 1981, five prominent people from this community were executed. Three more were put to death in 1982. In the Fall of 1982, the Revolutionary Guards of Shiraz arrested, in two different series (one in Aban and one in Azar), 39 Baha'is in the first round and 41 in the second. Among the 39 arrested in the first round, 27 were gradually freed; while there is no information on the fate of the others.

In January 1983, the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz issued the death sentence for 22 (from the 41 arrested in the second round) Baha'is. In December 1982, one of these individuals; and in February of the same year three others from the same group were executed.

In May 1984, the other Baha'is remaining in prison were given four opportunities to recant their Faith and return to Islam in order to save their lives. All of these individuals refused.⁹ On 16 June, six male prisoners and on 18 June of the same year ten women prisoners were taken to the Polo Field in Shiraz and hanged on a gallows. Of the remaining two prisoners, one was executed in July 1984, and the other passed away in prison due to illness.

In 2006, the Ministry of State of the Islamic Republic of Iran heinously issued an express directive to the authorities nationwide to increase with greater intensity their activities for keeping the Baha'is under observation, and in particular controlling their social activities.

The Ministry of State requested from the provincial authorities across the nation to prepare a detailed questionnaire on the condition and activities of the Baha'is — including their “financial status”, “social interactions” and “their associations with foreign assemblies”.

This recent directive was issued by the Ministry of the Interior in a letter dated 19 August 2006 addressed to the Provincial Deputies of the Department of Politics and Security throughout Iran. This letter was among a series of threatening papers and documents which unveiled the hidden efforts of the Islamic Republic to identify the Baha'is and monitor their activities. Ms. Bani Dugal, the Principal Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations, in connection with these letters, indicates: The emergence of this new letter highlights the gravity of the situation facing Iranian Baha'is! She adds:

This letter further confirms that Iran's government has targeted the Baha'is for covert surveillance... It also reveals for the first time the type of information the government strives to collect on both individuals and the Baha'i community as a whole — information that in most societies would be considered private and highly sensitive.

⁹ One of the women prisoners at the time actually did recant her belief in the Baha'i Faith and went home with her husband and children.

Ms. Dugal also indicated that:

The letter also contains elements of misinformation. For example, the letter asks for information on the 'socio-political activities' of Baha'is — even though it is well known to authorities that Baha'is are entirely non-political in their activities, inasmuch as the Baha'i sacred writings stress the importance of non-involvement in politics, as well as non-violence.

The letter of the Islamic republic dated 19 August and addressed to the Provincial Deputies of the Department of Politics and Security followed the release earlier that year of a secret letter dated 29 October 2005 from the Iranian Military Headquarters to various Revolutionary Guards and Police Forces instructing them to “identify” the Baha'is and “monitor” their activities.

News of the 29 October letter was first publicized by Asma Jahangir, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, in March 2006; and stirred intense alarm among international human rights groups. Ms. Jahangir herself expressed concern that “the information gained as a result of such monitoring will be used as a basis for the increased persecution of, and discrimination against, members of the Baha'i Faith.”¹⁰

Another letter, dated 2 May 2006, unveils the depths to which the Islamic republic has gone in implementing such surveillance at the local level. That letter, which is written by the Trades, Production and Technical Services Society of Kermanshah to the Iranian Union of Battery Manufacturers, instructs the Union to provide a list of the members of “the Baha'i sect” among their members.

Some observers have compared the Islamic Republic's effort to identify and monitor Baha'is to the situation of the Jewish Community at the onset of the Nazi terror. For example, in April of that same year, it was announced that the orders issued in the 29 October letter were “reminiscent of the steps taken against Jews in Europe and a dangerous step toward the institution of Nuremberg-type laws.”¹¹

In recent months, Iranian authorities have continued their efforts to arrest and detain Baha'is throughout Iran, and to subject them to a sequence of imprisonment and release that is intentionally designed in such a manner as to harass and oppress the Baha'i community. Over the last two years, more than 150 Baha'is have been arrested throughout the nation; and although some of these individuals have been released on bail – set at exorbitant amounts often including huge amounts of money, property deeds or business licenses – they are still awaiting trial.

On 18 June 2007, a report was released of the arrest of a 70-year-old poor man in Kirmanshah. The charge against him was the possession of 3 compact discs containing Baha'i music. He was tried on 22 April 2007 for the charge of “propagating Baha'ism and insulting the Holy Imams”. His defense attorney was given only ten minutes to look at his client's files, become familiar with the charges and prepare his defense. While there was yet no written verdict, the judge verbally sentenced him to one year in prison and 70 lashes of the whip.

On June 17, 2007, a 34-year-old Baha'i was arrested in a hardware store in Tabriz and was taken to an unknown place. He was able to contact his family two days later and

¹⁰ Details concerning these letters can be read at <http://news.bahai.org/story/432>

¹¹ *ibid*

inform them of his well-being. Upon contacting the authorities, the Baha'is in Tabriz were told by a Security Officer that some of the detainee's neighbors had indicated that he had insulted Islam. Ultimately, his family members were able to visit him, and discovered that he had put a 2-day interrogation process behind him.

On May 27, 2007, a couple in Abadih, near Shiraz, were arrested in their home by the Ministry of Information authorities. The authorities also confiscated the couple's books, family video tapes, music compact discs, phone books, personal records, mobile phones, and notes pertaining to some other Baha'is in the area who unofficially took care of certain aspects of the Baha'i Community. They were both interrogated for some time. The wife was released after 8 hours, but her husband was transferred to Shiraz and was finally released on bail after being detained for a whole month. The charge brought against him was propagating the Baha'i Faith.

On May 7, 2007, a court in Mazandaran refused the appeals of 3 women and a man who were arrested in Qa'emshahr in 2005 under the charge of "propagation in favor of the opposition to the Islamic Regime", and their files were referred to the Supreme Court. The accused were released on bail.

On April 24, 2007, the Revolutionary Court of Sari sentenced a Baha'i to one year in prison and 4 years of exile to the town of Bijar. The charges against him were "propaganda activities against the Islamic Republic of Iran and in favor of groups and associations acting against the Regime."

In April 2007, a great number of Baha'is residing in various areas were called in for questioning; and some were interrogated on the telephone by the Ministry of Information or by Office of Security authorities. Some of these areas were Babulsar, Bandar-'Abbas, Bandar-Turkman, Bijnurd, Gilavanad, Damavand, Hamadan, Karaj, Lahijan, Shahinshahr, Tihiran and Yaftabad. The interrogations concerned the activities of the Baha'i Community and individual Baha'is. According to one report, a bank in Jiraft was instructed to report account details for its Baha'i clients to the relevant authorities.

The Baha'i Community has recently come into the possession of copies of a letter issued by a governmental agency in charge of caring for Iran-Iraq war veterans and of providing for their expenses. In this letter, it is clearly indicated that a certain individual, despite having been disabled during the war and survived being a war-prisoner in Iraq, would not be allowed to benefit from any sort of pension due to his membership in the "Baha'i Sect".

Attacking the beliefs of these compatriots in all forms of public media, including the Internet, is still continuing. Newspapers in Khurasan and Mazandaran have recently printed insulting articles about the Baha'is; and anti-Baha'i booklets have been distributed in Shiraz amongst the public. These publications have also been distributed in schools in Shahinshahr, Ahvaz and Babulsar.

According to reliable information, banks have refused to grant loans to Baha'is; and authorities have refrained from granting them business licenses or renewing their existing ones.

In Sanandaj, a Bank official has claimed that he has received 14 loan applications from Baha'is, all of which have been refused. A Bank employee in Sari has admitted that: "we have been directed to refrain from issuing loans to Baha'i applicants."

In Hamadan, the owner of a grocery store that had been in business for 48 years had tried, after his father's passing, to change the store's business license from his father's name to his own name. One of the authorities had told him that the Baha'is would not be given business licenses for operating grocery stores. He had said: "No matter where you turn to

appeal, even if you go the United Nations, you will have to come back here eventually, and this is clearly the answer you will receive.”

The destruction of a Baha’i Cemetery was another expression of the policies of the Islamic Republic in creating a negative atmosphere and inciting the public against the Baha’is. The destruction of this cemetery, on the outskirts of Najafabad, was carried out overnight between 8 and 9 September by a band of mischief-makers fully equipped with heavy machinery. In January 2007, similar incidents took place in Yazd, where bulldozers and heavy machinery were used to demolish another cemetery. The numbers of these sorts of anti-Baha’i activities, as well as those of the violation of human rights of other citizens, are steadily increasing.

A few days prior to the destruction of the cemetery in Najafabad, threatening letters were sent to about 30 Baha’i families in the area. In the province of Mazandaran, six houses belonging to Baha’is were set on fire. In Abadih, graffiti and slogans containing hate messages and curse words were written all over the doors and walls of Baha’i homes and businesses.

In April 2008, Baha’is were summoned for questioning in more than 17 cities; subsequent to which the arrest of six more Baha’is were announced...

On the morning of Wednesday 14 May, the Security Authorities of the Islamic Republic arrested 6 Baha’is in Tehran and transferred them to the Evin prison. Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Vahid Tizfahm, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli and Mr. Saeid Rezaie were arrested in their own homes after a thorough search of the premises.

The six individuals arrested are members of a seven-member group in charge of the leadership of the Baha’i Community in Iran. It should be specified that Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, the other member of this group, had been arrested in February 2008 and was already in prison.¹²

The Iranian News Agency IRNA, while covering a press conference by Mr. Elham,¹³ reported that the six Baha’is were arrested for security reasons and not for religious reasons. IRNA also quoted Mr. Elham saying that these individuals “were somehow connected with foreigners and especially with Zionists.”

A report dated October 3, 2008, from Human Rights Activists in Iran indicates: The leaders of the Baha’i Community in Vilashahr (near Isfahan) by the names of Hushmand Talibi and Mihran Zayni, together with another member of this community by the name of Farhad Firdawsiyan, were arrested by the Security Police Force for burying their dead in a place they have been using for this purpose for 15 years. They were sent to Isfahan prison without a trial, and their present condition is unknown.

It is noteworthy that in addition to these seven leaders of the Baha’i Community [named above], three other Baha’is by the names of ‘Ali Ahmadi, Changiz Dirakhshaniyan and Mrs. Simin Gurji were arrested in Qa’imshahr in recent days.

Nowhere in the articles of the Islamic Republic’s Constitution is there any restriction noted on the right to education by Baha’i individuals; however, what is taking place in reality is contrary to that. Baha’i youth are faced with a violation of their most rudimentary rights and without a reasonable excuse are not allowed to continue their education. This denial of education included the preliminary phases of registration, when receiving the report [of their entrance exam], or selecting a course of study, or ultimately during their first term of study!

¹² For a complete report on this event please see, <http://news.bahai.org/story/634>

¹³ Ghulam-Husayn Elham, Iranian Government spokesperson

Article 19 of the Constitution states:

The people of Iran, regardless of the ethnic group or tribe to which they may belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, language and the like do not present any sort of a special advantage.¹⁴

In August 2008, four Baha'i youth who had been deprived of higher education, by the names of Armin Rahmani, Samim Pizishki, Navid Khanajani and Hisam Mithaqi, referred to the Office of Hujatu'l-Islam Rahbar, Member of the Parliamentary Commission on Education, to appeal their status of having been expelled from university and of having been deprived of their right to higher education.¹⁵

After continuous, but futile, attempts to appeal to the Ministry of Sciences and the Organization for Assessment and Evaluation, they had now considered coming to the office of Mr. Rahbar, who was also a member of the Cultural Sub-committee of the Parliamentary Council and the Imam Jum'ih of Isfahan at the time, to regain their violated right to an education.

When these young students first arrived at the Office of the Hujjat'l-Islam, a man in plain clothing by the name of Qandi, who appeared to be from the Security Forces, told them that a directive had been received to the effect that the Hujjatu'l-Islam was not to interfere in the matter of the education of these youth. A little while later, other Security Officers arrived and, while threatening these youth, instructed them to leave the premises. It is necessary to explain that Mr. Rahbar himself had earlier — in a brief, initial, response — indicated his lack of ability to be of any assistance in the matter. The youth, however, had insisted on a meeting, expressing clearly that under the law, the proper course of action for regaining their rightful privileges would be for them to appeal their situation to their member of the Islamic Parliamentary Council, and for him to bring it to the attention of the Council. However, while they were waiting for the meeting, the Security Forces present forcefully made them leave the premises.

The Security officers present at the Office, who were trying eagerly to drive the youth away from Mr. Rahbar's Office, called in armed guards and other plainclothes officers, all of whom were equipped with automatic weapons. They closed the doors and windows, asked all others to leave, and — lining up the four youth and roughing them up — tried to create an intimidating atmosphere of extreme fear for them. At this time, Mr. Rahbar had come out of his private office and again announced that he was unable to help the students despite the fact that they all had very high grades and impressive educational records, but that he was willing to hold back the security officers if they left quietly.

The four Baha'i youth, being confronted with armed guards, had no choice but to leave. They continue to be deprived of their right to education despite their exemplary academic credentials.

These basic human rights are being violated in a country in which the Universal Covenant of civil, political, economic and social rights were approved in 1975 (about 35 years ago) by the country's Parliament at the time; and while matters of adhering to such laws go beyond a country's internal regulations.

The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights indicates:

¹⁴ http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch03.php

¹⁵ For a full report on this event please see: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/2008/09/friday-19th-of-september/>

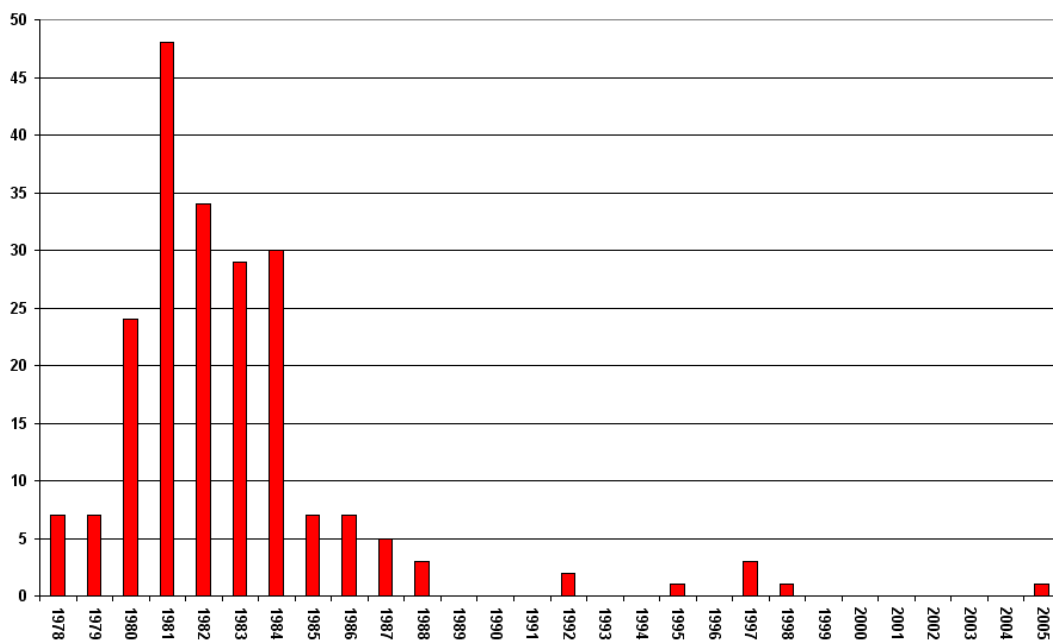
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.¹⁶

In the second article of the same declaration, we read:

Everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this Dispensation, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social, property, birth or other status.¹⁷

Why is it that citizenship rights and human rights, despite being legally recognized in Iran, are not being practiced? I invite you all, at this Sixtieth Anniversary of the passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to come together so that we could exert all that is in our power to meet the appropriate conditions for attaining democracy and justice by standing against the violation of the rights of our fellow countrymen; by so doing we would not stand in shame by the history we make!

Number of Baha'is Killed in Iran



Baha'is killed since 1978

(Name, date of death, town, manner of death)

1978

Mr. Ahmad Isma'ili, 1978, Ahram, Killed

Mr. Diya'u'llah Haqiqat, Aug 13, Jahrum, Killed

Mr. Shir-Muhammad Dastpish, Dec, Buyr-Ahmad, Mobbed

¹⁶ <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>

¹⁷ *ibid*

Mrs. 'Avad-Gul Fahandizh, Dec 14, Shiraz, Mobbed
Mr. Sifatu'llah Fahandizh, Dec 14, Shiraz, Mobbed
Mr. Khusraw Afnani, Dec 22, Miyan-Duab, Mobbed
Mr. Parviz Afnani, Dec 22, Miyan-Duab, Mobbed

1979

Mr. Ibrahim Ma'navi, early 1979, Hisar, Killed
Mr. Haji-Muhammad 'Azizi, Jan 9, Khurmuj, Beaten
Mr. Husayn Shakuri, Apr 2, Ushnaviyyih, Killed
Mr. 'Ali-Akbar Khursandi, Apr 12, Tehran, Hanged
Mr. Bahar Vujdani, Sep 27, Mahabad, Executed
Mr. 'Ali Sattarzadiah, Oct 28, Bukan, Killed
Mr. 'Azamatu'llah Fahandizh, Dec 14, Shiraz, Executed

1980

Mr. Habibu'llah Panahi, Feb 4, Urmia, Assassinated
Mr. Ghulam-Husayn A'zami, May 6, Tehran, Executed
Mr. 'Ali-Akbar Mu'ini, May 6, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Badi'u'llah Yazdani, May 6, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Parviz Bayani, May 11, Piranshahr, Executed
Mr. Mir-Asadu'llah Mukhtari, May 18, Andrun, Stoned
Mr. Hasan Isma'ilzadiah, June, Sanandaj, Killed
Mr. Yusuf Subhani, Jun 27, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Yadu'llah Astani, Jul 14, Tabriz, Executed
Dr. Faramarz Samandari, Jul 14, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Muhammad Akbari, Jul 16, Rasht, Executed
Mr. Yadu'llah Mahbubiyani, Jul 30, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Dhabihu'llah Mu'mini, Aug 15, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Nuru'llah Akhtar-Khavari, Sep 8, Yazd, Executed
Mr. 'Azizu'llah Dhabihyan, Sep 8, Yazd, Executed
Mr. Firaydun Faridani, Sep 8, Yazd, Executed
Mr. Mahmud Hasanzadiah, Sep 8, Yazd, Executed
Mr. 'Abdu'l-Vahhab Kazimi-Manshadi, Sep 8, Yazd, Executed
Mr. Jalal Mustaqim, Sep 8, Yazd, Executed
Mr. 'Ali Mutahari, Sep 8, Yazd, Executed
Mr. Rida Firuzi, Nov 9, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Muhammad-Husayn Ma'sumi, Nov 23, Birjand, Burned
Mrs. Shikkar-Nisa Ma'sumi, Nov 23, Birjand, Burned
Mr. Bihruz Sana'i, Dec 17, Tehran, Executed

1981

Dr. Manuchihr Hakim, Jan 12, Tehran, Assassinated
Mr. Mihdi Anvari, Mar 17, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Hidayatu'llah Dihqani, Mar 17, Shiraz, Executed
Mrs. Nuraniyyih Yarshatir, Apr, Shiraz, Assassinated
Mr. Sattar Khushkhu, Apr 30, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Ihsanu'llah Mihdi-Zadiah, Apr 30, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Yadu'llah Vahdat, Apr 30, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Muhammad (Suhrah) Habibi, Jun 14, Hamadan, Executed
Mr. Muhammad-Baqir (Suhayl) Habibi, Jun 14, Hamadan, Executed
Mr. Husayn Khandil, Jun 14, Hamadan, Executed

Mr. Tarazu'llah Khuzayn, Jun 14, Hamadan, Executed
Mr. Husayn Mutlaq, Jun 14, Hamadan, Executed
Dr. Firuz Na'imi, Jun 14, Hamadan, Executed
Dr. Nasir Vafa'i, Jun 14, Hamadan, Executed
Mr. Buzurg 'Alaviyan, Jun 23, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Hashim Farnush, Jun 23, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Farhang Mavaddat, Jun 23, Tehran, Executed
Dr. Masih Farhangi, Jun 24, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Badi'ullah Farid, Jun 24, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Yadu'llah Pustchi, Jun 24, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Varqa Tibyaniyan (Tibyani), Jun 24, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Kamalu'd-Din Bakhtavar, Jul 26, Mashhad Executed
Mr. Ni'matu'llah Katibpur Shahidi, Jul 26, Mashhad, Executed
Mr. 'Abdu'l-'Ali Asadyari, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Husayn Asadu'llah-Zadeh, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Mihdi Bahiri, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Dr. Masrur Dakhili, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Dr. Parviz Firuzi, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Manuchihr Khadi'I, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Allah-Virdi Mithaqi, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Habibu'llah Tahqiqi, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Isma'il Zihtab, Jul 29, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Husayn Rastigar-Namdar, Aug 5, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Habibu'llah 'Azizi, Aug 29, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Bahman 'Atifi, Sep 11, Isfahan, Executed
Mr. 'Izzat Atifi, Sep 11, Isfahan, Executed
Mr. Ahmad Ridvani, Sep 11, Isfahan, Executed
Mr. Ata'u'llah Rawhani, Sep 11, Isfahan, Executed
Mr. Gushtasb Thabit-Rasikh, Sep 11, Isfahan, Executed
Mr. Yadu'llah Sipih-Arfa, Oct 23, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Mihdi Amin-Amin, Dec 27, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Jalal 'Azizi, Dec 27, Tehran, Executed
Dr. 'Izzatu'llah Furuhi, Dec 27, Tehran, Executed
Mrs. Zhinus Ni'mat Mahmudi, Dec 27, Tehran, Executed
Dr. Mahmud Majdhub, Dec 27, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Qudratu'llah Rawhani, Dec 27, Tehran, Executed
Dr. Sirius Rawshani, Dec 27, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Kamran Samimi, Dec 27, Tehran, Executed

1982

Mrs. Shiva Mahmudi Asadu'llah-Zadeh, Jan 4, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Iskandar 'Azizi, Jan 4, Tehran, Executed
Mrs. Shidrukh Amir-Kiya Baqa, Jan 4, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Fathu'llah Firdawsi, Jan 4, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Khusraw Muhandisi, Jan 4, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Kurush Tala'i, Jan 4, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Ata'u'llah Yavari, Jan 4, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Ibrahim Khayrkah, Feb 22, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Husayn Vahdat Haqq, Feb 28, Tehran, Executed

Mr. 'Askar Muhammadi, Apr 2, Kerman, Assassinated
Mr. Ihsanu'llah Khayyami, Apr 12, Urmia, Executed
Mr. 'Azizu'llah Gulshani, Apr 29, Mashhad, Executed
Mrs. Ishraqiyyih Faruhar, May 8, Karaj, Executed
Mr. Mahmud Faruhar, May 8, Karaj, Executed
Mr. Badi'u'llah Haqpaykar, May 8, Karaj, Executed
Mr. Agahu'llah Tizfahm, May 10, Urmia, Executed
Miss Jalaliyyih Mushta il Usku'i, May 10, Urmia, Executed
Mrs. Iran Rahimpur (Khurma'i), May 12, Dizful, Executed
Mr. Nasru'llah Amini, May 16, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Sa'du'llah Babazadeh, May 16, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Ata'u'llah Haqqani, Jun 1, Tehran, Killed
Mr. Muhammad Abbasi, Jul 9, Qazvin, Executed
Mr. Jadidu'llah Ashraf, Jul 9, Qazvin, Executed
Mr. Manuchihr Farzanah Mu'ayyad, Jul 9, Qazvin, Executed
Mr. Muhammad Mansuri, Jul 9, Qazvin, Executed
Mr. Manuchihr Vafa'i, Jul 9, Tehran, Assassinated
Mr. 'Abbas-Ali Sadiqipur, Jul 15, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. 'Ali Na'imiyan, Aug 11, Urmia, Executed
Mr. Habibu'llah Awji, Nov 16, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Dhiya'u'llah Ahrari, Nov 21, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Husayn Nayyiri-Isfahani, Nov 29, Isfahan, Died in Prison
Mrs. Guldanih 'Alipur, Dec 24, Sari, Mobbed

1983

Mr. Hidayatu'llah Siyavushi, Jan 1, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Yadu'llah Mahmudnizhad, Mar 12, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Rahmatu'llah Vafa'i, Mar 12, Shiraz, Executed
Mrs. Tuba Za'irpur, Mar 12, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Adadu'llah (Aziz) Zaydi, Apr 1, Miyan-Duab, Killed
Mr. Jalal Hakimian, May 1, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Suhayl Safa'i, May 1, Tehran, Executed
Dr. Bahram Afnan, Jun 16, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. 'Abdu'l-Husayn Azadi, Jun 16, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Kurush Haqbin, Jun 16, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. 'Inayatu'llah Ishraqi, Jun 16, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Jamshid Siyavushi, Jun 16, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Bahram Yalda'i, Jun 16, Shiraz, Executed
Miss Shahin(Shirin) Dalvand, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Mrs. 'Izzat Janami Ishraqi, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Miss Ru'ya Ishraqi, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Miss Muna Mahmudnizhad, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Miss Zarrin Muqimi-Abyanih, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Miss Mahshid Nirumand, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Miss Simin Sabiri, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Mrs. Tahirih Arjumandi Siyavushi, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Miss Akhtar Thabit, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Mrs. Nusrat Ghufrani Yalda'i, Jun 18, Shiraz, Executed
Mr. Suhayl Hushmand, Jun 28, Shiraz, Executed

Mr. Ahmad-‘Ali Thabit-Sarvistani, Jun 30, Shiraz, Died in Prison
Mr. Muhammad Ishraqi, Aug 31, Tehran, Died in Prison
Mr. Akbar Haqiqi, Sep 19, Khuy, Mobbed
Mr. Bahman Dihqani, Nov 19, Muhammadiyyih, Mobbed
Mr. ‘Abdu’l-Majid Mutahhar, Dec 15, Isfahan, Died in Prison

1984

Mr. Rahmatu’llah Hakiman, Jan 11, Kerman, Died in Prison
Mr. Ghulam-Husayn Hasanzadih-Shakiri, Mar 10, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Muhsin Radavi, Mar 13, Tehran, Died in Prison
Mr. Nusrat’ullah Diya’i, Mar 19, Kerman Died in Prison
Mr. Kamran Lutfi, Apr 9, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Rahim Rahimiyan, Apr 9, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Yadu’llah Sabiriyani, Apr 9, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Asadu’llah Kamil-Muqaddam, May 2, Tehran, Died in Prison
Mr. Maqsud ‘Alizadih, May 5, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Jalal Payravi, May 5, Tabriz, Executed
Mr. Jahangir Hidayati, May 15, Tehran, Executed
Mr. ‘Ali-Muhammad Zamani, May 15, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Nusratu’llah Vahdat, Jun 17, Mashhad, Executed
Mr. Ihsanu’llah Kathiri, Jun 27, Tehran, Executed
Dr. Manuchihr Ruhi, Aug 16, Bujnurd, Executed
Mr. Aminu’llah Qurbanpur, Aug 25, Tehran, Died in Prison
Mr. Rustam Varjavandi, Sep 15, Tehran, Died in Prison
Mr. Shapur (Hushang) Markazi, Sep 23, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Firuz Purdil, Oct 30, Mashhad, Executed
Mr. Ahmad Bashiri, Nov 1, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Yunis Nawruzi-Iranzad, Nov 1, Karaj
Mr. ‘Alirida Niyakan, Nov 11, Tabriz, Died in Prison
Mr. Diya’u’llah Mai’i-Usku’i, Nov 13, Tabriz, Died in Prison
Dr. Farhad Asdaq, Nov 19, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Firuz Athari, Dec 9, Karaj, Executed
Mr. Ghulam-Husayn Farhand LSA Dec 9 Tehran (Karaj) Executed
Mr. ‘Inayatu’llah Haqiqi, Dec 9, Karaj, Executed
Mr. Jamal Kashani, Dec 9, Karaj, Executed
Mr. Jamshid Pur-Ustadkar, Dec 9, Karaj, Executed
Dr. Ruhu’llah Ta’lim, Dec 9, Tehran (Kirmanshah), Executed

1985

Mr. Ruhu’llah Hasuri, Jan 21, Yazd, Executed
Mr. Ruhu’llah Bahramshahi, Feb 25, Yazd, Executed
Mr. Nusratu’llah Subhani, Mar 5, Tehran, Executed
Mr. ‘Abbas Idilkhani, Aug 1, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Rahmatu’llah Vujdani, Aug 31, Bandar-‘Abbas, Executed
Mr. Nur’ud-Din Ta’ifi, Oct 12, Gorgan (Kirmanshah), Died in Prison
Mr. ‘Azizu’llah Ashjari, Nov 19, Tabriz, Executed

1986

Mr. Payman Subhani, Apr 28, Saravan, Mobbed
Mr. Sirru’llah Vahdat-Nizami, May 4, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Fidrus Shabrukh, May 9, Zahedan, Executed

Mr. Farid Bihmardi, Jun 10, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Habibu'llah Muhtadi, Aug 27, Tehran, Killed
Mr. Babak Talibi, Sep 2, Karaj, Beaten
Mr. Iraj Mihdi-Nizhad, Sep 4, Bandar-'Abbas, Mobbed

1987

Mr. Ahmad Kavieh, Jan 26, Isfahan, Killed
Mr. Surush Jabbari, Mar 3, Tehran, Killed
Mr. Abu'l-Qasim Shayiq, Mar 3, Tehran, Killed
Mr. Ardishir Akhtari, Sep 28, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Amir-Husayn Nadiri, Sep 28, Tehran, Executed

1988

Mr. Bihnam Pasha'i, presumably Nov, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Iraj Afshin, presumably Nov, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Mirdad Maqsudi, Feb 16, Urmia, Killed

1992

Mr. Bahman Samandari, Mar 18, Tehran, Executed
Mr. Ruhu'llah Ghedami, Jun 17, on Qum Highway, Killed

1995

Mr. Shirvin Fallah, Dec, Arak, Killed

1997

Mr. Mansur Dawlat, Apr 4, Kerman, Killed
Mr. Shahram Reza'i, Jul 7, Rasht, Killed
Mr. Masha'llah Enayati, Jul 4, Isfahan, Beaten to death in prison

1998

Mr. Ruhu'llah Rawhani, Jul 21, Isfahan, Executed

2005

Mr. Dhabihu'llah Mahrami, Dec 15, Yazd, Dec 15, Death in prison

Iran: Using terror internally and abroad

By Wahied Wahdat-Hagh

This article was posted on January 29, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/930> and a German translation is found at http://europeandemocracy.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13322&catid=4&Itemid=22.

On 14 January Iranian secret service agents arbitrarily detained at least six members of the Baha'i religion in Tehran, including a former female colleague of Shirin Ebadi. At the same time terror propaganda against pro-Western Arab regimes continues.

On the morning of 14 January, Iranian secret service agents conducted raids in at least 11 homes of members of the Baha'i religion in Tehran. Computers, mobile phones, private notes, books and photos were confiscated. At least six Baha'is were arbitrarily detained, five of whom were taken to the notorious Evin prison. They are Mrs Jinous Sobhani, Mr Shahrokh Taefi, Mr Didar Raoufi, Mr Payam Aghsani and Mrs Aziz Samandari. Only Mr Golshan Sobhani was released after a few hours.

As recently as 21 December 2008, Jinous Sobhani had been the victim of aggression by Iranian officials when they raided and shut down the Centre for the Defence of Human Rights in Tehran run by Nobel Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi. The Centre was also home to a mine clearance project, for which Jinous Sobhani worked. The projects were partly financed from the money that Shirin Ebadi received for winning the Nobel Prize. On 21 December 2008, Jinous Sobhani was forced to leave her place of work and go home. She was arbitrarily detained on 14 January.

Continued pressure against human rights campaigners

Shirin Ebadi has expressed her regret and said that she regarded the detention of her former colleague as a continuation of the pressure against the Centre for the Defence of Human Rights.

As the Campaign for Equality reported, Jinous Sobhani had previously published a number of legal texts in domestic newspapers. Diane Ala'i, representative of the International Baha'i Community at the United Nations, told Radio Farda concerning the detentions: "These people were detained because of their belief in the Baha'i religion." Diane Ala'i also pointed to the "general human rights situation" in Iran, reported Baha'i World News Service.

On 14 January, nine Baha'i students studying at the university in the Iranian city of Kerman were forced to leave the university purely because they were Baha'i.

Iranian media's conspiracy theories against the Baha'is

The Iranian media is keeping up its conspiracy theories against the Baha'is: for example, just as the BBC Persian-language television channel was launched, an article on the aims of this new British service appeared, from the news agency Tabnak, which belongs to the former Revolutionary Guards general Mohssen Rezaei. This report obviously referred to Baha'i connections with the BBC Persian-language radio service, which has been broadcasting daily since 1941.

It is not enough for the totalitarian dictatorship of the Islamic “Republic” of Iran to repress the weakest members of society, including the women’s and human rights movements and the students’ and workers’ movements – anyone with a different philosophy of life is regarded as a threat to the dictatorship. Hojatuleslam Shirazi recently warned of a “velvet revolution”. Any non-Islamist way of thought can be regarded as a threat in Iran. Internal Islamisation goes hand in hand with export of the revolution abroad. No lesser person than General Mohssen Rezai said in September 2008 that supporting the Palestinians would “strengthen Iran’s national security”.

Terror abroad: “Islamist ecumenism” or jihad against the West

Since 1982, Iran has been demonstrably active in training militant Islamist jihadists to set up theocracies around the Islamic world, based on the model of Iran. But what would happen if the Egyptian president was assassinated in a terrorist attack? Would not the Iranian state, as a result of its inflammatory state propaganda of the past few weeks, be responsible for mobilizing radical and fanatical students as accomplices to a terrorist act?

At the beginning of the year the student Bassiji units, who apparently do not need study grants, announced that they would pay a bounty of one million dollars to anyone who kills Egypt’s President Mubarak. Iranian Islamists, who in the opinion of some authors in Germany are in the process of forming an “Islamist ecumenism” with Hamas and Hezbollah, call this a “revolutionary execution”.

On 12 January Fardanews, which is close to Ahmadinejad, reported that the “prize for Mubarak’s execution was being raised to 1.5 million dollars”. Egypt’s President Mubarak was described as the “Egyptian pharaoh”. In Iran, oil is no longer officially sold in dollars, but it is still perfectly acceptable to issue a bounty in dollar, particularly for “hostile” presidents.

300 people have come forward as voluntary assassins

Sadeq Shabazi, chairman of the “Student Movement for Justice”, said: “Three decades ago the martyr Khalid Eslamboli shot dead Egypt’s traitorous president. This was the revolutionary execution of Anwar Sadat. Today the entire Egyptian people confirms that what Eslamboli did was a necessary step.” He went on to say that Mubarak cooperated with the “Zionist regime”. Shabazi gloated about the fact that more than 300 people had come forward as voluntary assassins in the Iranian city of Mashad alone. Years ago the state has named a street in Tehran after Anwar Sadat’s killer.

So is it really moderate, as is often claimed, if the Islamist leader Ali Khamenei prevents a mass of fanatics from flying to Gaza to die terrorists’ deaths there? Not really, since such a step could signify a direct entry into war, something that Ali Khamenei does not intend to risk. However, the militant Bassiji units have been trained for the fateful day for years. They are regarded as a reserve unit of the Iranian army. Iranian politicians have repeatedly warned that they would react with an asymmetric war if the situation became serious. There are authors in Germany who talk of a “consolidated” Iranian state that is acting almost rationally – unlike the Pakistani state.

Murderous gifts

No lesser person than the Iranian leader Ali Khamenei himself had called for the jihad against Israel – and this does not involve humanitarian aid for a region in crisis, by any means. It should not be forgotten that it is Iranian weapons that Hamas and Hezbollah are using, and the money for buying the weapons and rockets did not come from the gross

national product generated in Gaza or southern Lebanon. For 28 years, Iran has been training terrorists who are supposedly defending Islam and, as such, are merely conducting a proxy war for the Khomeini dictatorship.

Iran's rulers have still not issued free plane tickets for terrorists marching voluntarily into death, and they are still preventing them from going on their mass organised journey abroad. They continue to content themselves with training and supporting jihadists who provide them with "resistance". The question remains how long the international community will continue to look on seriously as both Iran and Syria supply weapons to Islamist terrorist organizations. After all, the rockets and military equipment used by Hamas and Hezbollah were not paid for by wealth generated in Gaza and southern Lebanon. Instead they are murderous gifts, bloodstained dollars that serve present-day Iran's national security, as General Rezai stressed last September.

If US President Obama does speak with Iran's rulers, he should make it clear to them and the world that Iran needs a secular democracy, freedom of opinion and belief, political freedoms rather than Islamist fractions and the Khomeinistic totalitarian dictatorship of Velayat Faqih. This is because a totalitarian dictatorship with a religious stamp, as prevails in Iran, can not genuinely act responsible within its own system nor show reason internally and abroad.

Zhinous Sobhani and Citizenship Rights

By Taqi Rahmani

The Persian original of this essay was posted on January 28, 2009, at http://www.roozonline.com/archives/2009/02/post_11281.php, and its translation on January 29, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/938>.

Zhinous Sobhani has been arrested. Those who believe in their own humanity don't oppress the weak. But in the calculus of power there is no such consideration. To oppress the weak, to create diversions and to make excuses are tools of those in power, who believe that by such means they can remain in power.

Zhinous Sobhani worked in the office of the Center for Defenders of Human Rights. The present author met Sobhani when I visited the office of the Center for Defenders [of Human Rights]. She was a refined and elegant lady who carried out her duties in an excellent manner.

It has been announced that Zhinous Sobhani has been arrested and that she is a Baha'i. But what is the real political scenario? Before exploring the political games that are being played, allow me to make several points.

In accordance with all civil laws and the nation's Constitution, anyone born in Iran is an Iranian. According to the same law, every Iranian has the right to receive education, work, own property, etc.

Zhinous Sobhani was born after the revolution. She was born into a Baha'i family. The Islamic Republic's laws do not state that a Baha'i family is not Iranian. Many Iranians are born in a Muslim family and retain that religion. The present laws of the Islamic Republic provide Zhinous Sobhani with certain rights whose violation, in truth, constitutes a violation of the laws of the land.

From another angle, she is a lady in need of work to support herself and was hired as a secretary at the Center for Defenders [of Human Rights]. No provision has been made in the constitution of the Center and its employment guidelines to inquire about the applicant's religious beliefs and or ask about his or her ideology. Nor did she have a role in the Center's strategic development and positions. ...

Even if we were to suppose that she had promoted her religion, she did not commit a crime, despite the fact that the autocrats and those in power view such acts as a felony. One must ask: Has Ms. Sobhani truly committed a crime? She was just an employee at the Center for Defenders [of Human Rights] and performed clerical work there. If that is a crime, then it must clearly be announced that no Baha'i in Iran has the right to work – something which of a certainty is an impossibility. Such an act cannot be carried out by legal proceedings or governmental action, because there cannot be second- or third- or tenth-class citizens. Even those citizens must have the right to work and possess sufficient liberty to pursue an unhindered life. In other words, both the powerful and also lowly people like me have the right to exist and prosper.

Therefore, Mrs. Sobhani's arrest on the charge of working in the Center for Defenders of Human Rights means that the authorities do not recognize her right to earn a living as a citizen, which deprives her of her right to citizenship guaranteed by the laws.

Why was Zhinous Sobhani arrested for promoting her beliefs, or working at the Center for Defenders of Human Rights – a Center which has been shut anyway, though no authority is willing to admit it except the secretary of the spokesperson for the Judiciary, who remarked that the Center did not have a license?

It is one of the wonders of our time that a spokesperson who is always before television cameras and constantly gives interviews about all judicial cases refuses to announce this closure of one office. Perhaps he knows all too well that it is a lie, and therefore lets his secretary announce it.

At any rate, the problem with the Center appears to be Mrs. [Shirin] Ebadi. That is, in order to pressure the Center for Defenders of Human Rights, they must force Mrs. Ebadi to retreat. The conditions of this time do not allow the regime to arrest Mrs. Ebadi. Therefore, to pressure and intimidate her, they arrest Zhinous Sobhani, knowing that Ban-Ki Moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, will not intercede in Mrs. Sobhani's case. That is, the regime arrests one of its citizens in order to indirectly pressure another citizen. Zhinous Sobhani must be used as a pawn in a scenario to pressure Mrs. Ebadi and the Center for Defenders of Human Rights into abandoning their main goal, which is the lifting of the illegal ban on the Center.

Even if – an extremely unlikely event - Zhinous Sobhani has committed a crime, it has no bearing on the Center. Being an employee of the Center is not a crime. If she has committed a crime, then it must be proven in a just court, with an attorney and a sitting jury; and not by sending her to solitary confinement and forcing her into confessing to false accusations.

On the other hand, what has the Center for Defenders of Human Rights done to invite so much pressure? Is defending citizenship rights, opposing war and sanctions, and defending the rights of individuals irrespective of their religious or ideological beliefs a crime?

The forced closing of the office of the Center for Defenders of Human Rights is illegal and Zhinous Sobhani is a victim of pressure tactics against the Center. The arrest of any member or employee of the Center is intended to exert pressure on its chief, Mrs. Ebadi. All advocates of human rights and freedom-seeking organizations must condemn such acts.

These condemnations are consequential — they strengthen the sense of fraternity among Iranians and their belief in and respect for citizenship rights. The very existence of the government-people relationship resides in respecting the right of citizenship of all Iranians.

How good it would be if we Muslims supported the rights of all people in accordance with our Qur'anic traditions, and aligned with the example and the deeds of Ayatollah Taleqani! God has created all people and invited all to believe in the oneness of God and in justice. We must show oneness and justice through our deeds, not mere words.

Return the rights of citizenship to Zhinous Sobhani!

We are Ashamed!

The following is an open letter from a group of academics, writers, artists, journalists and Iranian activists throughout the world to the Baha'i community. This letter has been signed by a large number of the most prominent Iranian intellectuals, and posted originally on February 4, 2009, on <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/998>, along with translations into Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian, Persian, Portuguese, and Spanish. A number of news agencies reported this letter, including CNN: : <http://arabic.cnn.com/2009/entertainment/2/10/Iran.apology/>.

We are ashamed!

A century and a half of oppression and silence is enough!

In the name of goodness and beauty, and in the name of humanity and liberty!
As Iranian human beings, we are ashamed for what has been perpetrated upon the Baha'is in the last century and a half in Iran.

We firmly believe that every Iranian, "without distinction of any kind, such as, race, color, sex, language, religion, politics or other opinions," and also without regard to ethnic background, "social origin, property, birth or other status," is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, from the very inception of the Baha'i Faith, the followers of this religion in Iran have been deprived of many provisions of human rights solely on account of their religious convictions.

According to historical documents and evidence, from the commencement of the Babi Movement followed by the appearance of the Baha'i Faith, thousands of our countrymen have been slain by the sword of bigotry and superstition only for their religious beliefs. Just in the first decades of its establishment, some twenty thousand of those who stood identified with this faith community were savagely killed throughout various regions of Iran.

We are ashamed that during that period, no voice of protest against these barbaric murders was registered;

We are ashamed that until today the voice of protest against this heinous crime has been infrequent and muted;

We are ashamed that in addition to the intense suppression of Baha'is during its formative decades, the last century also witnessed periodic episodes of persecution of this group of our countrymen, in which their homes and businesses were set on fire, and their lives, property and families were subjected to brutal persecution – but all the while, the intellectual community of Iran remained silent;

We are ashamed that during the last thirty years, the killing of Baha'is solely on the basis of their religious beliefs has gained legal status and over two-hundred Baha'is have been slain on this account;

We are ashamed that a group of intellectuals have justified coercion against the Baha'i community of Iran;

We are ashamed of our silence that after many decades of service to Iran, Baha'i retired persons have been deprived of their right to a pension;

We are ashamed of our silence that on the account of their fidelity to their religion and truthfulness in stating this conviction, thousands of Baha'i youth have been barred from education in universities and other institutions of higher learning in Iran;

We are ashamed that because of their parents' religious beliefs, Baha'i children are subjected to denigration in schools and in public.

We are ashamed of our silence over this painful reality that in our nation, Baha'is are systematically oppressed and maligned, a number of them are incarcerated because of their religious convictions, their homes and places of business are attacked and destroyed, and periodically their burial places are desecrated;

We are ashamed of our silence when confronted with the long, dark and atrocious record that our laws and legal system have marginalized and deprived Baha'is of their rights, and the injustice and harassment of both official and unofficial organs of the government towards this group of our countrymen;

We are ashamed for all these transgressions and injustices, and we are ashamed for our silence over these deeds.

We, the undersigned, asked you, the Baha'is, to forgive us for the wrongs committed against the Baha'i community of Iran.

We will no longer be silent when injustice is visited upon you.

We stand by you in achieving all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights.

Let us join hands in replacing hatred and ignorance with love and tolerance.

February 3, 2009

Translator: Eventually, hundreds of Iranians signed this petition, but the original signatories at the time of release of this statement were:

1. Aban Vahid, Human Rights Activist – Sweden
2. Abdolalian Morteza, Journalist, CJFE Board of Directors – Canada, Oakville
3. Abdi Asghar, Physiologist/ Human Rights Activist
4. Abghari Shahla, Professor, Life University – USA, Atlanta
5. Abghari Siavash, Professor, University of Georgia – USA, Atlanta
6. Aeine Abtin, Poet – Sweden
7. Afshar Mahasti, Reasercher – USA, Los Angeles
8. Afshari Maryam, Activist – Sweden, Gutenberg
9. Afshin-Jam, Human Rights Activist/ Singer/Songwriter/Actor, Canada, Vancouver
10. Aghnam Reza, Writer/Literature Critic – England, London
11. Ahmadi Fereidoon, Political Analyst – Germany Colonia
12. Ahmadi Ramin, Professor, Yale University – USA, Yale
13. Akbari, Mansour, Human Rights Activist – Sweden, Stockholm
14. Akhavan, Asal, Human Rights Supporter – Australia
15. Alavi Reza, Writer/Political Analyst – USA
16. Almasi Nasrin, Managing editor of Shahrvand- Canada, Toronto
17. Amini Bahman, Publisher – France, Paris
18. Amini, Mehdi, Political Activist – USA, Washington DC
19. Amirgholi Amir, Human Rights Activist – Iran, Tehran
20. Amirhosseini Bahman, journalist – USA, Virginia
21. Amirsedghi Nasrin, Writer/Director of Kult DA – Germany, Mainz
22. Amoozgar Mojgan, Medical Doctor – France, Paris
23. Ansari Siamak, Human Rights Activist – Sweden, Gutenberg
24. Arian Nima, Student/Human Rights Activist – Germany
25. Asadi, Houshang, Writer/ Journalist – France, Paris

26. Assadi Savadkouhi Hooshang, IT specialist – Sweden, Stockholm
27. Assman Mohammad Javad, Poet/ Translator – Iran, Esfahan
28. Attar Mahmood, Pharmacist/ Human Rights Supporter – Italy
29. Avaei Gil, Writer/Bloger – Holand
30. Ayoubzadeh, Hassan, Writer/ Lawyer – Netherlands, Arnhem
31. Azad Azadeh, Sociologist – Canada
32. Azadian Abbas, Psychotrapist – Toronto Canada
33. Azarian Mina, Actress – Sweden, Stockholm
34. Azarkolah Houman, Actor – France, Paris
35. Azarli Katayoun, Writer/Poet – Germany
36. Bagheri- Goldschmied Nahid, Freelance Journalist – Austria, Vienna
37. Bagherpour Danesh, Political Analyst – Germany
38. Bagherpour Khosro, Poet /Journalist – Germany
39. Bakhshizadeh Marziye, Human Rights Activist – Germany
40. Bakhtiyari Sheyda, Human Rights Activist – Denmark
41. Balouch Abdolghader, Writer, Canada Vancouver
42. Baradaran Monireh, Writer/Human rights activist – Germany
43. Barati Mehran, Researcher, Germany, Berlin
44. Batebi Ahmad, Human Rights Activist – USA, Washington
45. Behboodi Reza, Human Rights Activist – Canada
46. Behnia, Kamran, Physicist – France, Paris
47. Beyzaie Niloofar, Play writer/Theatre Director – Germany, Frankfurt
48. Bigdeli Bahram, Human Rights Activist – Germany , Cologne
49. Bishetab Reza, Writer, France, Paris
50. Borghei Mohammad, Professor Strayer University – USA
51. Boroumand Ladan, Researcher, Boroumand Foundation – USA, Washington
52. Boroumand, Roya, Executive Director, Boroumand Foundation – USA, Washington
53. Chehabi Houchang-Esfandiar, Professor – USA, Boston
54. Choubine Bahram, Researcher/Writer – Germany, Köln
55. Corraza Gabriela, Journalist – Spain
56. Daneshvar Hamid, Actor/Theatre Director – France, Paris
57. Darvishpour Mehrdad, Professor, Stockholm University – Sweden, Stockholm
58. Daryani Hossein, Stage Actor – Germany, Berlin
59. Dashi Ali, Political Activist Danemark
60. Dastmalchi Parviz, Writer/Political Analyst – Germany, Berlin
61. Davani Hossein, Art Critic/Human Rights Activist – Germany Colonia
62. Dehzangi Arash, PHD Candidate- Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
63. Delneshin Shahin, Political Analyst/Blogger -Denmark, Copenhagen
64. Djalali Chimeh Mohammad (Msahar), Poet – France, Paris
65. Djanati Atai Behi, Actor/ Writer/Theatre Director – France, Paris
66. Doai Babak, Musician/ Music Teacher – Belgium
67. Duschouki Abdolsatar, Political Analyst – England
68. Ebadi Abdolatif, Poet/Translator/Journalist – England
69. Ebrahimi Hadi, Editor-in-chief of Shahrگون, Canada, Vancouver
70. Emami Bahram, Human Rights Activist – Sweden, Stockholm
71. Esfandarmaz Sherin Human Rights Activist, Belgium Bruxelles
72. Eskandari Mohammad Reza, Sociologist / Activist – Holland
73. Fadai Behroz, Political Activist – Holland

74. Fahimi Nima, Chief of Efsha Website – England
75. Fani Yazdi Reza, Political analyst – USA
76. Farahani Fereshteh, Human Rights Activist – Holland
77. Faraji Hossein, TV Moderator – USA, Los Angeles
78. Farhoudi Vida, Poet/Translator- France, Paris
79. Farid Siamak, Human Rights Activist, Belgium Bruxelles
80. Farrahi Farahnaz, Chief of Iran bbb Website – Germany, Berlin
81. Farshy Ebrahim, Writer/Teacher/Theater Actor – Germany Colonia
82. Fattah Abasali, Political Activist – Australia
83. Fazel Navid, Chief Physician – Germany
84. Ferdosian Payam, writer/ Researcher/ Human Rights Activist – USA, Virginia
85. Forouhar Parastou, Artist/Human Rights Activist – Germany, Frankfurt
86. Fouladi Firuzeh Faye, USA, Silver Spring, Maryland
87. Ghadiri Khosro, Professor/ Journalist/Analyst – USA, California
88. Ghaemi Hadi Coordinator Int. Campaign for HR in Iran – USA
89. Ghahari Keivandokht, Deutsche Welle, Section Iran- Germany, Bonn
90. Ghahraman Saghi, Poet /Journalist – Canada, Toronto
91. Ghahraman, Sasan, Publisher/Writer/Journalist – Canada, Toronto
92. Ghasemi – Impertro Akhtar, Free lance Journalist/ Photographer – Germany, Colonia
93. Ghassemi Reza, Writer – France, Paris
94. Ghiaee Abbas, Bookstore Manager – Germany
95. Ghorashi Reza, Professor, USA New Jersey
96. Giahi Fatemeh, Human Rights Activist, USA, Massachusetts
97. Goharзад Reza, Journalist, USA
98. Golab- Dej Hooshang, Writer/Poet – Sweden Stockholm
99. Golchin Ali, Lawyer – USA, Massachusetts
100. Habibinia Omid, Journalist – Sweden
101. Hajzadeh Fallah Masoud, Design Engineer – Västerås, Sweden
102. Hakim Mohammad Hossein, Professor – USA, Amherst
103. Halford Zhara, Painter/Photograph/Sculptor – France
104. Hamidi Nasrin, Human Rights Activist – Holland
105. Hamidi Hamid, Human Rights Activist – Holland
106. Hamzeloee Mahmoud, Actor/Theatre & Cinema Director – Norway
107. Harandi, Farideh, Lawyer, USA
108. Hashemizadeh Iradj, Architect/Journalist- Austria, Graz
109. Hassibi Mohammad, Political activist, USA
110. Hatami Parviz, Human Rights Activist – USA
111. Hekmat Bijan, Political Activist – France, Paris
112. Heyrani Aref , general contractor, USA, Beaverton OR
113. Homayounpour Kouros, , USA, Washington, DC.
114. Homayounpour Shohreh, Teacher- USA, Washington DC
115. Honarmand Manouchehr, Journalist – Holland
116. Hosseini Mirali, Actor/Journalist, France, Paris
117. Hosseinzadeh Jafar, Political Activist – Belgium
118. Houshmand Zara, Writer – USA Houston
119. Irani Nikki, Human Rights Activist- USA
120. Irani Sholeh, Editor-in-Chief AvayeZan.org –
121. Irvani Arash, (M. Saghi) Poet, Germany Dusseldorf

122. Jabbari Reza, Researcher – Sweden, Gutenberg
123. Jaddeh Mohsen, Journalist/Translator – Germany
124. Jafari Reza, Theatre Director – Germany
125. Jafari Sedighe, Human Rights Activist – Germany, Hanover
126. Javadi Akram, Director of Ida Bookstore – Germany
127. Javdan Hamidreza, Actor/ Theatre Director – France, Paris
128. Javid Jahanshah, Publisher, Iranian [dot] com – Mexico, Chihuahua
129. Jazani Mihan, Writer/Activist – France, Paris
130. Kakhsaz Naser, Political analyst – Germany, Bochum
131. Kalbasi Sheema, Poet – USA, Washington
132. Kamali Shaghayegh, Singer/ Music Lecturer – Germany, Münster
133. Kamrani Ali, Stage Actor/ Song Writer – Germany, Frankfurt
134. Karami, Nasser, Political Analyst – Germany
135. Karimi Behzad, Political Activist, Netherland
136. Kassraei Farhang, Writer/Actor – Germany, Wiesbaden
137. Kaviany Massoud, Professor University Michigan– USA Michigan
138. Kavir Mahmood, Poet/Writer – England
139. Kazemi Monireh, Women Rights Activist – Germany
140. Keshavarz Mehran, Human Rights Activist – Norway
141. Khabazian Reza, Human Rights Supporter – USA
142. Khayam Zohreh, Women Right Activist – USA
143. Khoi Esmail, Writer/Poet – England, London
144. Khojinian, Hadi, Poet/ Writer – England
145. Khorami Tahere, Human Rights Activist – Holland
146. Khorrami Hossein, Political Activist – Germany, Essen
147. Khorsandi Hadi, Satirist – Great Britain, London
148. Khosroparviz Keikhosro, Political Activist, Sweden
149. Khosrozadeh Behrooz, Journalist/ Political science Researcher – Germany Göttingen
150. Kiarostami Kia, Film Producer, Germany, Berlin
151. Koochgilani Parvin, Editor Shahrvand – USA, Texas
152. Kowsari Hamid, Director of New Technology Training Institute, USA Los Angeles
153. Laghaeian Shahriar, Medical Doctor – USA, Seattle
154. Lalejini Ali, Translator – Sweden
155. Lavaei Mehrdad, Human Rights Activist – Holland
156. Madadi Shabnam, Physician/ Human Rights Supporter – Germany
157. Madjlessi Darius, Political Activist – Holland
158. Maghssudnia Manochehr, Political Activist – Germany, Berlin
159. Mahbaz Efat, Women rights activist /Journalist– England, London
160. Mahdjoubi Ali, Member of Parliament – Germany, Berlin
161. Mahjoubi Ebrahim, Human Rights Activist – Germany, Cologne
162. Malakooty Sirius, Classical Guitar Player/ Composer/ Lecturer – England, London
163. Malekzadeh Ali, Human Rights Activist
164. Manoo Missaghi, Social Analyst, Canada, Toronto
165. Masoudi Banafsheh, Researcher – France, Paris
166. Massoumi Bahram, Writer/Activist – Germany
167. Masumian Nima, Teacher – Spain
168. Mazhar Varya, Writer/ Poet – Finland, Helsinki
169. Mehr Bijan, Political Activist – USA, Boston

170. Mirfakhrai Mehran, Architect/ Human Rights Supporter – Italy
171. Miremadi Bijan, Professor University Vancouver – Canada Vancouver
172. Mir Mobini Hossein, Journalist – USA, California
173. Mir Sattari Anwar, President of EuroPers Human Rights – Belgium, Brussels
174. Moghaddas Mehran, Play writer/Theatre Director – Denmark, Copenhagen
175. Mohamadi Majid, Professor/Writer/Researcher – USA, NY
176. Moheb Robab, Writer/ Poet – Sweden
177. Mohtasham Yashar, Activist – France, Paris
178. Mokhtari Sohrab, Writer, Germany, Berlin
179. Morad Daryoush, Human Rights Activist – Germany, Cologne
180. Moshkin Ghalam Shahrokh, Actor/Dancer – France, Paris
181. Mossaed Jila, Poet/Writer – Sweden, Göteborg.
182. Mossallanejad Ezat, Writer/Human right Activist, CCVT – Canada, Toronto
183. Naghibzadeh Fathiyeh, Germany, Berlin
184. Nakhai Shahbaz, Journalist – Canada
185. Nazarian Arsen, Translator – Holland
186. Nejad Mohsen, Political Activist – USA, California
187. Nejati Ahmad, Human Rights Supporter – Belgium
188. Niroumand Bahman, Writer/Journalist – Germany, Berlin
189. Noghrekar Masoud, Writer – USA Florida
190. Nourmanesh Shirindokht, Writer/ Activist – USA, California
191. Nowzari Hamid, Political Activist – Germany, Berlin
192. Omidmehr Ali Akbar, Researcher/ Professor – Denmark
193. Omidmehr Ashraf Sadat, Teacher/ Human Rights Activist – Denmark
194. Omidnehr Mahraz, professor – Denmark
195. Omid Mahzad, Researcher/Professor – Denmark
196. Ostovar Yavar, Poet – Sweden
197. Pak Anna Asyeh, Women right activist – France
198. Paki Morteza, Human Right Activist, Canada
199. Parham Babak, Poet – USA
200. Parsa Kourosh, Human Rights Activist – USA
201. Parsa Soheil, Theatre Director – Canada Toronto
202. Parsi Touradj, Researcher/Ex-Professor – Sweden
203. Payandeh Mehrdad, DGB Director, Germany, Hanover
204. Pegahi Mahshid, Women Rights Activist – Germany
205. Pourmandi Ahmad, Political Activist – Germany, Munich
206. Pour-Naghavi Ali, Political Activist, Holland
207. Rafiee Keyvan, Human Rights Activist – Iran
208. Rahbari Alexander, Composer/ Music Professor – Austria Vienna
209. Rahimi Khosro, Radio Producer – Sweden, Gutenberg
210. Rahnamae M.J., Music Researcher/ Poet – Holland
211. Ramezani Rahim, Political Activist – Turkey Van
212. Ranjbar Darvish, Former Diplomat of IR of Iran.
213. Ranjbar Kazem, Political Sociology Scientist – France, Paris
214. Rashedan Nima, Political Researcher/Analyst – Swiss
215. Rashidi Asad, writer/Poet – Germany
216. Rastgar Iraj, Human Rights Activist – USA, Texas
217. Rasti Mahshid, Women/Human Rights Activist- Sweden, Stockholm

218. Razavi Rasoul, Human Rights Activist – Germany Bonn
219. Roshan Mitra, Journalist – Canada, Montreal
220. Saadati Mansoor, Chemist – Canada, Edmonton
221. Sabety Setareh, Writer/Teacher – France, Nice
222. Sadr Hamid, Writer – Germany
223. Sadreddin Zahed, Actor/Theater Director – France, Paris
224. Safaei E., Poet/Political Activist – Germany, Colonia
225. Sahimi, Muhammad Professor, University of Southern California – USA, California
226. Sakhaee Manoucher, Singer/Journalist – Germany
227. Salary Babak, Photograph – Canada
228. Samadpouri Ali, Political Activist – Belgium
229. Samadany Faramarz, Chemist – USA
230. Samienejad Mojtaba, Journalist, Iran
231. Sarhaddi Arash, Actor/Theater Director – Germany, Berlin
232. Sarshar Homa, Writer/Journalist – USA, Los Angeles
233. Sedghi Majid, Journalist – Franc, Paris
234. Sehati parisa, Women Rights Activist – Sweden
235. Seihoun Farideh, Professor, Framingham State College- USA
236. Servati Mojgan, Sociologist/Writer/Researcher – Germany
237. Setoodeh Behrouz, Political Analyst – USA
238. Shabafrooz Masood, Human Rights Activist – USA California
239. Shafaei Javad, Italia, Roma
240. Shafaei Manuchehr, Artist/Activist, Germany
241. Shafie Minoo, Human Rights Activist – Denmark
242. Shafigh Shahla,(Chahla Chafiq) Writer/Researcher – France, Paris
243. Shamshiri Fariborz, Human Rights Activist – Canada
244. Shemiranie Khosro, Journalist – Canada, Montreal
245. Sheyda Behrooz, Literary Critic/Theorist- Sweden, Stockholm
246. Shirazi Jahangir, Journalist/Activist – Holland
247. Simai Behrouz, Poet/Writer – USA
248. Sina Bijan, Medical Doctor – Germany
249. Sobhani Sohrab, International Affairs Consultant – USA, Washington, DC
250. Sohi Siamak , human Rights Activist – Denmark
251. Soltani Anwar, Reasercher – England
252. Taghipoor Masoomeh, Actor/Theatre Director – Sweden, Göteborg.
253. Tahavori Mohammad, Journalist, USA, MA Cambridge
254. Tavackoli Shahin, Medical Doctor – USA, Huston
255. Torabi Mohammad, Telcom Research Scientist – USA, Dana Point USA, Washington
256. Vahdat Kamran, Professor – USA, Amherst
257. Vahdati Soheila, Human Rights Activist – USA, California
258. Yadegari Shahrokh, Composer/Professor University of California – USA, California
259. Yousefi Nasser, Teather Director/Radio Producer – Sweden, Stockholm
260. Youssefi Hadi, Human Rights Activist – Denmark
261. Zahed Sadreddin, Stage Actor/ theatre Director – France, Paris
262. Zahedi Mitra, Theatre Director – Germany, Berlin
263. Zandian Mandana, Medical Doctor/Writer/Poet – USA
264. Zarasvand Hossein, Poet – Toronto Canada
265. Zarei Faramarz, Actor – China

266. Zeinali Lohrasb, Political Activist – Germany

267. Zerehi Hassan, Editor-in-chief of Shahrvand, Canada, Toronto

Press Release by “We Are Ashamed” organizers

*The following Press Release was posted on February 14, 2009, at:
<http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1193>.*

A Press Release by the organizers of the open letter to the Baha’i community titled “A century and a half of oppression and silence is enough!”

Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you have no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain.
(Sa’di)

Two hundred more have joined the open letter “We are Ashamed”!

On February 3, 2009, the open letter “We are Ashamed! A century and a half of oppression and silence is enough!” was published. This proclamation was signed and endorsed by 42 Iranian academicians, writers, artists, journalists and human rights activists throughout the world. These signatories condemned the long silence of Iranian society and intellectuals in the face of crimes and atrocities inflicted upon the Baha’is of Iran over the course of a century and a half.

With the initial publication of this letter, a period of ten days was set aside so that others wishing to join this growing group of concerned citizens would be able to append their signatures to this letter. We are now pleased to publish a more complete list of signatories along with this Press Release.

In sharing this list, a few points must be noted:

1. A great many emails in support of this open letter have been received. However, only those emails that were deemed to be from sufficiently reliable sources have been included in the present tally.
2. A number of political activists, professionals, specialists and other noble and well-meaning individuals have expressed alignment with the open letter and joined the rank of its signatories. Therefore, in addition to “Iranian academics, writers, artists, journalists and human rights activists”, these categories of Iranian professionals have also been added to the list.
3. Since it was not possible via email to confirm their participation with all those who signed this letter, a few of the names have been included without such confirmations and solely by relying on the submitted emails.

We are confident that many more individuals, responsible and humane individuals, both inside and outside Iran, will add their seal of approval to it, as they become aware of such a letter, and we hope that the independent and committed Iranian media will join us in disseminating this message.

End of Press Release

In response to this Press Release, on February 15, 2009, the Baha'i International Community expressed gratitude for the open letter of support:

<http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1211>

New York, 15 February (BWNS) – The Baha'i International Community has issued a statement of gratitude to the Iranian intellectuals, scholars, writers, journalists, activists, and artists throughout the world who signed an open letter apologizing for their silence during Iran's long-running persecution of the Baha'is.

The open letter from the Iranians – dated 3 February and signed so far by 243 men and women living in 19 countries – had asked Baha'is to forgive them “for the wrongs committed against the Baha'i community of Iran” over the last century and a half.

“We will no longer be silent when injustice is visited upon you,” the letter said after enumerating some of the ways Baha'is have been persecuted, from “barbaric murders” to depriving youth of higher education.

In response, the Baha'i International Community told the signatories that the letter “brought a degree of solace and relief to the pain that your Baha'i fellow citizens endure.” “On their behalf and that of the Baha'is throughout the world we convey our profound gratitude and appreciation for a deed of such historical moment,” the Baha'i message said, referring to the publication of the open letter.

The letter was particularly significant, said the Baha'i response, in that it rejected the milieu of intimidation created by Iranian authorities throughout the decades that served to silence “those fair-minded and informed individuals who had always wished to rise up” in support of the Baha'is.

Indeed, in a press statement yesterday, the organizers behind the letter said that many more people would like to sign.

“We are confident,” their statement said, “that many more individuals, responsible and humane individuals, both inside and outside Iran, will add their seal of approval to it, as they become aware of such a letter, and we hope that the independent and committed Iranian media will join us in disseminating this message.”

The open letter began with the heading “We are ashamed! A century and a half of oppression and silence is enough!”

“We are ashamed that during the last 30 years, the killing of Baha'is solely on the basis of their religious beliefs has gained legal status and over 200 Baha'is have been slain on this account,” said one clause.

“We are ashamed that a group of intellectuals have justified coercion against the Baha'i community of Iran,” the letter continued.

The letter ended thus: “We stand by you in achieving all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights. Let us join hands in replacing hatred and ignorance with love and tolerance.”

The Baha'i response also ended with a statement of hope: “The ardent hope of Iranian Baha'is is to be able to labor, shoulder to shoulder, with their compatriots for the progress and exaltation of their country that it may assume its seat of honor and glory among the family of nations.”

What is there to Celebrate?

By Shahrzad Arshadi

Arshadi is a Montreal-based human rights activist, photographer and filmmaker. This informed essay was first disseminated on February 11, 2009, under the title, "What is there to Celebrate? For the 30th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran" and posted on February 15, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1175>.

February 11, 2009, will mark the 30th anniversary of Iran's Islamic revolution!

I cannot believe it has already been 30 years! Only thinking about these 30 years makes me cry. My heart is aching!

There are nights I wish that when I opened my eyes in the morning, I could take a deep breath and say to myself, whoa, what a nightmare! Unfortunately, what happened to Iran is a horrible reality! I am not dreaming!

I was not sure if I wanted to write anything related to the 30th anniversary of Iran's Islamic revolution. A couple of days ago, I was surfing on the Internet to read news about Iran and to learn what is new in my country of birth. To make a long story short, I saw that the Government of Iran is celebrating the 30th anniversary of the revolution for twelve days, from February 1st to the 12th.

Thus, I decided to write something about it to remind myself about the reality of these past 30 years. I must try to clarify what the Iranian government is really celebrating! What history did they create in the past 3 decades, which makes them so proud that they must celebrate for 12 days?

Allow me to go back to the beginning of the revolution, or maybe a little bit before.

It was 1978. The Iranian revolution was in full swing. I was a teenager full of life and passionate about a big change, like so many young people during that period. We were all ready to get rid of the monarchy and bring justice and equality to our country. The future was so bright and it was right in front of us; we could be free from the hands of a dictator!

Finally the time had come: 1979 was glorious. The Shah left the country! However, the glory of the 1979 revolution did not last long for many Iranians. Women were the first to be targeted by the new regime.

- On 3 March 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini announced that women were not allowed to be judges.
- On 6 March 1979, Khomeini announced that women should wear the "hijab" (the veil) in the workplace.
- On 8 March 1979, international women's day turned into a protest against Khomeini's announcements — this was the start of Hezbollah's attacks on demonstrations.
- On 29 March 1979, Khomeini announced that beaches and sporting events would be segregated by sex.

Women with no hijab were under constant attack on the streets and in public places. There were cases where acid was thrown on the bodies and faces of these unveiled women on the streets. Finally in June of 1980, with Khomeini's "Enqelab-e Edari" or "Administrative Revolution", the "hijab" became mandatory for Iranian women regardless of their religious beliefs.

Right from the beginning, Iran's Islamic regime started celebrating its power by executing people from every range of the old regime. But the killings did not end there. The new government started arresting everyone who did not want to be governed by religious fanatics.

Iran's prisons were flooded with political prisoners of every age, gender, religion and ideology. I will never forget the morning news from those early revolutionary times. Every day, the news started with a list of the opposition members who had been executed the day or the night before. Thousands had been killed in prisons all around Iran. Imagine your day when it starts with such morning news! Things changed for us drastically. We had been betrayed.

The Islamic government had no respect for any ethnic or religious minorities, most particularly members of the Baha'i faith. Right from the beginning of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Baha'is were reviled for their beliefs. In the Islamic Republic's new constitution, passed in 1979, Baha'is had been denied any rights as citizens of Iran. A good Muslim could attack and kill a Baha'i with complete impunity. From mid-1978 to 1979, a great number of Baha'is were attacked and killed by mobs. In 1980, at least 24 Baha'is were killed — half of them were members of Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies. In the past 3 decades, 207 Baha'is have been killed; thousand have been imprisoned and tortured.

Since the Islamic regime has been in power, Baha'is have been prevented from obtaining higher education — this discrimination is still going on.

On 19 August 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini declared Holy War against the Kurdish people of Iran. After Khomeini's order, armed forces attacked Kurdistan in order to destroy the Kurdish people's democratic and popular movement. Thousands were killed. Many young men and women moved to the mountains to organize a struggle against the Islamic government's armed forces.

In June of 1980, universities were shut down. The Islamic Cultural Revolution was on its way. According to the new government, since opposition to the Islamic regime dominated higher education and academia and because they are influenced by non-Islamic thought, university's systems must be changed completely. The Cultural Revolution forcefully took over university campuses. Students and professors tried to resist the Islamic Cultural Revolution control; many were injured, arrested and killed. Universities were closed for almost three years. After reopening in September of 1982, many books were banned. Many students were denied access to education and many faculty members were denied access to academic sites in universities.

1980 to 1983 was when elimination of opposition groups occurred. According to Amnesty International reports, more than 6000 were executed in Iran between 1979 and 1983. However, imprisonment and execution did not end in 1983. In 1988, thousands of political prisoners were brutally murdered by the Iranian government (estimates range from 8,000 to 14,000 executions). In the summer of 1988, the massacre started right after Ayatollah Khomeini's "Fatwa" [i.e. religious ruling]: execution of all political prisoners, those whom the Islamic Republic of Iran called "moharebs" (meaning those who war against God) and "mortads" (apostates from Islam).

The 1980's were a decade of execution of members of the opposition and of war! The government executed thousands of political prisoners of every age, gender, and ideology. They never provided any information about how all these prisoners were killed; also they never acknowledged these executions. Khavaran on the south east side of Tehran is one of the cemeteries that have been used as a mass grave for the bodies of political prisoners executed in 1988. Even though many families do not know where their daughters,

sons, husbands, wives, mothers or fathers are buried, in the past 20 years Khavaran has become a place for thousands of families to get together to grieve for their great loss. However, the Islamic government cannot even let the dead rest in peace, as they are doing everything in their power to destroy this mass grave. During the past month, in the winter of 2009, the Iranian government dug up Khavaran's mass grave in order to remove the remainder of the bodies to an unknown place. They have changed the soil and planted trees! They hope that maybe with the destruction of Khavaran, the blood from their hands will be washed away.

As I am looking at what I have written until now, through almost two and half pages, almost twelve hundred words, I cannot find a single word or reason to make me believe that this revolution deserves a celebration.

Through three decades of violence, abuse, discrimination, torture and execution, Iran has lived and still continues to live in fear!

Art was another victim of the new government. According to the new government, only art related to the Islamic Revolution was worth creating. Music was forbidden unless it was a tool for Islamic propaganda. Almost all the popular singers in Islamic Iran had no right to sing, because their music supposedly promoted western and non-Islamic values, from which only the devil could benefit. Hundreds of thousands of music albums and films were confiscated from radio and TV stations. Studio productions and even private collections in people's houses were not safe. Women's voices became the property of the Islamic government according to their belief that no man should hear women singing! Women were completely banned from being singers, unless they sang in a chorus with men.

The new reality was even harsher for dance! Dance had been forbidden for men and women. All dance schools were shutdown. No one was allowed to dance in Iran during those years!

The spread of fear and the killing of Iranian dissidents was not only inside Iran's borders. The Iranian government secretly orchestrated a "Committee for Special Operations" outside Iran. Several Iranian dissidents have been killed in Europe and Asia.

- Shahrokh Misaghi, a member of the student opposition, was killed in Manila, The Philippines, on 14 January 1982.
- On 8 June 1982, Shahram Mirani, a Kurdish Iranian student and a member of the student opposition to the Islamic government, was attacked on the streets of Aligarh-India at night, and beaten to death.
- On 10 September 1982, Abdol Amir Rahdar, a member of the student opposition to the Islamic government, was killed in Bangalore, India.
- In 1990, Kazem Rajavi was killed in Switzerland.
- In 1991, Shahpur Bakhtiar, the last Prime Minister under the Shah, was found with his throat slit at his house in France.
- On 9 August 1992, Fereydoun Farrokhzad, a famous Iranian singer and poet, an outspoken artist who spoke against the human rights abuses of the Iranian Islamic government, was stabbed to death and beheaded with a knife at his home in Bonn, Germany.
- On 17 September 1992, Iranian Kurdish dissidents and opposition leaders Sadegh Shahafkandi, Fattah Abdoli, and Homayoun Ardala were assassinated at the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin, Germany. The killers were arrested but set free and sent to Iran after a while. The German federal prosecutors during the trial

directly accused Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's spiritual leader, and former President Hashemi Rafsanjani for ordering and approving the killings.

The list goes on!

The 1998 serial murders of Iranian dissident intellectuals were a series of murders and disappearances of Iranians who had been critical of the Islamic Republic. Among them were Mohammad Mokhtari, a great Iranian philosopher and poet, Mohammad Jafar Poyandeh, a philosopher and translator, Ms Parvaneh Eskandari, Dariush Forouhar, Majid Sharif and.... No one ever gave any answers about these crimes.

The 1990's were the beginning of independent student rallies against the government and against university policies.

On 9 July 1999, police and hard-line vigilantes attacked a dormitory at the University of Tehran. One student was killed and twenty were injured by the attackers. Not long after that, the Government of Iran banned street protests. Many students were arrested and tortured for the simple gesture of asking for better treatment for students.

Hundreds of newspapers and magazines were shut down and banned from ever being published again. Many Internet sites and blogs were disrupted and their creators arrested.

In spring of 2003, university student's rallies hit the streets of Tehran and other big cities. It was during that time when Ziba Zahra Kazemi, an Iranian – Canadian photojournalist, happened to be in Tehran. On 23 June 2003, she had been arrested in front of Evin Prison while she was taking photographs of the demonstrations. She was tortured and murdered while she was in the custody of the Iranian government.

These recent years are not different from past years. Farzad Kamangar, a 33 year old Iranian Kurdish teacher and trade unionist, was sentenced to death by the Iranian Revolutionary Court on the 25 February 2008 after a trial which took place in secret and lasted only minutes. His execution could take place at any moment. Many Kurdish activists have been arrested and killed during the past few years.

On 15 May 2008, six Baha'i leaders in Iran were arrested and taken to the notorious Evin prison. They are still in jail without having gone through a trial.

On December of 2008, Islamic authorities shut down the Centre for Defenders of Human Rights led by Shirin Ebadi, and raided her private office, seizing her computers and files. Furthermore, on 1 January 2009, pro-regime "demonstrators" attacked Ebadi's home and office.

On 15 January 2009, at least six Baha'is were arrested, including a woman who worked at the Centre for Defenders of Human Rights and who was connected with Nobel Prize winner Shirin Ebadi. The six were arrested after government security agents raided the homes of 11 Baha'is. They also confiscated Baha'i books and other items, such as computers and photographs.

The list of human rights abuses in Iran is longer than anyone can imagine. On 12 June 2006, a peaceful demonstration organized by women activists to demand changes to discriminatory laws against women turned violent, no thanks to Islamic government officials and supporters. Seventy women were arrested during that demonstration in Tehran. A great majority of these women were not looking for a big change or to overthrow the government, as they had emphasized in a "Million Signature Campaign". These women specified that the demands of their campaign were not in contradiction to Islamic principles. They were looking for a change in the current system. Regardless, even a simple demand for change to

the discriminatory laws — by only collecting signatures — is a big threat to this totalitarian government.

On 15 October 2008, the Iranian Ministry of Information arrested Esha Momeni, an Iranian-American student at California State University/Northridge. She went back to Iran to make a documentary about women's rights activists, but to this day she is trapped in Iran, because officials have confiscated her passport and have forbidden her to leave the country. Alieh Eghdamdoust was transferred to Evin prison on 31 January 2009, to serve a three-year prison term in relation to her participation in the peaceful protest of 12 June 2006.

Nafiseh Azad was arrested while collecting signatures in support of the Million Signature Campaign on 30 January 2009. She is now under interrogation at Vozara Detention Center. On 3 February 2009, security officials from the Special Security Branch of the Office of the Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Courts stormed the home of imprisoned activist Nafiseh Azad and seized her personal property as well as the property of her housemates.

This is what the Islamic Republic of Iran is celebrating!

I understand there is so much more that I have to add to this text, but let's stop here. However, this is a brief version of these events! This is only a part of what the Iranian people have been through since the Islamic government came to power!

For that reason, let us not forget what happened to Iran in the past three decades! Let us remember the thousands and thousands who lost their lives over the past three decades! Let us remember those who are in prison because of their beliefs! Let us remember those who are being stoned to death because they make love outside the Islamic framework and laws! Let us remember those who live under constant abuse because of their sexual orientation! Let us remember...! Let us remember in order to prevent the same thing from happening again!

We need to narrate what happened to us. We need to remind ourselves that oppressors may be able to confiscate many things from us, but they can never confiscate our hopes and dreams.

Two weeks ago, I participated in a demonstration to support the people of Gaza. The slogan that was mostly repeated by participants was; "Silent accomplice!"

I think it was for the same reason that the great Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Supporting Freedom of Expression for Baha'is

By Abolhassan Banisadr

Abolhassan Banisadr was the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1980-81). The following is a translation of an introduction to an interview he held with Rahmat-Qasem Begu, a reporter for Radio France Internationale, on February 16, 2009, http://www.rfi.fr/actufa/articles/110/article_5377.asp. This translation was posted on February 17, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1252>

In Iran, debate about the manner in which the government is dealing with the Baha'i community and its followers gains a new intensity each day. For instance, Hojjatol-Islam Duri-Najafabadi, the nation's prosecutor-general, wrote a letter to the Minister of Intelligence instructing him to combat the activities of this community.

In recent months, increased incarcerations, pressures on the Baha'is in addition to [possible] imprisonment, the status of their civil rights and of the citizenship rights of this community, have attracted the attention of national and international agencies concerned with human rights. Regarding the government's reaction towards this community [i.e., Baha'is], which has several hundred thousand members, Hojjatol-Islam Dur-Najafabadi stated, "According to the constitution of the Islamic Republic, having a certain belief and conviction is free. However, it is illegal to state or proclaim it in any manner."

Abolhassan Banisadr, Iran's first president, says, "When having any belief is free, how can expressing it be prohibited by law?"

Statement of Support by Writers and Journalists from Kurdistan

The Kurdistan region, covering land in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, is victim to long-running separatist conflicts in which thousands of lives have been lost. Under such circumstances, the statement in support of Iranian Baha'is is a sign of courage, selflessness and humanity. This statement was published in Persian on February 16, 2009, at <http://komala.eu/kurdi/?p=562> and a translation appeared on February 18, 2009, at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1272>.

To:

The Universal House of Justice
Human-rights Activist Groups in Iran
Human-rights Observer Groups across the Globe
Secretary General of the United Nations

With boundless greetings,

Reports from the Islamic Republic's news agencies and other non-official sources indicate that the Leadership Council of the Islamic Republic has issued a defamatory circular letter to Intelligence, Security, Military and Disciplinary forces throughout the country in which it has reintroduced such old clichés as referring to the Baha'i Faith as "the wayward sect of Baha'ism", "being associated with Zionism" and the "necessity of reacting harshly against the followers of Baha" – demonstrating its firm intent to gird up its tyrannical resolve to design and execute a systematic crime against humanity and against the followers of the Baha'i Faith in Iran. This is also evidenced by the letter of the nation's Prosecutor-General to the Ministry of Intelligence.

Fundamentally, reference to any religious group in the world with a particular following as a "wayward sect" is not only unbecoming of our humanity, but the expression is now so undermined and outdated that any reference to it in any context quickly brings to mind the dark ages, the medieval period, the inquisition, the rule of religious deceit and taking advantage of the effects of religion on humans through misinterpretation and misrepresentation of lofty religious truths by a number of deceitful individuals clothed in the garment of leadership and spirituality.

Our first question is: Who has granted permission to the lords of bloodshed, murder and crime to attribute from the hogwash of their petrified, backward minds to any other religious, national, ethnical or political group such phrases as "wayward sect", "satanic faction", "arms of despotisms", "allies", "mercenaries", "agents of espionage", etc., and to hurl accusations against other schools of thought, against followers of such heterodoxies, against supporters of peace, freedom and democracy, and against those who resist following a grotesque and dead ideology by the name of the Islamic Republic.

Having accepted diversity and pluralism, the present-day mind undoubtedly accepts and values all dimensions of thought – national, religious, linguistic, political, cultural and social backgrounds – only within the overarching concept of humanity and as human beings. Having accepted this reality, it will then recognize all other related details and hold itself responsible for observing and safeguarding the material and spiritual rights of groups with diverse belief, national, religious, linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds.

The world of today is a world that challenges any sort of oppression against any group of people belonging to any school of thought, nation, religion, language, culture or

society. It accepts thinking differently – along with diversity – as an obvious and fundamental principle; and while defining its parameters, guides the efforts of human rights foundations, activists, writers, intellectuals, journalists and even governmental disciplines to respect others even in light of differences of thought and opinion.

The recent communiqué from the Leadership Council and the nation's Prosecutor-General to the Ministry of Intelligence of the Islamic Republic indicating the necessity for dealing harshly with the Baha'i Faith and attributing to it the baseless and unfounded accusation of association with the international Zionism demonstrates that, unable to design a plot on the immense scale of international conspiracies and fearful of subjects which might induce a crisis among different Iranian groups, and in order to cover up an imminent crisis in the disintegration of its regime, the Islamic Republic has once again – as it has attempted many times before – chosen the policy of concocting a pretence of conspiracy and suppression of the supposed conspirators and has targeted the followers of the Baha'i Faith for its purposes.

We, writers and journalists from Kurdistan in adherence to our humanitarian responsibilities, wish to inform the people of Kurdistan in general, and in particular those who live in Iran, of the reality that the Baha'i Holy Places and the World Centre of the Baha'i Faith were established 80 years prior to the formation of the State of Israel and during the reign of the Ottoman Empire in the two cities of Haifa and 'Akka; that the Founder of the Baha'i Faith – an independent religion with its own exclusive order – was exiled to that land by the order of the Iranian rulers of the time; that there is no relationship between Zionism, in a political sense, and Baha'ism with its religious foundations; and that we wish to announce our unconditional support for Kurdish Baha'is, for non-Kurdish Baha'is living in Kurdistan, for the nearly 350 thousand Baha'is living in Iran (and constituting the largest religious minority in the country), and for over six million Baha'is living across the globe bringing this religion to recognition as the second most widespread religion on earth.

While condemning the government's decisions, in the midst of the collapse of the Islamic Republic, to consider it necessary to clash with the followers of Baha in Iran, we announce our readiness – both by means of the pen as well as by more forceful action – to erase this recurring shame; and we earnestly expect the human-rights organizations and foundations of the world, as well as political groups and parties in Kurdistan and other ethnic groups in Iran, to leave no stone unturned in announcing official statements condemning this excessive scrutiny of beliefs, this design for the suppression of the friends of peace and fellowship (the people of Baha), and this neo-holocaust.

A group of writers and journalists from Kurdistan

Validity of signatures has been ascertained and they have been archived for security reasons.

Violation of the rights of the Baha'i citizens is shameful

By United Republicans of Iran

On February 19, 2009, the following statement was posted on Source: <http://www.iranrepublic.org/> and republished at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1379>.

Call for an immediate release of the leaders of the Baha'i community in Iran.

Nearly 9 months after the arrest of the 7 leaders of the Baha'i community in Iran and following the "guilty verdict" on espionage issued by Security Prosecutor of Tehran and even before a court of justice could review the accusations, the Prosecutor General of Iran in a letter to the Ministry of Intelligence, declared the activities of the leadership illegal and banned. The prosecutor general also stated: "that the activities of Baha'i organization in all aspect are illegal since their connection to Israel and opposition to Islam and Islamic nation and danger to national security is obvious. It is imperative that any further activities by any such groups be dealt with."

Head of the Ministry of Intelligence, Mr. Dori Najaf Abadi, while pointing to the 20th and 23rd articles of the Constitution which stipulates the rights of the citizens and freedom of belief and speech, he himself violated these very same articles accusing them for their belief in another religion, and "tampering with minds of others and agitation." In the Islamic Republic of Iran, arrest and intimidation of the Baha'is have always existed. But this is the first time that the government has openly and officially declared any religious activities by the followers of the Baha'i faith illegal and "equal to opposition to Islam and Islamic government" and for the benefit of the State of Israel.

The Islamic Republic of Iran in the last year has arrested numerous Baha'is throughout the country. According to published reports by Human Rights organizations, currently there are over 30 who are in prison. Among them are the 7 leaders of the Baha'i Community, Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naemi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Ms. Mahvash Sabet, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm who were arrested last year. With the exception of Ms. Sabeh who was arrested in Mashhad on March 5, 2008 the rest were arrested in Tehran on 14th of May.

The new cycle of arrest, torture and trial of the Baha'is under the pretext of espionage, indicates the escalation of intimidation against the believers of this faith. False accusation of espionage for Israel is solely based on the ground that their religious center is located there and it's a pretext to conjure up inhumane and discriminatory policies against them.

United Republicans of Iran, which has consistently defended the rights of the Baha'i community in Iran, once again calls for their immediate release and to end the systematic pressure and restrictions against them and relieve the official orders of the prosecutor general and to accept their right to follow their beliefs.

The United Republicans of Iran, demand for the immediate elimination of any discrimination imposed on our compatriots based on gender, religion, ethnicity, race and creed.

Dialogue with Some Signatories of the “We are Ashamed” Proclamation

By Iraj Adibzadeh

The following is a translation of an interview held by Iraj Adibzadeh, a noted reporter for Radio Zamaaneh. This article was entitled in Persian, “To be Iranian does not mean to be Shi’ah” and published on February 5, 2009 at http://zamaaneh.com/adibzadeh/2009/02/print_post_287.html. Translation was posted on February 22, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1403>.

“We are ashamed” is the title of a statement sealed with the signature of Iranian academicians, authors, artists, journalists, human rights and social activists throughout the globe addressed to the Baha’i community in Iran.

In this statement, these individuals have expressed their shame as Iranians for whatever has been done to the Baha’is over the last 150 years in Iran – the martyrdom of 20,000 Baha’is due to their beliefs, the setting ablaze of their homes and workplaces are instances of this severe persecution.

During the thirty years of the Islamic Republic of Iran, killing Baha’is has become legal. More than 200 Baha’is during these three decades have been martyred, and some are in prison. Their children have been deprived of studying in universities; their retired persons after serving their homeland for years have been denied their pensions, and even their cemeteries have been attacked and demolished.

The statement “We are Ashamed” further adds, “... a group of intellectuals have justified coercion against the Baha’i community of Iran.”

At the end, those who have signed this statement from different continents note, “We, the undersigned, asked you, the Baha’is, to forgive us for the wrongs committed against the Baha’i community of Iran. We will no longer be silent when injustice is visited upon you. We stand by you in achieving all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

One of the signatories is Ms. Shahla Shafigh. She is an author and researcher, and describes what has been done to Baha’is as an irruption of apartheid:

I signed the statement with utmost pleasure. I have always referred to the suppression of the Baha’is in my interviews and articles. For example, in a book published in 2002 in France about the suppression of Iranians I have dedicated some sections to this subject. I think this is a significant topic. The suppression of Baha’is has aspects and dimensions that other religious communities do not have.

An ideological government rules Iranian society and authorities have used religion as means of achieving power. Therefore, all other religions, and even Muslims who do not share the same beliefs as those in the government, face suppression. Examples of this are widely observed, including those against them and even sometimes individuals close to them, such as [Sadegh] Ghotbzadeh [Khomeini's close aide in exile, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic 1979-80, executed for subversion in 1982].

Consequently, silencing these groups included all, even the Muslims.

However, the question of Baha’is raises both symbolic issues and in reality a very specific and sensitive question. Since the Baha’i religion

appeared after Islam, the Islamic regime, due to its ideology, assumes their slaughter of Baha'is is completely lawful. Accordingly, Baha'is do not have any right to life.

When we look at the freedom of religion in Iran, it can be noticed that the issue of the Baha'is is quite significant, because in regard to this case, unimaginable pressures and restraints are imposed on them. For example, talented Baha'i youth cannot enter universities. In fact, they have imposed a kind of apartheid upon Baha'is, which is quite shocking.

Another issue that I have to point out is the existence of a kind of silence in this regard. This silence needs to be broken. I think the Baha'i issue, with respect to the fears that the Islamic regime is cultivating, suggesting that Baha'is are agents of such and such, has caused even a great portion of those who are against the Islamic government to keep themselves aloof from this issue.

Therefore, this case certainly needs to be discussed. An atmosphere has to be created so that this meaningless aggressive suppression is ended.

Muhammad Jalali Cheymeh (known as M. Sahar) is a resident of Paris; he comments on this issue as the suppression of Iranian humanity for the reason of one's beliefs. He states:

When I received this statement ["We are Ashamed"], I felt that I had to sign it simply for the reason that when those with different religious faiths are Iranians, they are first and foremost Iranians. They have to have the rights of citizenship and Iranian nationality.

Suppressing Iranians for their beliefs, putting them under pressure, or as it is practiced in Iran, depriving Baha'i youth of being allowed to study in universities, is inhumane and grossly unjust.

I was deeply saddened when I heard that in Qom they had prepared a petition against the Baha'is. Four months ago I wrote an article and composed a poem in regard to this event. I have stated these facts in there, "Nobody chooses one's faith at the time of one's birth. To be Iranian does not mean to be a Shi'ah. Iran has a very ancient history. It has embraced a variety of religions and their followers have always lived in this land. This country is their homeland. They have grown up here. Therefore, they have an inalienable right to reside here. They have served and are serving the country."

To suppress an Iranian under the pretext of religion is a crime. This should be kept in mind. If there was laxness and silence on the part of Iranian intellectuals, then this disgraceful and dishonorable neglect should be remedied.

Shahrokh Meshkin-Qalam is an artist and theater director in Paris, and he believes that the significant aspect of this problem — that is, the suppression of Baha'is in Iran — concerns lack of democratic values and disregard for human rights:

Attacking Baha'is is nothing except a diversion. The main theme of this letter concerns the extent to which the concept of democracy has been instilled in our minds rather than being a Baha'i or being from some other religious

minority. The problem is respect for different thoughts and perspectives, for different ideas, for different religions whether minority or majority, for different lifestyles, and for different needs.

We should not let others decide the way we want to lead our life. What is painful for me and made me sign this letter was not that I was born into a Baha'i family. It was about how we could allow ourselves to determine the life of others according to what we like or dislike. This is surely not what is desired. When one is born in this country, say, in an Armenian, or Jewish, or a Baha'i family, it is not due to one's own decision.

Baha'is have been one of the central targets of attacks in Iran since many years ago, and unfortunately have been mostly ignored by intellectuals. The reason is that they did not have the power of the Jewish community to defend themselves. The Jews have always been capable of fighting back or supporting themselves throughout the world – even though they have been wrongly put under pressure and their rights violated.

But nowadays, merely being a Baha'i carries a verdict of execution, or dismissal of employment – a deprivation of life. The Jews have at least been able to secure these rights in Iran. Therefore, one of the reasons I dared request that my friends sign this letter was to focus on democratic values and to renew these standards for all mankind. It was certainly not due to them being religious, or coming from a specific religion, or even being an atheist.

What makes me feel proud is that democracy and humaneness have been important for all those who have signed this letter. They have a variety of ideas, a variety of religions, and a variety of political persuasions. But cherishing democratic ideals is their common denominator.

Lastly, I asked the reaction of Ms Diane Ala'i, the representative of the Baha'i International Community in the United Nations, concerning the statement of academicians, authors, artists, journalists, human rights and social activists throughout the globe by the title of "We are ashamed". She stated:

This was a very important and courageous step taken by Iranian intellectuals and artists. Of course, these Iranians live abroad and are able to openly perform such actions. However, we know that there are many in Iran who defend the rights of the Baha'is. This is, in fact, a human rights issue. It reveals that there is a unity and integrity throughout Iran about defending the rights of others and ending violations of human rights there. This is great progress and gives hope to every one of us concerning the development of human rights and the promulgation of democracy in Iran.

Baha'is, the Sole Targets of Conspiracism?

By Aram Anahid

The following is a translation of a brilliant article published in Persian on February 17, 2009, at <http://www.iranian.com/main/2009/feb-21>, under the title, "When Hate Triumphs over Justice, All are Victims". This translation was posted on February 22, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1407>. Translator.

In early February 2009, for the first time after two decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran officially accused the leaders of the Baha'i community of Iran of espionage, thus reverting its position to that of the 1980s. A week later, Iran's Prosecutor-General, Hujjatul-Islam Dorri Najafabadi, accused Baha'is of "espionage, infiltration, and undermining people's belief," and asked the Ministry of Intelligence to fight all echelons of Baha'i organizations. These allegations are certainly not new. For more than seventy years, similar accusations have repeatedly been voiced against Baha'is. In fact, the Babi-Baha'i Movement has been the target of ruthless attacks since its very inception in mid 19th century Iran, but until the early 20th century the rhetoric targeted at the faith was religious, rather than political, in nature.

It was, first, during the early 1940s that a book titled "The Political Confessions or Memoirs of Prince Dolgoruki" (or, simply, "Dolgorukov's Memoirs") was published in Iran. In its preface, the book purported to be a translation of the memoirs of Prince Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgorukov (Russian Minister in Iran from 1845-54), first published in the official organ of the Soviet Communist Party. According to the book, whose Russian "original" has never been found, Prince Dolgorukov had travelled to Iran during the 1830s, entered the ranks of the 'ulama, and instigated the Babi-Baha'i uprising. The book totally contradicted the well-documented life of Prince Dolgorukov, and made obvious chronological and historical mistakes in its allegations about the lives of the Bab and Baha'u'llah.¹⁸ Nevertheless, "Dolgorukov's Memoirs" was reprinted many times, and created a master-narrative that others subsequently deployed.¹⁹ With its political tone, the book, on the one hand, heralded the ascendancy of politics over religion in the mindset of Iran's Shi'a clergy, and on the other, demonstrated the vast popularity that conspiracy theories enjoyed in Iran.

Shortly after the publication of the Memoirs, Fereidoon Adamiyyat, one of the most influential and widely acknowledged Iranian historians of the 20th century, argued in his Book, "Amir Kabir and Iran", that British intelligence officers were behind a plot which led to the creation of the Baha'i Faith. He falsely claimed that Arthur Conolly, a British intelligence officer who was executed in Bukhara in 1842, had in his "Journey to the North of India through Russia, Persia and Afghanistan" admitted that Mulla Husayn Bushrui, the first follower of the Bab, was an agent working for him. Adamiyyat further concluded that without the aid of foreign powers such a religious sect could not have survived for so long, thus giving further credence to the conspiracy theories of his time and culture.²⁰ Although He subsequently came to accept that Conolly had never made such a claim, and removed

¹⁸ Moojan Momen, "Dolgorukov Memoirs", Encyclopedia Iranica; <http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v7f5/v7f525.html>.

¹⁹ Mina Yazdani, "Dolgoruki's Confessions: From Story to Masternarrative," forthcoming

²⁰ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi. "Baha'i sitizi va Islamgarai dar Iran" [Anti-Baha'ism and Islamism in Iran 1941-1955] *Irannamah*, Vol.19 no. 1&2 (Winter/Spring 2001), 79-124.

the allegations in later editions of his book, the influence of his initial claim proved to be lasting among Iranians. In this way, the two 19th century superpowers which had for so long competed to impose their influence upon Iran were in a matter of few years implicated in a Babi-Baha'i plot.

While "Dolgorukov's Memoirs" had linked the Baha'i Religion to a Russian plot and "Amir Kabir and Iran" had elaborated upon its British roots, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the usurpation of one of the holiest parts of the Islamic world by a Jewish regime quickly translated into a new interpretation of the Baha'i situation. In no more than a few years Iranian 'ulama "discovered" the links between their old internal foe, the Baha'is, and their new external enemy, Israel. This was not especially hard, as, luckily, the once remote corner of the Ottoman Empire where the world center of the Baha'i Faith was situated, had now become the northern territories of the new state. Finally in 1963, 15 years after the establishment of Israel and during the course of the unrest that swept through Iran in response to a set of far-reaching reforms launched by the Shah, Ayatollah Khomeini and the Association of Iranian Clerics, in two separate declarations, denounced Baha'is as agents and representatives of Israel, and demanded their severe repression.²¹

During the 1960s and 70s almost everything that troubled Iranian clerics was seen as evidence of a Baha'i-Israeli plot against Islam. The Shah, who was harshly rebuked by the 'ulama for his regime's strong ties with Israel, was accused of being a Baha'i because of some of the reforms he had introduced, notably his giving voting rights to women, and providing blue-collar industrial workers with a share of the profits earned by their companies. Various cultural events launched by the administration, some of which had clear Western tones, were seen as Baha'i plots to undermine the Islamic identity of Iranians. Iranian ministers and courtiers were almost collectively accused of being Baha'is. Even Iran's notorious intelligence agency, SAVAK, whose strong anti-leftist agenda had naturally led to its inclination to recruit people with Islamic ties, and which had obvious connections with the Hujjatieh society – the self-professed archenemies of the Baha'is – was seen as nothing more than a Baha'i puppet. Consequently, the 1979 Islamic Revolution came about not just as an uprising against the Shah, but supposedly as a reaction to an Israeli-Baha'i threat.

During its first decade in power, the Islamic regime openly persecuted and killed Baha'is. These persecutions, however, caused distress in the international community. In response to the international calls for the persecutions to be stopped, Siyyid Husayn Musawi, then the attorney general of Iran, declared in 1983 that the Baha'is were not being harassed for their religious beliefs but because they were Israel spies. This was despite the fact that by that time it had become plainly obvious that the attorney general's so-called "spies" could avoid maltreatment and persecution by openly denouncing their faith. The Baha'i community forcefully denied the charges and challenged the attorney general to produce evidence to back his allegations.

Failure of the Islamic regime to provide evidence to back its allegations against Baha'is, coupled with an international opposition that steadily gained momentum, finally convinced the authorities to reconsider their stance towards Baha'is. In 1991, a secret government memorandum was drawn up by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and signed by Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, which provided a blueprint of the policies and actions to which the Baha'i community of Iran was to be subjugated.²² Briefly, the memorandum demanded a shift in Iran's stance towards Baha'is from overt persecution

²¹ Ibid.

²² <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-8-3-14.html>

to a more covert policy aimed at depleting the Iranian Baha'i community's economic and cultural resources – although a reversal towards the 1980s-style persecution now seems to indicate that these covert policy failed to bring about its proposed objective.

Iran's hugely unsuccessful attempt to convince the international community that Baha'is were indeed spies was probably one of the reasons that convinced Iranian officials to review Iran's contemporary history. The aim of this review was in no way to reconsider age-old beliefs and assumptions, but to generate so-called "objective" facts and data which would ultimately serve to justify those assumptions. It was in light of this conviction that, during the late 1980s, enterprises such as the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies and the Political Studies and Research Institute were launched. A considerable portion of the publications of these institutes either directly or indirectly addressed the extent and depth of the conspiracy which had for centuries overshadowed the lives of the multitudes who had fallen victim to its designs, until it was finally exposed by the Islamic Revolution.

Some of the most interesting examples of such literature can be found among the works of Abdullah Shahbazi, the first head of the Political Studies and Research Institute, and one of the main faces behind The Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies. Shahbazi has, indeed, advanced Iranian conspiracism to new extents. In his view, the unholy alliance between Baha'ism and Zionism was not formed during the mid Twentieth Century, but much earlier. Shahbazi, is an ardent supporter of the theory that "Jewish Plutocrats" have for so long been behind a series of plots which have shaped today's world. He is doubtlessly influenced by the notorious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a counterfeit document first published around 1905 in Russia, but has in no way allowed the Protocols to limit his imagination.

In fact, in a speech he gave in Tehran University's College of Law and Political Science in 1999, he publicly declared that the Protocols was indeed a forgery.²³ However, he insisted the forgery was done by the Jews and not, as is popularly assumed, by their enemies. In his account, Jewish Plutocrats first conducted and later exposed the forgery to discredit the theories that implicated them in various plots against humanity as no more than a set of paranoid conspiracy theories. In another place,²⁴ he also confirms that the "Memoirs" is a fake, but indicates that the forgery was commissioned by the British Intelligence services, thus pointing towards an even deeper conspiracy instigated against Iran and Islam.

In his "History of Baha'ism in Iran",²⁵ published in the autumn 2003 edition of the Quarterly Journal of the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies, Shahbazi refers to his own research to conclude that the Bab had, during his stay with his uncle in Bushehr, been approached and somehow convinced to put forth his claims by Anglo-Jewish companies operating in those areas at the time. Shahbazi also provides a novel interpretation of the 1839 Allahdad incident, during which many Jews living in Mashhad were forced to accept Islam – thus becoming crypto-Jews. He insists that the Mashhadi Jews collectively converted to Islam without coercion or anything, only to later declare their faith in the Bab to give the impression that Muslims were joining the new faith. Such allegations, charges and misattributions turn Shahbazi's "History of Baha'ism in Iran" into something that, compared

²³ Abdullah Shahbazi, "Why the Protocols of the Elders of Zion is Forged" <http://www.shahbazi.org/Articles/Protocols.pdf>.

²⁴ Abdullah Shahbazi, "Sir Shapour Reporter and the 28 Mordad, 42 Coup d'état" <http://www.shahbazi.org/Articles/Reporter.pdf>.

²⁵ Abdullah Shahbazi, "History of Baha'ism in Iran" <http://www.shahbazi.org/pages/bahaism2.htm>.

to the “Memoirs”, may appear to provide a more convincing objective account of Iranian history, but which, in effect, draws conclusions that are far more incredible than those of the “Memoirs”. In short, Shahbazi’s works attempt to uncover a joint English, Zionist, Parsi, and Baha’i conspiracy that gradually unfolded during the course of many decades, if not centuries.

Naturally, the Islamic Republic’s official endorsement of such a mindset for some 30 years could potentially have harmed the intellectual and psychological health of the Iranian community. As it gradually got out of hand, such a paranoid approach has, in fact, already proven to be troublesome even for the most prominent officials operating within the Islamic regime. In 2007, Shahbazi claimed that Saeed Imami, a high-ranking intelligence official who mysteriously died in prison while being investigated in connection with a series of political assassinations, was in fact a Jewish-Baha’i agent. He also accused Ruhullah Hosseinian, once a friend of Imami, and now a close associate of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, of being a Baha’i.²⁶

Shahbazi has now even implied that the Islamic Republic’s Intelligence apparatus is being directed by Baha’i-Zionist infiltrators.²⁷ He has also suggested that recent anti-Baha’i activities have been invoked by these Baha’i infiltrators who are trying to advance an ominous hidden design by bringing the Baha’i issue to the forefront and inviting considerable media attention and sympathy for the Baha’is. While these allegations may indeed sound astounding, they are admittedly dull compared to those put forth only recently by Dr. Mahdi Khaz’ali, son of Ayatollah Khaz’ali, on his website.²⁸ Dr. Khaz’ali claims that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is a crypto-Jew. He also makes similar claims, albeit discreetly, about Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi, a prominent Shi’a cleric and Ahmadinejad’s patron. In his eyes, Ahmadinejad and his colleagues are effectively acting in line with Israel’s interests. Such allegations against President Ahmadinejad (whose own view of the world is, incidentally, a perfect example of conspiracism) demonstrate the adherent danger of the conspiracy mindset that has for so long been reinforced by the Islamic propaganda machine.

Moreover, this danger has not been contained within the borders of Iran. Two months before his death on June 7, 2006, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the leading Iraqi Al-Qaeda figure, in a 4-hour recorded speech, reiterated the many accusations voiced against Baha’is by Islamic Republic officials. He was, however, making those allegations, not against Baha’is, but against Shi’as.²⁹ Zarqawi was apparently basing his arguments upon deeply-rooted preconceptions and beliefs about Shi’as. For example Shahrastani, in his famous *al-Milal wa ‘l-nihal*, had long before indicated that many tenets of the Shi’a worldview, including the concepts of Imamate, occultation, and return, were first brought forth by an ‘Abdullah Ibn Saba, a Jew who had converted to Islam.³⁰ Also, Ibn Taymiyya had once argued that the Shi’as had collaborated with the enemies of the Islamic Caliphate, thus bringing about its

²⁶ http://www.shahbazi.org/Oligarchy/Hoseinian_Emami.htm.

²⁷ <http://www.shahbazi.org/blog/Archive/8703.htm>.

²⁸ <http://www.drkhazali.com/articles-and-mails/397-1387-11-06-07-27-46.html>.

²⁹ Nibras Kazimi, “Zarqawi’s anti- Shi’a Legacy, Original or borrowed?” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol 4, 53-72.

³⁰ Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wa ‘l-Nihal*, al-juz’ 1, 173-174

<http://arabic.islamicweb.com/books/creed.asp?book=11&ID=171>.

fall.³¹ But now, Zarqawi was utilizing such allegations to conclude that that the Shi'as were American-Israeli agents operating within the Islamic community.

Zarqawi, along with other Jihadists who have in recent years increasingly identified Shi'as as the archenemies of Islam, argue that the Iraq war was in fact part of a scheme conducted by Iran, the USA, and the Shi'as of Iraq, to conquer the Islamic nation. They see the increased influence of Iran after the invasion as clear evidence of the validity of their conspiracy theory. They further regard Lebanon's Shi'a Hezbollah as an Israeli puppet, which has in effect created a buffer zone to protect Israel while claiming credit for an alleged Shi'a stance against the "Zionist State". Allegations against Shi'as have even expanded to accommodate the claims that they are sexually corrupt – even that they commit incest.³² Although it is generally understood that the Saudi regime has for decades actively endorsed such anti-Shi'a propaganda, it is also true that Shi'a clerics have, since the early 20th century, been active proponents of conspiracy theories. Doubtlessly, the huge investments that the Islamic Republic has made during the past 30 years to market its own brand of conspiracism have also helped to further cultivate this form of historical logic among the Sunnis. Unfortunately the simplest and most distressing outcome has been the rise in attacks that target Shi'as, not only in Iraq, but also in other Islamic countries.

What escaped the attentions of conspiracy theorists was the fact that when immediate ambitions undermine truth, when hate triumphs over justice, all are victims. Today, maybe more than ever, Iranian society needs to turn its back on the illusory world in which it once lived, and reassess many of the hypotheses which overshadowed its understanding. Indeed, during the past few years strong steps have been taken in this direction, not only by intellectuals, but also by the general population. Still, however, there are people who prefer the familiar darkness of their own illusory world to a much more colorful but complex reality. Yet, Iran's government spokesman asserts that the Baha'i movement "is an organized setup linked to alien powers, especially the Zionists", and its attorney general insists that the Baha'i administration "is evidently affiliated with Israel." They, however, are unaware of the ominous destiny that awaits humanity, Iran, and Iranians, if they continue to lock themselves within the walls of hatred and deceit.

³¹ Nibras Kazimi, "Zarqawi's anti- Shi'a Legacy, Original or borrowed?" *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol 4, 53-72.

³² *Ibid.*

IMHRO condemning trial of 7 Bahá'í leaders in Iran for spying

By Iranian Minorities' Human Rights Organization (MHRO)

The following statement was posted on February 22, 2009 at

<http://iranianminorityshumanright.blogspot.com/2009/02/imbro-condemning-trial-of-7-babai.html> and reposted on February 24, 2009 at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1436>.

The Iranian government has announced that they will put on trial 7 Bahá'í leaders: Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, Vahid Tizfahm, and Mahvash Sabet. All seven were arrested in 2008 and stand accused of spying for Israel. The Iranian prosecutor has, however, written an open letter that has been published by papers in which he asks the security service to persecute Bahá'í believers in Iran.

IMHRO finds this request from the prosecutor to be extremely alarming. We fear that it will result in greater widespread persecution of Baha'is. We are very concerned about these 7 Bahá'í leaders, sources in Iran have told us that the government is planning a large scale crackdown and arrest of the Bahá'í in Iran.

Reza Washahi a researcher on minorities in Iran told IMHRO the following:

The Bahá'ís have always been persecuted in Iran, but after the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, Bahá'í faced a new era of terror and persecution. The Iranian government has never recognised Bahá'í as a religion. The government has guided mobs and religious extremists have destroyed their worship and historical places. Many have been murdered in daylight and their cases have never been followed by courts. Bahá'ís are banned from employment and higher education and face all sort of social and cultural discrimination." "It is clear that this is show trial and they persecuted for their faith and nothing else."

IMHRO is appealing to the international community and asks supporters to do the following:

To put a pressure on Iranian government to stop the inhuman treatment of Bahá'ís in Iran;

To ask the Iranian government to immediately release all the Bahá'ís in prison, including the 7 Bahá'í leaders and to so without condition;

To request the Iranian government to lift the social and cultural restrictions on Bahá'ís in Iran.

Actions

Please write to one of the following and express your concern regarding the treatment of Bahá'ís in Iran. Ask them to release the Bahá'í prisoners. Remind the Iranian government that they are a signatory party of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Also, please remind them that all of these covenants clearly support the freedom of social life and the freedom of religion:

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USA

Supreme Leader of Iran

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The Islamic Revolution in Iran, 30 years on

By Wahied Wahdat-Hagh

Dr. Wahdat-Hagh is a Senior Fellow with the European Foundation for Democracy in Brussels and this essay was first published on February 13, 2009, at http://europeandemocracy.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13363&catid=4&Itemid=22 and then on February 27, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1513>.

Death sentences, executions, floggings and amputations mark the bitter reality in Iran 30 years on from the Islamic Revolution. The Baha'i are particularly threatened by the prevailing law.

Mehrangiz Kar worked for 22 years as a lawyer in the Islamic “Republic” of Iran before she emigrated to the United States. In an analysis of the Iranian criminal code, Kar came to the conclusion that, 30 years after the Islamic Revolution, brute violence against men, women, children, Muslims and non-Muslims has assumed a legitimate form and become legally entrenched. The following text is based on the Persian version of Mehrangiz Kar’s analysis, which appeared in Roozonline on 11 February 2009. In conclusion, the worrying position of the Baha’i is discussed.

Death Sentences

Under article 90 of the criminal code, a man or woman will be executed if he or she is repeatedly unfaithful. Under article 95, even the mentally ill can be executed for this offence. The code stresses that Islamic law cannot be enforced in countries that oppose Islam. On the other hand, article 7 emphasizes that Iranians who commit acts of this type abroad can be condemned in Iran if they are arrested in Iran. Therefore, exiled Iranians and Europeans who have sexual relations with Iranian women are not automatically protected from Islamic law, at least not if they go to Iran. Under article 179, a man or woman will be executed if he or she has been repeatedly caught and flogged for consuming alcoholic beverages and then continues to consume alcohol. Execution takes place when it is proven that alcohol has been consumed four times. Under article 180, the mentally ill can also be executed if they have repeatedly drunk alcohol. Under article 157, illegal sexual acts are punished by flogging after the third occasion, followed by the death sentence in case of a fourth occasion. Article 82 is particularly discriminatory against non-Muslims. If a non-Muslim has illegal sex with a Muslim woman, the non-Muslim is executed directly after the first occasion. This means that, under Iranian law, a European who has extramarital sex with an Iranian woman in Europe can be executed in Iran if he is caught there. This is because such acts are regarded as rape of the Muslim woman. The same article 82 lays down the death penalty as the general punishment for rape. Under article 111, two homosexuals who are of full age and in their right mind will be executed if they are clearly in a sexual relationship. Under article 112, an adult male who has sex with an underage boy will be executed. If the underage boy consented voluntarily, he is punished with 74 lashes. Under article 122, if two men had non-penetrative sex three times and were flogged three times, they will be executed on the fourth occasion. Under article 131, if two lesbians have already been flogged three times on account of sexual relations, they will be executed on the fourth occasion. While under Islamic law the

death penalty is provided for a murderer, as is the case in Iran, a murderer is nonetheless not always executed, because of the possibility of compensation laid down in the blood law.

Only a Muslim man is regarded as a complete human being

Blood law is the law of *ius sanguinis*, which establishes inequality among people. Blood laws are particularly discriminatory against non-Muslims and women. Only a Muslim man is regarded as a complete human being, commanding the highest blood price. A Muslim woman is half as much as a Muslim man. According to Mrs Kar, the Iranian jurist, a Muslim is never condemned to death if he kills a non-Muslim. If a male Muslim kills a female Muslim, he is not sentenced to death. But if the family members of the murdered woman pay half of the murderer's blood price to the murderer, the murderer can be punished. This means that the victim's family members have the further indignity of having to pay money if the murderer is to be prosecuted at all. If a man kills his child or grandchild, he is never sentenced to death. This is because children are the father's property under Islamic law. Under article 220, the father can at most be sentenced to pay blood money for the child. If a man merely suspects that his wife has committed adultery and kills her, he is never executed. Islamic law protects the murderer, who does not have to prove his suspicions and can continue living unpunished. On the slightest suspicion, the man can kill his wife and her alleged lover and walk away unpunished. Under paragraph 630, the murderer will not even be questioned. The lawyer Mehrangiz Kar writes that murderers who give the appearance of devoutness, of "protecting Islamic values", are not executed for their deeds. The court can refrain from a conviction if the victim is regarded as *mahdur al-dam*, someone whose blood is worthless. Kar cites the example of the chain murders of intellectuals committed in the 1990s. Those responsible were not prosecuted, since the intellectuals were said to have put forward anti-Islamic arguments. Mrs Kar also cites the example of the Baha'i, whose blood has no value, at least not in the Islamic "Republic" of Iran. Kar writes that, in her entire 22 years as a lawyer in the Islamic "Republic", she has no recollection of anyone ever being executed for killing a Baha'i. Nor does she recall the murderer of a Christian or Jew ever receiving the death penalty. Indeed, Iranian justice constantly stresses that if the murderer of a member of a recognized religious minority such as a Christian or Jew is killed by a non-Muslim, this non-Muslim deserves the death penalty, but a Muslim killer need not fear as much. Articles 226 and 295, which give Muslim judges leeway, provide protection for Muslim killers of non-Muslims. Under article 222, even a mentally ill person can be killed by a healthy Muslim.

Flogging is torture

Under article 84 of the Iranian criminal code, a married old man or married old woman who is unfaithful can be stoned. Before being stoned, they must receive 100 lashes. Under article 83, a married woman who has sex with an adolescent can be condemned to 100 lashes. Under article 88, an unmarried woman or unmarried man who has illegal sex is condemned to 100 lashes. Under article 174, anyone consuming alcohol is condemned to 80 lashes. Under article 121, two men who have non-penetrative sex will each be punished with 100 lashes. If the active man was a non-Muslim, the non-Muslim will be punished with death. Under article 123, two naked men discovered under a blanket will be punished with 99 lashes. Under article 129, two women who have sex will each receive 100 lashes.

Execution plus torture

If a married woman has a sexual relationship with her husband but is still unfaithful, she will be stoned. If she admits her offence, articles 83 and 99 state that a cleric must throw the first stone, followed by the crowd. If she does not admit her offence but witnesses confirm it, the crowd must throw the first stones at her, followed by the cleric. Under article 101, the judge must inform the people of the date of the stoning. Under article 102, a man will be buried up to his hips and a woman up to her breast before the stoning begins. A woman must not have any opportunity to flee. Under article 104, the stones must not be so big that the person dies after just one or two throws, but nor must they be too small. At any rate, the person must be in agony before dying. The lawyer and women's and human rights activist Kar emphasises that the woman's testimony is of absolutely no importance, particularly in respect of sexual offences. The voice of a female witness counts for nothing. In other cases a woman's testimony counts for half that of a man's, but sometimes a woman's voice counts for nothing at all. Amputations are another chapter of the Islamic criminal code. Under articles 198 and 201, a thief's four fingers, right arm or left leg can be chopped off. The left leg will be chopped off if the thief continues to steal, even if his four fingers have already been chopped off. By law, men aged 15 and over and women aged – believe it or not – nine and over are of criminally responsible age, as laid down in article 49 of the Iranian criminal code. Thus the law punishes little girls six years younger than it does boys. If a 15-year-old boy or a nine-year-old girl commits murder, the judge can pronounce the death penalty for minors. They will be executed from the age of 17 years.

The worrying position of the Baha'i

In conclusion, the position of the Baha'i is highlighted. They are regarded as outlaws. Their blood has no legal value and they can be killed arbitrarily. At present, seven members of their leadership are accused of spying for Israel, for which they face the death penalty. The Baha'i have no civil and human rights in Iran. Not even Ayatollah Montazeri is prepared to give the Baha'i genuine civil rights. Ayatollah Montazeri, who wished to become leader of the Islamic "Republic" of Iran after Khomeini's death, went into legal opposition following his criticism of the mass executions in 1988. Even today he still believes that the aims of the Islamic Revolution have not been realized. On 14 May 2008, Ayatollah Montazeri issued a fatwa and granted the Baha'i the right to water and soil. This law goes back to the old Persian kingdom of 2,000 years ago, and is a right that was granted to peasants without land or possessions. It amounts to a right to life without full civil rights. On 14 June 2008, Ayatollah Montazeri wrote that the Baha'i were infidels and had to be fought politically. In any case the Baha'i administration has been banned for 30 years. The Baha'i are not permitted to disclose their identity publicly, and have been banned as a subject in society for 30 years. They are not allowed to study at the university and even their graves are destroyed on state orders. As there is a pogrom atmosphere against the Baha'i, Ayatollah Montazeri argues against genocide but wants to grant the Baha'i rights as Iranians only if they have converted to Islam. The Baha'i are not recognized as members of a religious minority in Iran, even though they are Iran's largest religious minority. Civil and human rights for all Iranians can only become reality in a liberal democratic state and if state and religion are separated. Thus it follows that Iran's Islamic criminal code is a serious barrier to the democratization of Iran.

Prominent Academics Call for End of Persecutions

A prominent group of more than sixty professors and scholars who specialize in Middle Eastern and Iranian Studies have added their voices in protest over the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran and have asked the Iranian government to accord its Baha'is citizens their full civil rights and freedoms. This statement was published on March 11, 2009 at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1765> along with translations into Arabic, Chinese, English, German, Greek, Persian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish.
Translator.

We, the undersigned scholars and academic specialists in the fields of Middle Eastern and Iranian studies, call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to put an end to human rights abuses against Baha'is in Iran, which have been greatly escalating in recent months, and grant them full civil rights and freedoms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Social and Economic Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. We note with great concern evidence of an ongoing campaign to deprive the Baha'is of Iran of their fundamental human rights. This all points to a worrisome development inside Iran that appears to be preparing the way for further human rights violations against the Baha'is. Recent events include but are not limited to the following:

- **Arbitrary Arrests.** Authorities arrested five Baha'is in Tehran on January 14, 2009: Ms. Jinous Sobhani, Mr. Shahrokh Taef, Mr. Didar Raoufi, Mr. Payam Aghsani and Mr. Aziz Samandari, followed by the arrest of two Baha'is in Mashhad, raids on eight homes and the arrest of Mr. Nima Haghar in Tehran on February 1, 2009. They join not only numerous individual arrested and detained in cities and towns throughout Iran, but also the seven Baha'i leaders who were arrested in 2008, and who remain in prison, despite statements by the United Nations, six Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, and various human rights organizations calling for their immediate release.
- **Attacks on Baha'i Homes.** Authorities have been entering homes either to arrest Baha'is and/or confiscate personal belongings such as photos, books, and computers. A new and troubling development is the recent dissemination of a 31-page list of Baha'is in Shiraz that includes their names, professions, and home and work addresses. The list was accompanied by several quotes from high-ranking clerics, including Ayatollah Khomeini, against the Baha'is, and could lead to attacks on the listed Baha'is.
- **Denial of Access to Education.** Since 1979, the Iranian government has enforced a ban on Baha'i students from access to higher education, a recognized universal human right, and frequent restriction of home schooling to children who have been denied access to public education institutions.
- **Campaigns of Intimidation.** These include the harassment of school children, government sponsored propaganda against the Baha'is in the media, public seminars and symposia, the distribution of anti-Baha'i CDs in various school districts throughout the country, and harassment of those who seek to help the Baha'is, such as Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi.
- **The Financial and Economic Strangulation of the Baha'i Community.** The Iranian government has, over the course of the past decades, expelled all Baha'i employees of national and local governments, and has moved to confiscate homes, businesses,

financial assets, and other properties in a systematic attempt to destroy financially the Iranian Baha'is.

- **Attacks on and Desecration of Baha'i Cemeteries.** Baha'i cemeteries in Qaimshahr, Yazd, Najafabad, and elsewhere have been repeatedly vandalized and then completely destroyed.

We stand in solidarity with the Baha'is and indeed with members of all religious communities who do not have full rights and freedoms in Iran.

Signed:

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This statement was accompanied by a Press Release which may be found at:
<http://www.iranpresswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/press-release.pdf>

Anti-Baha'ism in Iran

By Wahied Wahdat-Hagh

Dr. Wahdat-Hagh is a Senior Fellow with the European Foundation for Democracy in Brussels and this essay was published on March 23, 2009, on <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/2003>.

In Iran, state-sponsored hate propaganda and conspiracy theories against the Baha'i are never-ending. Now, "crypto-Jews" – also called "Anusim" – are said to have been responsible for the spread of the Babi and Baha'i religions in Iran.

FarsNews is not just any Iranian news agency. It is a state-sponsored news agency and mouthpiece of the Iranian military. An example of state-inspired hate speech appeared on March 1, 2009 at <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8712060542>.

State-inspired lies: crypto-Jews are guilty of spreading the Baha'i religion

Abdollah Shahbazi, the author of the article that appeared in Farsnews, is not unknown in Iran. He was an active member of the pro-Moscow communist Tudeh party in the days of the Soviet Union. At the end of the 1980s he founded a research institute that openly and closely cooperated with the secret service of the "Islamic Republic of Iran". And he was one of the prominent figures who supported the election of Ahmadinejad in the ninth presidential elections in 2005. Shahbazi – old communist and new Islamist, anti-Semite and anti-Baha'i – seriously claims to have discovered in his researches that "crypto-Jews" have played "an important role in bringing about and spreading Babism and Baha'ism in Iran's recent history".

Of course the Jews are to blame

Shahbazi is one of the Iranian authors who have been agitating against the Baha'i for years. His conspiracy theories consist of half-truths whose ultimate purpose is to defame the Baha'i and of course the Jews. He claims that when the Babi religion began in the 19th century, it was not Muslims who converted to the Babi and Baha'i religions but crypto-Jews who had merely assumed Muslim names. What is true is that the Babi religion has been stifled in Iran at the insistence of the Shi'ite clergy and that the Baha'i have been persecuted since their religion appeared in Iran. It is also true that a number of Jews became Baha'i, but so did many Zoroastrians and Muslims. In various writings, Shahbazi, the "Islamic Republic of Iran" 's increasingly influential hate speech propagandist, claims that Jewish Zionists had first decided to invent a new faith some 150 years ago. But, he said, they had been unsuccessful. For this reason some of them had converted to Islam so that they could then assume the Babi faith as Muslims. They had failed as Jews, so they wanted to support the Babi and Baha'i as Muslims. The logic of Ahmadinejad's supporter is plain and simply wrong: he believes that a good Muslim cannot become a Babi or a Baha'i, so it must have been Jews that became Babi and later Baha'i. This corresponds to the fact that many Jews assumed the new faith when the Baha'i religion first appeared. Likewise, it is also true that, despite persecution by the Muslim clergy and hate speech, many Zoroastrians and Muslims became Baha'i. It is a historical fact that most Babi actually converted from Islam. It is also a historical fact that more than the 20,000 Babi who were murdered in the 19th century under pressure from the clergy and state authorities were all converted Muslims. But this is

precisely what the ideologues of today's terror cannot admit; therefore they feel forced to invent anti-Semitic stories.

Comte de Gobineau

Shahbazi even quotes from reports compiled by the then French ambassador to Iran, the famous racial theorist Comte de Gobineau, whom Napoleon III sent to Iran in 1855. As it happens, French ambassador Gobineau, who divided humanity into different races and was one of the founders of European racial theory, also wrote about the Babi movement. But Gobineau wrote positively about the Babi movement, this time not for racist reasons but probably because he admired the revolutionary spirit of the Babi. The Babi staunchly supported improved social conditions in Iran. They even abolished a number of Islamic laws that would now be regarded as reactionary, for example they espoused greater rights for women. Napoleon III's ambassador in Tehran therefore admired the Babi movement, irrespective of his racial teachings. Shahbazi, the old communist and present-day Islamist supporter of Ahmadinejad, is not in the least interested in the reasons why, for example, Gobineau gave his time and attention to a Mullah Yazdi, who was said to have been very learned and to have played an important role at the beginning of the Babi movement. For Shahbazi, it is only important that this Mullah Yazdi must have been a crypto-Jew and have spread the new faith in Khorassan province in order to destroy Islam. For Gobineau, it was entirely irrelevant whether Mullah Yazdi was a convert – presumably Gobineau had no idea. But Shahbazi, who has obviously read Gobineau, makes this great discovery, as if Iranian Jews actually have brought about a religious movement that now, as the Baha'i religion, has at least five million followers worldwide. It would be an understatement to describe this stance of Shahbazi's as paranoid, since this propaganda is not state-inspired "rhetoric" but is instead used for the real persecution of Iran's Baha'i. For Shahbazi, it is important that a crypto-Jew (Anusim) can never become a real Muslim and therefore remains a "covert" Jew and, as a "covert" Jew, he therefore becomes at best a Babi or Baha'i in order to fight Islam. Indeed, according to him, the Jewish Baha'i in particular are notorious for their hostility to Islam. Yet the truth is that the Baha'i respect Islam as a historical religion even though Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i religion, abolished the Islamic criminal code and many other Islamic laws. In fact, the Baha'i do not believe that Mohammed was the "seal of the prophets". Ultimately, it is true that the "Islamic Republic of Iran" aims to enforce anachronistic laws by totalitarian means against the will of the people. In doing so, the totalitarian dictatorship is inhibiting the development and advancement of Iranian society. Anti-Baha'ism and anti-Semitism are not "rhetorical" formulas in Iran, as many journalists and academics claim, but fixed components of the prevailing ideology and practice of the religiously legitimized dictatorship.

Freedom of opinion vs. freedom of expression

It is a historical fact that in the "Islamic Republic of Iran" people are free to have opinions but not to express them, as Iran's senior prosecutor Ayatollah Dori Najafabadi recently confirmed. The Baha'i have been eliminated as subjects in society for 30 years. At present, seven leading Baha'i are in detention, allegedly for spying for Israel, and it is feared that they will be executed. The Baha'i are in fact persecuted and executed solely for open-minded faith. The Baha'i International Community has written an open letter to Ayatollah Najafabadi, which is well worth reading. This letter makes it clear that not only is there no freedom of opinion in Iran but that the freedom of conscience of the entire Iranian nation and not just that of the Iranian Baha'i is at stake.

I really do not understand!

By Hassan Yousefi Eshakavari

Eshakavari is a trained cleric, but because of his progressive and non-orthodox views was divested of his robe of office (khal-i libas). He was also jailed by the Iranian regime for several years; in recent times he has written several brilliant essays in support of the human and civil rights of the Baha'i community of Iran. The following essay was posted on http://www.roozonline.com/archives/2009/03/post_11788.php and a translation appeared on March 25, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/2023>.

I really do not understand!

I think everyone has encountered incidents or circumstances that one could not fully understand, comprehend or analyze. In these instances, we become helpless and do not know how to respond to the situation. That is to say, one truly feels impotent. This issue is important for the reason that we usually and routinely assess every event, easy or difficult, in some standardized way and at some normal level.

We are able to interpret and analyze its hows and whys, or to offer a simple or complex response. Therefore, it scarcely happens that we could truly feel and express a complete inability to understand some event and question, and to genuinely and seriously state that we do not know and do not comprehend.

Like you and others, I too normally have standard explanations, understandings, and analysis. I am always prepared to give an answer to every question. However, there have been serious issues which I have frankly felt helpless to comprehend or interpret. Basically, in responding deeply to such a question, I have become obviously distressed, I was unable to answer, and I have explicitly stated, "I do not know, I do not understand, and I have no response."

The last time was about a month ago when a reporter from one of the overseas radio stations asked me about the reason and/or reasons underlying the demolition of the Baha'is cemeteries in Babol; I said that I honestly and seriously do not know, since, just as with you and others, when I hear and read the news, I ask myself, why? Why the isolated cemetery of a group of fellow-citizens, some of whom probably belong to the distant past and do not interfere in the affairs of the living, particularly the rulers, but who are nevertheless faced with attacks, destruction, and disdain. In fact, who are these people who perform such ugly and inhumane actions? What are their goals, what their objectives and what purpose are they following?

These are the probable religious, political, and/or economical consequences. Anyway, what are the benefits for them? Have these individuals arbitrarily and merely from personal motives taken such determined actions through their own individual initiative and decision or at most through several individuals — so-called "mediators"? If this is so, why do the united governmental forces, security and police forces not prevent these actions and their systematic repetition? Why, instead of the arrest and punishment of such self-motivated individuals, are the same oppressed victims still the ones who are detained, imprisoned, and punished? If the Baha'is are the subjects of opposition and antagonism, and they are considered to be unbelievers who do not have the right to live and to die like righteous Muslims, why then are the dervishes (Sufis) confronted in the same way? Aren't they Muslims? Should not the life, possessions, and reputation of Muslims be preserved and remain secure, in accordance with irrefutable religious laws and regulations, against the

transgressions of criminals? Were not most of the nobles and scholars of Islam, actually, whether Shiite or Sunni, nevertheless officially Sufis? Or at least did they not have an explicit Sufi orientation; or have they not defended them? Or would they not defend them due to their misguided thinking and religious perspectives? What do you do with Fahad Helli and his “Taqdis”, his mystical literary work, Sadr’ul-din Shirazi, Feyz-i-Kashani, and Mulla Ahmad Naraqi — and most important of all, the departed Leader of the revolution and the Founder of the Islamic Republic?

Has the exceptional and wonderful defense of Ayatollah Khomeini of a famous Sufi like Mansour al-Hallaj, who was murdered by chance on the basis of a “fatwa” or religious opinion on Islamic law been so quickly forgotten? It is possible that several unknowledgeable and immature youths or adults who perform these actions may be uninformed of these truths; however, are their leaders the muftis or Islamic scholars unaware or ignorant of these realities? Are other aims and intentions involved in the case? How can it be that a great Sufi like Jalal-ad-din Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Balkhi Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi al-Rumi, known as Molavi or Mawlana, has been so much honored as being one of the twelve saints or Guardians of Islam, and Khajih Shamsu’l-din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi has been raised to the station of God; however the resting place of an unknown and harmless Sufi in an out-of-the-way corner of Isfahan, probably on the basis of rejecting the wrong but not the false, is demolished?

Apart from all these considerations, why and for what reason or for what plausible and reasonable cause should a government carry out actions which lead to the greatest losses for the government itself? Does a wise and prudent human being act so as to cause its own loss? What harm could the Gonabadi or non-Gonabadi Dervishes bring to cows and sheep, when they have very particular thoughts, tastes, customs, and rituals; they do not interfere in politics and have no role in political or governmental affairs?

Why should one take actions that incite these noble, quiet, and peaceful human beings to make open protests? Does Iran have no other intellectual, political, religious, economic or cultural problems, so that we must spend energy on the guidance and instruction of a few Baha’is, Dervishes, and other similar groups; now we decide to ignore everything else and guide them? What about the shocking insistence of all authorities of the government from high to low on the burial of the corpses and scattered bones of war martyrs on the grounds of the universities of the country — with what kind of logic, analysis, or expediency does this take place? Are these actions glorifying the martyrs? Is there not any other way to honor these martyrs? Has a verse [from the Qur’an] been revealed that universities should turn into cemeteries, particularly at a time when students are sensitive to this action, and explicitly, seriously, and continuously oppose it? When in Islamic history have Muhammad (PBUH) the Messenger of God or which of His followers; or the Shiite Imams; or Islamic Jurists have buried the respected corpse of martyrs in the alleys, streets, a public yard; or a public park, school, or hospital? Have we brought about something of a novelty?

Is the Islamic Republic going to complete the list of its uncommon thought patterns and deeds in this way? Who should be told of this plan? In a regime or system that claims it is value-focused and basically embodies all the goals of the Prophets and Saints — even manifests all good and all virtue, but treats and manipulates the departed and martyrs in this way? If this type of behavior is not manipulative and there is no abuse, then why and with what common humane logic and on the basis of what type of standards is the regime or system prepared to pay so many expenses for these imposed burials? Is cost-benefit not an intellectual rule and principle?

Have these extensive arrests, repression and imprisonment of tens and probably hundreds of protesting students, the creation of abundant anger, rancor, and hatred in the hearts of these youth, who are the wealth of the country, have suitable costs and benefits for the country and even for the regime or system? If the response to this question is positive, it is an interesting story that the government with the extent of its sovereign domain is showing off its power to thousands of students and even to the public. I do not think that more degradation and corruption could be imagined for the “war martyrs” than what has been done under the guise of respect and honor in the Islamic Republic!

In general, it could be asked, “is it reasonable and advisable for a system or regime that has a lot of enemies and is surrounded by opponents and foes to assume that all the Eastern and Western governments are thinking of overthrowing it 24 hours a day, in order to fight simultaneously on several battlefields? Would it not be better to observe priority in challenging enemies? Would it not be more rational to postpone the demolition of foes such as Gonabadi Dervishes, Sunnis, or even the Baha’is, the Al-e-Yassin [whose leader is in Evin Prison -- see <http://aleyassin.blogspot.com>], as well as other groups with whose names we become familiar due to the blessing of these confrontations, to another time, after rooting out more fundamental and dangerous enemies?

For example, logically and rationally, are the abolition of poverty and the destructive social class gap, the creation of jobs and occupations for youth as well as facilities for their marriages, the eradication of addiction and dozens of enemies and other incurable pain and suffering the first priority, or rather the demolition of several Khaniqahs, (Sufi monasteries), or dervishes themselves; Friday Prayer; the Festival of Fast-Breaking (Eid al-Fitr) through a few faithful far and wide in the country? As an example, would it not be better first to clear up the fate of more than one billion dollars of the Iran Nation’s money that according to the Supreme Audit Court and several Majlis representatives was lost from last year’s budget, rather than the fate of the Gonabadi dervishes? Is it beneficial to the regime running the Islamic Republic to be daily introduced in various human rights gatherings and on a more extensive level, in the global media as major violators of human rights, and throughout its thirty years of existence to be condemned twenty one times by majority vote in such a significant organization as the United Nations?

It is stated that within the Ministry of Intelligence a section by the name “Religions Office” has been established.

I do not know about the responsibilities and the role of such an office within an institution such as the Ministry of Intelligence; however, what has such an organization with real tasks all over the world to do with something like “religion?” Does it mean that from the point of view of the rulers of the Islamic Republic or the security authorities of the country any variation in thought patterns — and specifically following other religions (apart from the official religion and faith of the country) — has security implications? Is there a more aggressive motive behind the establishment of this office? What happened to the important element “national interest” that was so much emphasized and confirmed by the founder of the Islamic Republic?

What is the “Expediency Discernment Council” for, and what is its role? Has the Assembly of the Experts no sensitivity, supervision, or idea about the management, on a macro level, of the country? Or should it not?

Have you any response to these and dozens of other questions? Could these treatments and thoughts of a government be understood, comprehended, or analyzed? Does an acceptable and logical interpretation or interpretations exist for these events and inquiries?

Is this an excessive expectation that at least the responsible authorities of the country, particularly the leaders and officials of the relevant functions, might make us aware and guide us with respect to the “hidden benefits” of these apparently illogical behaviors? Some government activities — security and law enforcement; cultural means — right or wrong are more or less comprehensible and apprehensible. For example, on occasion, on the one hand a government feels that it has lost its legitimacy and acceptability among the public, particularly among the intellectual, social, and political elites, and is besieged from all sides; it notices that its survival is, in any case, at serious risk; it is likely that it would do anything, and similar to one who is drowning would cling to any straw and weed. For example, this government might close all the newspapers, make the political parties lifeless and useless, or block free elections, avoiding discretionary supervision, and prevent the establishment of a truly national Majlis or Parliament. However, it is inconceivable that the Baha’is, dervish assemblies, or the performance of several Friday Prayers in Isfahan, Tehran, and some other places could be a threat to a powerful dominion equipped with all cultural, political, religious, security, and economic means.

Really, is holding a commemorative assembly for famous religious and political personalities such as [Mehdi] Bazargan and [Yadollah] Sahabi, who are, by chance, also considered among the founders of this [Islamic] regime, with the presence of hundreds and at most thousands of people in a recognized and valid center such as Husayniyah Ershad, something that would jeopardize the security and the interests of the government or the society? Does gathering signatures to demand changes in discrimination laws from the Majlis of this same regime harm the security of the country?

Should I give several other examples to sufficiently clarify the matter? Although the examples could be still continued, I do not mean to make a complete list of all the Islamic Republic’s misdeeds; I intend to state that some of the shocking activities performed by the responsible authorities of the Iranian regime cannot be comprehended, understood, or interpreted, inasmuch as they could not be analyzed by the usual humane standards and logic within a legal system. Unusual or odd acts take place that have no rational explanation; it could be simply proven that these take place on behalf of the ruling authorities; ultimately it would weaken the foundations of the regime, the preservation of which is amongst its most significant goals. Despite all this, how many times within history have these types of encounters by governments been finally to their advantage so that this could be the second or third time?

Notwithstanding, since the leaders and agents of these activities are, certainly, among the intellectuals of the group, faithful scholars in Islamic studies, and are the protectors of the regime and of national security, then anyone by reading these lines with the most humanitarian attitude would feel sympathetic for this author; hence, I and people like me should hesitate in our intellect, knowledge, and expedience, should we not?

The Baha'is of Iran and Contact with Foreign Nations

By Mehdi Khalaji

Khalaji is a visiting fellow at the Washington Institute and focuses on the role of politics in contemporary Shi'ite clericalism in Iran and Iraq. From 1986 to 2000 he trained in seminaries of Qom, the traditional center of Iran's clerical establishment. He has also served on the editorial boards of two prominent Iranian periodicals, worked for the BBC's Persian Service, and has worked as a producer for Radio Farda, the Persian-language service of the U.S. government's Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. He has published extensively, including "Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy". The following essay was originally published by BBC Persian Service on February 18, 2009, at http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/02/090223_ag_iranian_bahaeis_foreign_gov.shtml and a translation appeared on March 31, 2009, at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/2056>.

The Baha'is of Iran and Contact with Foreign Nations

Concurrent with the increase pressure on the Baha'is, once more the Islamic Republic of Iran has declared activities of the followers of the Baha'i Faith illegal.

In his letter to the Minister of Intelligence, Iran's Attorney General, Qorban-Ali Dorri Najafabadi, has accused the Baha'is of connection with Israel and of gathering of information for the "Zionist regime". He has written that the activities of the Baha'is in Iran will endanger national security and the nation's geopolitical integrity.

Conspiracy and the Baha'i Faith

Since the Baha'i Faith is a global entity and is not bounded by any geographical lines, it has been accused of breaking through "national identity and Iranian religiosity" from its very inception in the middle of the nineteenth century. Likewise, its birth and diffusion has been ascribed to the efforts and designs of authorities in such governments as Russia, the Ottoman Empire, England and Israel.

In the history book taught to the third graders (under the education program of the Islamic Republic of Iran), there an section under the heading, "Colonialism through Creating Sects", where it is stated, "The British and Russian governments were deeply frightened by the unity of Muslims in Iran. For this reason, they endeavored to cause division among the people and to destroy their oneness. One of the things they did to create this division was to create makeshift religions. Among these false and manmade religions was Babism and Baha'ism ... The claim of Siyyid Muhammad-Ali [sic] the Bab caused a great convulsion and for this reason it is known as the 'The Babi Sedition'. He created the Babi sect for this purpose was supported by the Russian and British governments."

Rivalry of Azalis and Baha'is, the First Promoter of Conspiracy Theories

However, where does this allegation comes from? The root of the connection between Baha'is and foreign nations is several-fold.

During the initial stage in the history of the Baha'i Faith, its neighboring religious branches, such as the Azalis, first fired this arrow of allegation. Based on what Mrs. Mangol Bayat has written in her book, "Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909", Azalis were active in the constitutional movement — and from a religious perspective, were rivals of the Baha'is. They tried to raise questions about the legitimacy and authenticity of the Baha'i Faith by suggesting "connections with foreigners".

Azalis were the followers of Mirza Yahya Nuri, surnamed Azal, who was a successor of Muhammad-Ali [sic] the Bab. At first they believed in the necessity of jihad [religious struggle] and armed removal of the Qajar government.

Mirza Husayn-Ali Baha (later Baha'u'llah), was a half-brother of Mirza Yahya Nuri from his father's side. After a while, the two brothers clashed over the successorship to their father, which resulted in deep enmity. [Editor's correction: Baha'u'llah had raised Azal since childhood; when He raised the claim to Prophethood, Azal rejected Baha'u'llah's claim. A division took place at that time and had nothing to do with their father's successorship or estate.] The Babis were divided into two branches — Azalis and Baha'is. The Azali group did not last long and soon disappeared. However, the Baha'is flourished and presently live in every country of the globe.

On the other hand, based on what Mansour Bonakdarian writes in his book, "Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911: Foreign Policy, Imperialism and Dissent", conversion of a number of Jews to the Babi and Baha'i religions, and also adaptation of the Baha'i faith by a number of British citizens, raised suspicions about the connection between Babis and Baha'is with "foreigners".

Even though the published official documents of the British Foreign Ministry demonstrate that this Ministry did not have a positive view of the Constitutional Revolt [of 1905-11], certain individuals like Edward Brown, the prominent scholar of Iran, became close supporters and allies of the Babi and Baha'i leaders.

It is worth noting that from the inception of Baha'ism, a large number of Shiite clerics and individuals from other religions, such as Zoroastrianism, converted to this religion as well.

Anti-Baha'ism, an Echo of Anti-Israel and Anti-American Sentiments

In 1868, after increasing differences between the two branches of the Babis, and reciprocal killings between the Azalis and the Baha'is, the Ottoman government took Mirza Yahya Nuri and Husayn-Ali Baha, who had been sent to Istanbul from Iran, to court.

The court exiled Mirza Yahya and his family and followers to the island of Cyprus, and Husayn-Ali Baha and his family and supporters to Akka, near Haifa (Palestine).

The Ottoman government was mostly under the influence of rumors spread by the Iranian authorities, who persisted in suggesting that Husayn-Ali Baha and his followers were in contact with Bulgarian revolutionaries and were a threat to Ottoman rule.

Baha'u'llah made Akka and Haifa the headquarters of his religion. Around the same time, Theodor Herzl in 1890s established the Zionist movement. The government of Israel came into being in 1948 in a region known as Palestine. The inauguration of the Zionist movement, formation of the nation of Israel and geographical position of the center of the Baha'i Faith were coincidences that became a new pretext for advancing conspiracy theories about the relationship of Baha'ism with the Jewish government of Israel.

In the context of anti-western proclivities, the closeness of the United States to Israel, and protests of western countries (as well as Russia) against anti-Baha'i repression, made the Baha'is targets of vehement attacks – particularly once clerical rule was established, the Baha'is of Iran were stripped of their citizenship rights.

Secular Intellectualism and Conspiracy Theories

The claim that foreigners had a role in the establishment and spread of the Baha'i Faith is not something created by the Islamic Republic or by current Shiite clerics.

In the early 1940s a book titled “The Political Confessions or Memoirs of Prince Dolgoruki: The Secrets of the Appearance of the Babi and Baha’i Religions in Iran” was published, in which the Baha’i Faith was presented as a creation of the hand of colonial powers, such as Russia.

This book, which is dismissed by many experts, such as Ahmad Kasravi, as a forgery, attempts to sever the line connecting the Babi and the Baha’i Faiths with Shiism and Islam, and presents them as a sudden and foreign phenomenon.

During the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, anti-Baha’i activities subsided to some degree. However, new waves of anti-Baha’i sentiment reemerged once again with the emergence of the monarchy of Muhammad-Reza Shah Pahlavi.

During this period, some Baha’is who had left the fold wrote certain books against the religion, and at some length they once more raised the issue of the connection of Baha’ism with foreign nations. In this regard, they exerted an influential role in enhancing suspicions against Baha’is.

Among these writings, in the book *Tarikh va Naqsh Siyasi Rahbaran Baha’i* [History and the Political Role of Baha’i leaders] by Murteza Ahmad A. (penname, Yafteh Publisher in 1344 [1965]), Baha’ism is defined as a “manufactured religion” created solely for the purpose of “waywardness and division among the citizens of the nation”.

Similarly, the author suggests that the Babi and Baha’i leaders at the beginning were “deep devotees of the glorious Russian government”, afterwards benefited from the “support of the Ottoman government”, and eventually “begin espionage for the British government”.

Fereydu Adamiyat, the renowned historian of the Constitutional Revolt, in his book, *Amir-Kabir va Iran* [Amir-Kabir and Iran], regards Baha’ism as a creation of British espionage and claims that Arthur Conolly, a British intelligence officer, has spoken in his travelogue about his connection with Mulla Husayn Bushruiyh, the first believer in the Bab.

From Adamiyat’s perspective, without support from foreign nations such a religion could not have endured and would have soon disappeared. Of course, at a later time, he recognized that the attribution to Arthur Conolly was incorrect, and removed it from subsequent printings of his book.

In his book *Baha’igari*, the author, Ahmad Kasravi, the well-regarded historian of the Constitutional period, accuses foreign governments such as the British of providing support to Baha’i leaders. He writes, “After the British conquered Palestine, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, the son and successor of Baha’u’llah, asked for the title of ‘Sir’ from that government. When it was bestowed, the day that the Order of Knighthood arrived, there was a large festival in Akka, and music was played.”

Kasravi’s allusion is to the later years of Abdu’l-Baha in Palestine. In the years that coincided with World War I, British power enveloped Palestine during the war in Haifa and subsequent to it. For this reason, they guaranteed the safety of Abdu’l-Baha and his Baha’i followers. Afterwards, as a reward for Abdu’l-Baha’s humanitarian activities during the war years, the British government granted him the title of “Sir”.

There is no historical evidence that Abdu’l-Baha himself ever wanted the title “Sir”.
Violation of the Rights of Citizenship in the First Constitution of Iran

One of the goals of the Constitutionalist was to make all the “servants of Iran” equal before the law, regardless of race or religion. Later this was achieved as Article 8 of the Constitution, which was ratified in 1906.

Despite this, the group of Constitutionalist who were in favor of aligning the Constitution with Islamic law were eventually able to deprive non-Muslim Iranians, including

Jews, Christians, Babis and Baha'is, of equal rights with other citizens. They also succeeded in ensuring that the same document deprived these minorities of representation in national parliament or from being given ministerial status.

Conspiracy Theory and the New Movement

The appearance of a new movement, an independent religion or a political power is constantly exposed to fresh threats. For this reason, accusing new movements of being against the masses, anti-religion or against the government is not unprecedented, and occurs in every instance.

The history of religion is filled with clashes between established and central religions and those on the periphery: This is the case with religions before Islam in Iran, as well as with Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each one in their own time had to face such slander and vilification.

Even Shi'ism, which today in Iran is considered the official and legal state religion, at the beginning of its formation was accused of being created by Jews for the destruction of Islam (Sunni religion). Many among the followers of Sunni Islam consider a certain 'Abdu'llah ibn Saba (who was a Jew and a resident of Kufih) as the one who formed the Shi'ite sect – a charge that Shi'ites reject.

Conspiracy theory is the easiest way to construe the emergence of any new entity. However, from a historical point of view, it is not an effective way to confront and defend against such emerging faiths. Many movements that internally have had the ability to sustain themselves have managed to continue their development despite such accusations or appeals to conspiracies.

On the other hand, we must differentiate between two theories: (1) a theory that fundamentally considers the Baha'i Faith to be a creation and effort of foreigners and does not recognize in it any internal drivers that stem from cultural, historical and Islamic-Shi'ite roots; (2) a theory that sees the Baha'i Faith as a movement based on an apt relationship between a cultural, religious and political axis of Iranian society which has gained the support of foreign nations.

Historical research and analysis does not support the first theory, but the same studies indicate that Baha'i leaders enjoyed the support of foreign nations. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the support of foreign nations for marginal religions and sects is not limited to the contemporary era. For instance, from a historical perspective, very few researchers doubt that the Mogul attack on the Islamic realm, which resulted in the fall of Baghdad and lessening of the central power of the Muslim Caliphs benefited smaller sects, such as the Shi'ite sect. Likewise, the collaboration and alliance of Shi'ite leaders and high-ranking clerics, such as Khawjeh Nasir'd-Din Tusi, with Mogul principals is beyond historical dispute.

Baha'is and the Silence of Intellectuals

Faced with persistent and focused attack on Baha'is, either before the 1979 revolution or afterwards, Baha'is have been deprived of the means to defend themselves.

This one-sided propaganda supported by the government, which has been accompanied by many episodes of intense persecution and attempts at genocide, has not only impacted the view of common people, but has also had a lasting influence on non-religious intellectuals. Only recently a number of Iranian intellectuals in a letter have expressed their shame for their long and inexcusable silence over the violation of the human rights of the Baha'i

citizens. However, few among the signatories of this document live in Iran, and most well-known contemporary intellectuals are not signatories to this document.

Two Mistakes of the Islamic Republic of Iran

By Shahla Firouz

A translation of this essay by Nizam was posted on March 31, 2009, at <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=67629665134&topic=10223> and appeared in edited form on April 1, 2009 at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/2064>.

For the past thirty years, the Islamic Republic has made innumerable mistakes and glaring errors in dealing with the Baha'i community. Some of these errors include summary executions, harassment and imprisonment, confiscation of property, and various forms of economic, social, and cultural isolation. This approach to the Baha'is stems from a distorted ideology that fails to differentiate between what is religious expression and what may constitute political dissent. This confused ideology has yet to define whether Iranian law should be rooted in Islamic shari'a or in fundamental human rights; whether adherence to the laws delineated by the Ayatollahs in their books of Islamic guidance must supersede the respect of the international community; and whether Iran is committed to a democratic society or whether pursuit of an Islamic polity is in its best interests.

At first glance, it may appear that these conflicts in defining the Islamic republic's identity are irrelevant to its dealing with the Baha'is. However, upon closer scrutiny, we find that this unbalanced duality of the Islamic republic's ideology is the root cause of its grave errors in dealing with the Baha'i community of Iran. Among many such errors, two mistakes of the Islamic Republic stand out as the most impressive.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, under international pressure, has repeatedly contended that its confrontations with the Baha'is are solely of a political nature and not relevant to the community's religious beliefs. This assertion is so far from the truth that one would have to question the sanity of anyone who accepts it at face value. A simple review of the expert religious opinion of the Islamic clergy regarding the Baha'i community should suffice to refute this assertion. Islamic clergymen have repeatedly made statements regarding the Baha'is as "untouchables" and dealing with them as "prohibited" within the Islamic framework. Such statements are rooted in religion and not politics. How can anyone of sound mind consider the harassment of Baha'i children in schools to be a political issue?

With the rising wave of persecution against the Baha'is three decades ago, publicly recanting one's faith was sufficient to prevent one's execution. To this day, a simple recanting of faith will open the door to universities, reinstate jobs and pensions, provide opportunities for employment, and lift many cultural and social restrictions.

It is this view of a religious community through political spectacles that has burdened the Baha'is community with a great deal of pain and suffering. This approach is reminiscent of the story of Moses when he turned his cane into a serpent, and in turn became frightened of what had transpired. The authorities of the Islamic Republic have likewise labeled the Baha'is as political agents but have forgotten that they were the ones who created this story at the outset.

The consequences of such forgetfulness are not simple, for members of an entire community are viewed as political enemies. While it is possible that a few elements within any party, group, or ideology may be spies, traitors, or enemies, it is a grave mistake to label all its members – children, youth, elderly, women, men, villagers, lay people or educated – as

spies, although this allegation may be instantly erased by a simple recanting of their faith as Baha'is.

Baha'is children are subjected to severe harassment in school, and are denied equal opportunity for or access to education. They are vilified, insulted, and belittled. Young Baha'is are deprived of their right to higher education and are categorically denied entry into any university in Iran. Employment in the public sector is not available for Baha'is. Even in the private sector, they are denied many legitimate avenues for progress, and the system conspires to thwart their ability to keep their employment. Many Baha'i families are constantly receiving threats. Their neighbors are often approached by unknown elements that advise them to shun the Baha'is, as they are "corrupt" and because consorting with them may have negative consequences. On a few occasions, threatening graffiti has been spray-painted on the walls of their homes. Other reports have surfaced of arson against Baha'i homes and cars. Baha'is continue to be summarily arrested and detained for undefined periods without charge. It is noteworthy that if all these "suspects", irrespective of age, gender, level of education, or cultural background are spies, and their crime is well-established, then why are they all not arrested and detained by the security forces? If these actions are simply performed by prejudiced mobs of people, then why are the authorities turning a blind eye to these events? Will any mind of sound judgment accept that a fourth grader may be a spy and his classmates should be advised to avoid conversing or playing with him at school?

Another consequence of viewing a religious community in a political light is that it makes the authorities unable to interpret their social interactions with the community. The authorities will view any peace-loving gesture as being charged with mistrust and antagonistic to themselves. In this light, even if the Baha'is, in accordance with their convictions, engage in acts of service to their communities, their actions are viewed as being against national security and motivated by the desire to spread propaganda against the regime. This is how legal files are created and lives are jeopardized.

Does obedience to the laws of one's faith and following the directives of its administration constitute action against Islam? Can the steadfastness, loyalty, and faith of a community be justified solely through their financial and emotional support of imaginary political powers? If so, why is it that other political parties did not last and perished? Why did the representatives of political parties "confess" to sins they did not commit on national television? Why is it that the financial support of all political parties always comes from an outside source? Why is it that none of the above scenarios hold true in the case of the Baha'is?

The reason is that the Supreme Leader, the Islamic clergy, the president, other statesmen, the head of the judiciary, and Mr. Najafabadi — the chief prosecutor — are all either in deep slumber or have feigned sleep so as to not recognize that the Baha'i community is a religious community with all the characteristics that pertain thereto, such as spiritual unity, obedience to a spiritual covenant, observation of ordinances, religious gatherings, and promoting the verities of their faith — whether welcomed or not by the authorities. As such, the rules that apply to political parties do not apply to a religious community. The unbelievers of Quraysh besieged Muhammad and His early followers in the valley of Abi-Talib for three years, but did not succeed in purging their faith. The Pharisees, in collaboration with the Romans, crucified Jesus and set the early believers on fire, but their faith was unshaken. Moses received a great deal of opposition, and Buddha, Abraham, and Zoroaster were sent into exile, but their faith did not cease to be. This time, if history is any indication, the efforts of the Islamic Republic, too, will be futile.

The second grave mistake of the Islamic Republic is its lack of adherence to Islam itself. Otherwise, the authorities would remember the Hadith stating that tyranny will not stand or the Qur'anic verse: "Verily truth has come and vanquished falsehood." They would practice reciting the verse, "there is no compulsion in religion", and the five times per day recitation invoking God to "guide us to the straight path" would have done its job. The authorities of the Islamic republic refuse to accept that change is God's tradition and that God's tradition may not be altered. They believe that with the Ministry of Intelligence, the Armed Forces, their vigilantes, and thousands of security and law enforcement forces, they can control the trend of change and prevent the inevitable, as if they were trying to stop the earth from rotating or the Sun from rising. Recall the story of Galileo, who under the pressure of the "Revolutionary Court" of his time and out of fear of the "Armed Forces" of the church verbally retracted his assertions of change, but addressed the earth with a stump and exclaimed, "Thou shall continue to revolve around the Sun."

Whether we desire it or not, the world is progressing at an astonishing speed. It is time to part with outdated beliefs and allow the fresh blood of change to flow and prove its effectiveness. Those who soar to the skies and have a broad vision and cheer the rise of the shining Sun are protected from the tyranny of the uninformed. However, those who have sought their homes within the dirt and the rocks see naught save their surroundings. Ultimately, these are the ones who are anxiety-stricken and are in denial about change.

Why Suppress the Baha'is?

By Hossein Bagher-Zadeh

Dr. Bagher-Zadeh is a learned Iranian intellectual, a human rights activists and a regular contributor to the online journal Iranian.com, where this essay first appeared on February 18, 2009 at <http://iranian.com/main/2009/feb-22> and on <http://iranbbb.org/37763.htm>. He is a spokesperson for Manshoor81 (Charter 2003). His weekly column on Iranian affairs in Persian appears in Iran Emrooz and other Iranian publications. This essay was translated on April 10, 2009, and posted at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/2111>.

Why Suppress the Baha'is?

The Islamic Republic regime has once again used one of its traditional tricks and generated waves of anti-Baha'i attacks during these heated days when different political parties are trying to win seats for the executive branch of the Islamic Republic, and the regime is enveloped with official and unofficial rumors regarding possible dialogue and ties with the United States – all of this can be seen against a backdrop of an extreme economic crisis which has overtaken the majority of the people, bringing their future into serious question. This current wave began some time ago with the arrest of dozens of Baha'is, and has culminated in accusations of espionage against seven leaders of the Baha'i Faith.

In the most recent phase of this anti-Baha'i wave, Ayatollah Qorban-Ali Dorri Najafabadi, Iran's Attorney General, wrote to his counterpart in the Ministry of Intelligence demanding confrontation with the "Baha'i administration". A few news agencies directly tied to the government have noted that this letter amounts to license on behalf of the Attorney General to instigate a "serious attack against elements of the Baha'i organization" and to see this confrontation through to "complete obliteration of the same". For this purpose, during Friday prayer sessions, officials of the Islamic regime gathered signatures on a petition calling for "the elimination of the wayward sect [i.e. Baha'i Faith] and the Baha'i organization." These actions, which are considered the most extreme efforts to eliminate the Baha'is during the 30-year of Islamic Republic regime, could transform existing anti-Baha'ism into widespread genocide and create a complete catastrophe.

Anti-Baha'ism in the Islamic Republic is as old as the regime itself. The Constitution of this regime recognized only a few known religions, and deliberately left out the Baha'i Faith, thus by exclusion making it invalid and outside of any religious category. In practice also, since the inception of the Islamic regime, not only have the followers of this religion [i.e. Baha'is] been deprived of their rights as human beings, but they have also been stripped of all civil rights due to them as citizens of this country.

Many times Baha'is have been subjected to pressure and harm. Their property has been confiscated. Their children have been barred from school. They have been summarily dismissed from work and left without job security. They have been denied pensions and in many cases had to reimburse salaries they had received while working. Their homes and dwellings have been attacked and confiscated. Their places of worship and gathering sites have been demolished and destroyed. Hundreds, nay thousands of them have been arrested and have fallen victim to torture and suffering. More than two hundred of them were executed during the first decade after the revolution. During the reign of the Islamic Republic, apart from political groups, the Baha'is have been more intensely and more bitterly persecuted and suppressed than any other group with a distinct social and belief structure.

The principle reason for anti-Baha'ism in the Islamic Republic is ideology. One religious order, by definition, rejects other religions. With regard to some religions, such as the people of the Book [a term used to refer to the Jewish and Christian religions - translator] or those of Sunni persuasion, such denial becomes relative. However, it becomes absolute when a religion is in direct conflict with the dominant religion. A regime that derives its influence by appealing to the idea of the Hidden Twelfth Imam cannot coexist with any belief that directly challenges that premise [Note: the Baha'i community believes that the Bab represented the Promised One of Islam and that the messianic expectations of Islam have been fulfilled in the persons of the Bab and Baha'u'llah - translator].

From this perspective, it is expected to see the authorities of this regime tormenting, torturing, harassing and executing Baha'is more than any other group, as well as periodically arresting individuals claiming to be the expected Promised One or in communication with Him and executing these individuals.

Since the suppression of the Baha'is is rooted in ideology that means the intensity of the oppression of Baha'is is directly proportional to the power of "messianics" in the government, rather than to the openness of the country's political atmosphere. However, these two issues are related to each other.

In the years immediately after the revolution, elements associated with the Hojjiyeh penetrated the government, and through their influence over various layers of government were able to pressure and suppress Baha'is.

However, harassing and persecuting Baha'is was not exclusive to this group. Many of those competing with Hojjiyeh or combating against it were also involved in oppressing the Baha'is because of ideological reasons. Many senior people in the government were personally involved in this effort or would lend it their complete support. For example, a large number of religious leaders such as the late Ayatollah Gulpaygani or Khamenei, the current supreme leader of the Islamic Republic, have issued instructions for limiting the Baha'is and barring them from access to educational facilities or from enjoying civil rights. In fact, so far — that is, after three decades of the Islamic regime — only one senior religious leader — namely, Ayatollah Montazeri — has emphasized the civil rights of the Baha'is and has defended their rights in this regard. Apart from this case, while currently the founders of the so-called sect of Qa'imis [those who expect the immediate arisal of the Promised Imam of Shi'i Islam] have taken over the government and once more waves of anti-Baha'ism are sweeping across the country, governmental authorities and different agencies are competing with one another in a game to see who can become more antagonistic towards Baha'is!

In addition to ideological motives, other factors are also involved with anti-Baha'ism. Frequently, during periods in which no major changes in government personnel have taken place, there have been ups and downs in pursuing anti-Baha'i policies. For example, the current government structure has been the same for the last three years, whereas the current anti-Baha'i wave has become intense only in recent weeks and months.

What has changed in these weeks that on one hand seven imprisoned Baha'i leaders are being charged with espionage and are on the verge of execution, while at the same time the country's Attorney General orders the complete eradication and obliteration of all Baha'is, and urges all government agencies to increase their propaganda against the Baha'is?

Is this not because the government wants to divert public opinion from certain issues, or to conceal a certain crisis, or to promote a certain group through diversionary propaganda and tactics?

Experience has proven that during periods of crisis or uncertain times, corrupt totalitarian regimes adopt such techniques as provoking public opinion against a helpless minority so they can divert public thoughts and preoccupy people's minds, thereby gaining relief from popular criticism. Under the present theocracy in Iran, the minority group that more than any other can be used as an instrument for this purpose is the Baha'i community, which has to pay through the sacrifice of the lives and possessions of its beleaguered members the high cost of deceit by Iran's rulers.

Ayatollah Dorri Najafabadi, who under the rule of so-called Islamic "justice" administers the judiciary branch, has boldly issued orders to eliminate and remove all Baha'is, while the entire propaganda machine of the government is feeding the fire that this man has ignited.

Najafabadi has a long and checkered history in confronting through legal means as well as by direct action the religious or political opponents of the Islamic Republic. Ten years ago, he was the Minister of Intelligence, and all his deputies and managers had significant roles in slaughtering such dissidents as Forouhar [see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dariush_Forouhar], [Mohammad] Mokhtari [see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chain_murders_of_Iran], Pooyandeh [see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Jafar_Pouyandeh], and many others. He himself is one of those principally accused for issuing the command for all these killings through his religious verdicts. It was for this reason [i.e. excess brutality] that he was dismissed from the office of Minister of Intelligence.

Now it is very likely that once again Najafabadi is the leader in suppressing a vulnerable and defenseless minority group, and officially presides over a planned massacre and annihilation of this group. He could be the instigator aiming to use the Baha'is as scapegoats for hiding internal conflicts within the government and to divert attention from political and social unrest.

Whatever his motive, there should be no doubt that this action could lead to total tragedy – a tragedy that elements in the government would use to incite public and religious sentiment against the Baha'is, which would be intended to bring about waves of terror and fear among the Baha'is in order to completely suppress and silence them.

The suppression of the Baha'is within the religious community of Iran, especially given the massive and intense propaganda against them over the course of so many decades, is not a difficult task. Most certainly a universal protest and movement would be required to repel the onslaught of this coming suppression of the Baha'is and its resultant calamity. The recent open letter, "We are Ashamed" signed by more than two hundred Iranian prominent figures residing outside the country is a serious measure in this direction. [Ayatollah] Montazeri's pronouncement a little while ago in defending the rights of Baha'is to citizenship and to civil rights is also a noteworthy and helpful step in changing the view of Islamist groups, particularly his own followers, about the Baha'is.

Within the country, enveloped in a most alarming and dangerous atmosphere, [Nobel prizewinner] Mrs. [Shirin] Ebadi and other members of the Human Rights Defenders have courageously arisen to defend the legal rights of the imprisoned Baha'is. It is also time for other civil rights activists to join this growing and historic movement, and to neutralize governmental propaganda against the Baha'is. In addition, it is possible that reformists and heterodox thinkers within the religious fold may follow the example of [Ayatollah] Montazeri, and such activists as Emad al-Din Baqi, and defend the rights of the Baha'is, and prevent government authorities from taking advantage of their silence to profit from anti-Baha'i policies.

The suppression of the Baha'is, like the suppression of any other defenseless minority, is a national tragedy no matter what the pretext or excuse. Remaining silent places an awful burden of responsibility on those who are able to raise their voices but who fail to do so.

It is the responsibility of all of us to defend the Baha'is with all our strength

By Farhang Farahi

Farahi is an eminent thinker, writer and journalist of modern Iran, and has been a defender of the Baha'i community throughout his career. This essay was published in Iran Times, 39th year, issue 1949, on March 20, 2009, available at: http://www.iranpresswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Iran_Times_Farahi.pdf and a translated was posted on May 2, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/2581>.

I have special respect for the Baha'i community of Iran, despite all the severe pressure and oppression in the past 165 years; they have remained in their homeland to fulfill their responsibilities and duties.

A gentleman from Switzerland announced that we should reconsider what the Seven Wonders of the World should be, because first, except for the Pyramids, the rest of the wonders have been destroyed, and second, the ancient wonders seem small and insignificant in comparison to the newer ones. This announcement was widely publicized in the media all over the world, and ultimately put to public vote across the globe. UNESCO participated in this important nomination and started valuating the votes. From the 200 structures that had received the highest number of votes, UNESCO selected 70-80 structures, among them: Hagia Sofia (Turkey), Eiffel Tower (France), Taj Mahal (India), Statue of Liberty (United States), Acropolis of Athens (Greece) and Alhambra de Granada (Spain).

However, there were no edifices selected from Iran. There was no mention of Persepolis, Sheikh Lotfullah Mosque, Isfahan's Jami Mosque, Naqsh-e Jahan Square, etc. The question is, why?

Is there any reason other than the fact that the Islamic government over the past thirty years, with policies based on hatred and revenge, has distanced itself farther and farther from the rest of the world? Isn't it that with ideologies based on prejudice and enmity, the government has instigated the Islamic militia to confront the Iranian nation? Isn't it that the Islamic regime has negated and considered worthless any signs of achievement, wealth of history, culture and civilization of Iran?

This is why we see great and famous Iranian leaders, thinkers, and achievers throughout the history of our civilization introduced to the world as "Arabs" or "Turks". Isn't it that the Islamic Republic, by disrespecting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by disregarding personal and social freedoms, and by being heedless to the world's objections, imprisons, tortures, and executes group after group of free thinkers?

Isn't it that the Islamic Government by creating insecurity and limiting healthy activities, not only oppresses those who think differently, but also those who have different belief systems? The followers of various religions are, by the direct order of the Islamic regime, imprisoned and tortured. With its Fatwa (religious ruling), the clergy incites the sentiments of the mob to attack, terrorize and even kill those with different beliefs and views.

Looking at the Islamic government's report card, we find that during the 30 years of their damned rule, over 200 Baha'is have been murdered solely on the grounds of their religious beliefs. In addition, hundreds of our Baha'i countrymen have either been imprisoned or subjected to aggression and brutality, and their homes or businesses have been set on fire.

Not only have Baha'i employees been fired from their jobs, but hundreds of Baha'i children and youth have been expelled from schools and universities.

It is no coincidence that Iranian university professors, writers, artists, reporters, and political activists residing inside and outside of their country, as citizens of Iran, have expressed their feelings of shame in an open letter to the Baha'i community of Iran. I too, as a responsible reporter, am dumbfounded and ashamed of the merciless and vicious attacks on the 300,000 member Baha'i community of Iran. I agree with the letter on which the Iranian intellectuals put their signature, admitting their shame of being silent while atrocities were inflicted upon Baha'is.

Truly, we should be ashamed of the silence of our intellectual predecessors. At the time of the Qajar dictators, when the possessions, lives, honor, personal and social freedom of Baha'is were violently transgressed, when their homes and businesses were mercilessly burning in the fire of hatred and animosity of tyrannical authorities and prejudiced militants, intellectuals remained silent.

When I read the poems of Tahirih, that courageous, resilient woman and famous poetess, who was brutally and viciously put to death because of her beliefs, I can't help but say I am ashamed.

My Baha'i countrymen studied and worked alongside me, achieving the highest marks in university, completing their tasks at their workplace as responsible, devoted and hardworking citizens. When I think of them, condemned and deprived of their most basic civil and human rights because of their belief system, I feel ashamed.

I have special respect for the Baha'i community of Iran, despite all the severe pressure and oppression over the past 165 years, of which I have mentioned only a few, they have remained in their homeland to fulfill their responsibilities and duties. As an Iranian, I am proud of them.

If we accept that there are 300,000 Baha'is residing in Iran, we should immediately accept that these tens of thousands of Baha'is need to elect individuals to attend to their administrative and spiritual needs. In other countries, even with much fewer numbers, Baha'is have elected spiritual assemblies. Baha'is even have a seat at the United Nations as the representative of 179 National Spiritual Assemblies across the globe. However, the members of the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies of Iran have either been executed or have been subjected to attacks and the theft of their possessions.

Even at the time of the Shah, with provocations and unfounded allegations by the National Intelligence and Security Organization (SAVAK), Baha'is were subject to aggression of which we are all more or less aware of. After the Revolution and in the same year, nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran were kidnapped and executed. During all these years, the Islamic government has instigated well organized official campaigns against Baha'is via media, radio, government television, internet sites, and even movie productions.

In 2005, the representatives of the International Baha'i Community presented a secret memorandum to the United Nations which was an order from the "Armed Forces of Iran", instructing the intelligence and information services, police forces and Islamic militia to identify and closely watch the activities of all Baha'is across country. This document caused immense concern among members of worldwide human rights organizations. In 2008, the Ministry of Education, Research & Technology ordered 81 universities to expel all Baha'i students from these institutions of higher education. Employment in government offices, foundations, and even private companies continues to be forbidden for Baha'is. Aggression is imposed by landlords of Baha'i tenants, in the form of cutting off their

electricity or natural gas lines and stealing their mail deliveries. These atrocities occur with the support of the police forces.

It is the responsibility of all of us with Iranian hearts beating in our chests to defend the Baha'i Community of Iran with all our strength.

Signed,
Farhang Farahi.

Justice, not Shame!

By Majid Naficy

Dr. Naficy is a well-known Iranian poet, writer, and human rights and political activist. The following essay was first published on March 12, 2009, at <http://fa.shabrvand.com/2008-07-14-20-49-09/2008-07-14-20-49-46/2284-2009-03-12-17-58-08> and a translation was posted on July 19, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/4399>.

Recently, a letter was published over the signature of 42 Iranian intellectuals addressed to the Baha'i community and proclaiming "one and a half century of persecution and our silence is enough". The title of the letter was We are Ashamed.

Over a month ago, Mr. Khosro Shemiranie sent this letter to me to sign. Even though from the age of fourteen I have been saddened by what Baha'is have been going through and I have written about it, I responded that I could not sign it since it was instigated by a "feeling of shame" and "collective sin" and not "seeking justice and freedom of conscience". I added, "If you reword this letter in which the phrase 'We are Ashamed' is repeated thirteen times and change it to 'We arise to defend the rights of Baha'is', you can be sure that I will sign it without any hesitation."

Now that this open letter has been published and broadly disseminated, and many others have joined as signatories, I find it necessary to write my reasons for not signing it. I hope by launching this discussion, I can bring to light the tyranny and persecutions to which Baha'is have been subjected during the rule of the three regimes of Qajar, Pahlavi and Khomeini over the past 160 years.

1. My First Encounter with Baha'is

The first time I got to know a Baha'i was in Sa'di High School in Isfahan, when I was in the seventh grade. His name was Golestan Mossafaei, and he was in the eleventh grade. I met him at our school's Literature Club. The club was managed by Mohammad Hoquqi, our teacher and resident poet. This club did not last long; it shut down under the pressure imposed by prejudiced school officials.

Golestan always had a sweet smile, and sometimes he composed poems. A few times I went to his house, which was located close to a stream in Darvazeh Hasanabad. It was a modest house with one room. Even that room was barely furnished. Golestan explained how their house had been set on fire a few times, by an anti-Baha'i group called Hojjatiyeh.

Flyers had also been thrown into their yard, pressuring them to leave their residence. I felt deeply sad hearing about the tyranny inflicted on Golestan and his family.

I wrote a short story about it, and read it to members of my literary circle "Jong-e Isfahan".

The vice principal of the school was furious about my friendship with Golestan, and told my father that Majid had been entrapped by Baha'is. My father gave me a worn-out booklet called "Memoires of Prince Dolgoruki", the Russian Ambassador in Iran from 1846-1854, who allegedly claimed that the Baha'i movement had been started by Russians in order to destroy Iran and the Shiah sect of Islam. My mother forbade me from having a friendship with Golestan Mossafaei. She made such a monster of Golestan that whenever my four year old sister was mad at me, she would say, "Get lost Mofassaaci".

School teachers collaborated in pressuring me, and failed me in “calligraphy” when I was in grade 7! I was a bright student who had passed grade six with an average above 90. In the eighth grade, I was given failing grades in “calligraphy”, “religion”, “algebra” and “geometry”, and had to retake the exams for these subjects at the end of summer. I was not given passing grades and had to repeat grade 8 the following year. This was the first big failure of my life, and taught me a lesson in resilience. I left day school, and enrolled in a night school so that I would be able to complete two grades in one year.

Sa’di High School was run by a religious mafia, composed of a few teachers and a fanatically religious vice principal. At the top of the group, there was a physics teacher whose name was Nuri and looked like a shopkeeper in the old bazaar. His shirts were buttoned up to the chin, and his face was always unshaven. He was the one who shut down our literature club, with the excuse that the organizer of the club disseminated the atheistic views of the prominent novelist, Sadeq Hedayat (1903-51), and caused students to drift away from Islam. Two mullahs by the names of Rohani and Faqih-Imami were our “religion” teachers. Another Mullah named Fazaeli, with good penmanship, taught us calligraphy. Even though he had a close relationship with the Shah’s appointed rulers in Isfahan, he also had close ties with our school religious mafia.³³

After two years of studying at night school, I enrolled in another high school called Harati. That school was not free of staunch religious, fanatical teachers either.

I remember on cold winter days, as we heard the school bell ring, we had to stand still on the spot and listen to Mr. Parvaresh. After the revolution when he was appointed a Minister, we found out that he had been a member of an anti-Baha’i group [Hojjatieh Society -- see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hojjatieh>]. He would sprinkle his religious speech with aphorism from Imam Ali in three languages, English, Arabic and Persian, showing off his talent!

2. Shaykhis and Mullahs

About the same time, impressed by the book *Tat Neshinha-ye Boluk Zahra* [The Tat People of the Zahra County] written by Jalal Al-Ahmad (1923-69), I became interested in the rural life of Iran and in traveling to a small village called Jandaq situated on the edge of Dasht-Namak desert. Inhabitants of this village told me that they were followers of a sect called Shaykhi Baqiri. This enticed me to start reading Shaykhi books. I realized that the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa’i (1753-1826) and his successor, Siyyid Kazim Rashti (1793-1843) had been instrumental for the appearance of Ali-Muhammad the Bab (1819-50) [co-founder of the Baha’i Faith].

After the death of Siyyid Kazim Rashti, one of the Qajar Princes, Aqa Karim Khan Kermani (1810-1871) became the Shaykhi leader. In order to stop his followers from accepting the Bab, he turned into the most active anti-Babi mullah of his time. Shaykhis grew in number and influence under him and his heir’s leadership. Even Mozaffari’d-Din Shah considered himself a Shaykhi.

After Karim Khan Kermani, the Shaykhi school of thought was divided into two branches.

One branch that was in the majority considered Karim Khan’s son as their leader and the Fourth Pillar (that is, the intermediary between the Hidden Imam and his followers,

³³ In September 2000 I published my memoir of this period in a detailed essay “avalin-haye man” (My Firsts) in *Shahrvand* magazine. This essay has also been included in my book “man khod iran hastam va si-o-panj maqaleh-ye digar” (I am Iran Alone and Thirty-Five other Essays Toronto, Afra-Pegah publishers 2006.

which is similar to Khomeini's idea of Velayet-e Faqih, "rule by jurists"). The other branch, under the leadership of Mohammad-Baqir Hamadani, rejected the heredity nature of the Fourth Pillar. They became known as Shaykhi Baqiris.

After studying Shaykhi books, I concluded that some of Shaykh Ahmad's views seemed more logical than the views of his Shiah counterparts. For example, resurrection at the Day of Judgment (known as Hurqalya) was the resurrection in a softer and more refined form— not a physical reconstruction. I found the Babi movement attractive only to the extent that it was egalitarian and the fact that a courageous female poet by the name of Tahirih Zarrin-Taj (1814 or 1817-1852) was one of its prominent followers. Other than that, from a young age, I was not interested in religious ideology.

My paternal grandfather, Abu-Torab, who had left the city of Kerman to settle in Pudeh, a small village near Isfahan, did not accept the heredity branch of the Shaykhis. Going through my father's library, I came across a few manuscripts of his grandfather, and once briefly read through one which explored the philosophical issue of free will versus predestination.

My father believed that there were no differences between Shaykhi and currently practiced Shiah schools, and that it was just a matter of whom each group considered to be their Source of Emulation. However, I had the feeling that my parents were afraid of becoming known as Shaykhis and kept secret their meetings for the purpose of studying and discussing the books of Kermani and Hamadani.

Among the views of Shaykhi Baqiris, my father liked their distrust of traditional mullahs. Among contemporary Islamic thinkers, my father liked Ali Shariati (1933-77), an Iranian scholar who was against the cast of clergy. I remember my father, while driving for picnics on Fridays, used to sing a folk song making fun of mullahs:

"I am a mullah, a mullah / Stayed overnight in a stable / A flea came and bit me / I kicked my quilt off/ Burnt my cot / And broke my teaspoon / I am a mullah, a mullah / Stayed overnight in a stable".

In Iranian folktales, a mullah was often pictured as a "cunning fox", and as a creature obsessed with food, overeating and sexual excesses, while pretending to be pious and self righteous. Khomeini was well aware of how mullahs were portrayed and their reputation. After the revolution, imitating his teacher, Abdul-Karim Haeri-Yazdi, Khomeini, in one of his speeches, changed the famous proverb "How easy to become a mullah, how hard to become a human!" to "How hard to become a mullah, impossible to become a human". He was trying to influence the subconscious of the masses and to overcome their innate sense of mistrust and resentment towards the mullahs.

3. From Tahirih to Ezzat

From 1964 to 1981, occasionally I came upon or heard about Baha'is. For example, I heard about Bahram Sadeqi (1936-86), a renowned storywriter from Najafabad who was a Baha'i. However, it was on September 17, 1981, when I found myself again in a situation in which I felt that I had the same destiny as Baha'is.

It was over two years since the revolution in Iran. Fundamentalist militant rulers were violently persecuting and executing members of the Iranian National Front and the leftist organizations. These groups were the ones that had played a crucial role in uprooting the Pahlavi regime.

On September 16, my wife and comrade, Ezzat Tabaian, left the house. That night, she phoned a friend and hurriedly told him that while being chased by the Islamic Militia, she had fallen and broken her pelvic bone. My wife asked him to contact me and tell me to quickly destroy all “incriminating evidence” in the house. The next day, the same friend asked if I had a safe place to spend the night, knowing that our home would not be spared from attacks. When I replied that I had nowhere to go, he suggested a large house on Lashkar square that belonged to his old aunt.

I knew his aunt was a Baha’i, and her house would not be a safe place either. However, we had no choice but to go to his aunt’s house. A deft servant opened the door and led us in. The old aunt told us how Islamic forces had arrested the last members of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Tehran. She was worried about her own safety as well.

That night, I had the strange feeling that Tahirih, the courageous Babi female poet was talking to me from the edge of the well into which she had been thrown after being strangled, 150 years before. I was seeing a connection between Tahirih and the painful fate of my wife in the claws of her tormentors. A few years later on September 18, 1986, I wrote a poem, Raftam Golat Bechinam [I Went to Find your Flower] published in a collection of poems under the same title, about the events of three days after the arrest of my wife Ezzat. The second part of the poem relates to the old Baha’i woman who offered me her home as refuge:

I have hardly fled
The slaughter place of a Marxist
To take refuge in a Baha’i’s.
Is there a lesson here for me?
In the deserted courtyard
Where the yellow leaves rustle
And the lonely goldfish
Circles in the green water,
A secret is revealed to me:
The bloody body of Zarrin Taj is still
Hanging over the prison’s well.
- Have you seen my Isaac?
The old building echoes my words.

“Ezzat”’s and “Tahirih”’s had the same destiny. On January 7, 1982, Ezzat and another leftist woman, along with fifty leftist men, faced the firing squad. Their bodies were dumped in the Khavaran cemetery located southeast of Tehran. Two months before that, I had gone to the same cemetery with my wife to visit the grave of a relative, Sadeq Okhovat, who had faced the firing squad. At that time, there were perhaps fewer than 30 graves at Khavaran. The second visit was for my wife, and I was accompanied by my brother-in-law, Hosein Okhovat-Moqadam. However, when Hosein was executed a few weeks later, I could not bring myself to visit the Khavaran cemetery again.

Later I learned that three days before my wife was executed — that is, on January 4, 1982 — six members of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Tehran had been executed and their bodies had been dumped in the same cemetery.

On January 2009, this cemetery was demolished by the Islamic Government of Iran. It was the resting place of 50 Baha’is, and thousands of other freedom-seeking Iranians.

4. The Test of the Broadmindedness of Iranians

I know about the sufferings endured by Baha'is not only from books, but also from seeing it first hand in my own day-to-day life. Their sufferings date back to the time of the Shah of Iran, particularly in the 1950s, when with the Shah's approval and using the national radio, Mohammad-Taqi Falsafi would deliver blistering sermons which provoked mobs to attack Baha'i holy places.

This trend has continued under the present reign of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has been governing for the past 30 years, and has executed over 200 Baha'is solely on the ground that they were Baha'is. Baha'is do not have the slightest basic human or civil rights as Iranian citizens. In an article which I wrote in 2004 titled "Shirin Ebadi and Freedom of Conscience", I recognized:

Defending the Baha'is must be considered a litmus test for any intellectual Iranian claiming that they honor human rights. In the Islamic government of Iran, there is no place for any Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, or the like. This is because according to Article 13 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the only recognized religious minorities are Zoroastrian, Jewish, or Christian Iranians.

Among the many minority groups that are legally deprived of their right to freedom of conscience, the situation of the Baha'is has been in particular the bleakest.

From the inception of this religion, dating back to the era of Mohammad Shah Qajar, the Iranian Shia clergy have been leading open attacks on this community [i.e. Babis and Baha'is]. The clergy imagined that the appearance of the Bab robbed them of their messianic claim to the expected Hidden Imam, Who is suppose to appear at the "end of time" to fill the world with justice. They believe that the appearance of the Bab took away from them the *raison d'être* of Shi'ism.

During the final decade of the Shah's regime, rumors began to be spread by fanatical groups known for their anti-Baha'i stance, aimed at provoking the people with mentally-sick hatred against the Baha'is, that Baha'is were supporters of the Shah. These false rumors became so widespread that even after the 1979 revolution, when in 1981 the regime began to intensely suppress the opposition including the Baha'is, Iranian intellectuals hesitated to defend the Baha'is against oppression – even when they could see perfectly well that Baha'is were being imprisoned, tortured, and executed merely for being Baha'i. It is for this reason that I consider the single most important quality of a democratic-minded Iranian is to be a supporter of the right of Baha'is to their religion and not heed the fictitious excuse that "Baha'is are members of a political party and not a true religion".

5. The Test of the Broadmindedness of Baha'is

After the publication of my article on Shirin Ebadi and the freedom of consciousness referred to above, I was asked: if the test of broadmindedness of an Iranian is in his defense of the rights of Baha'is, then what defines the broadmindedness of a Baha'i?

In my opinion, a democratic Iranian Baha'i must not only defend the rights of all heterodox thinkers in Iran, but must first and foremost defend the rights of the followers of Azal who call themselves by the name Bayani. Only then can a Baha'i be worthy of the title of free and democratic.

To make this matter more clear, I will explain something that happened in 1987 in Los Angeles. I was invited to a poetry night, and recited the poem *raftam golat bechinam*, from which a stanza was quoted above. Among the attendees was a Baha'i couple. At that time, in this poem I had used the word *Babi* instead of *Baha'i*. Afterwards, the Baha'i woman

asked, “Why did you use the word Babi? Today there are no Babis and they all have become Baha’is.”

Her question and comment not only demonstrated the narrow-mindedness and exclusivity of some Baha’is towards the minority group of the Babi-Azalis, but it also illustrates the narrow-mindedness of many Iranian leftists, of which I had been one, as well. At this point is it necessary to briefly look at the history of the emergence of the Babi movement and the divisions that took place within it.

6. The Azalis and the Baha’is

At the age of 24, Ali-Muhammad Shirazi in 1844 declared himself to be the Bab, which means he was the gate to the Promised One of Shia Islam. He later confirmed that indeed He was the Promised One himself. Shortly before His execution in 1850 in Tabriz, He named one of His followers, a 14-year-old youth named Mirza Yahya Nuri, to be His successor and gave him the title Subh-i Azal.³⁴

After the premiership of Amir Kabir, efforts to eradicate the Babis increased in intensity and many of them were compelled to leave their native land. In 1863, Mirza Husayn-Ali, known as Baha’u’llah, declared himself to be “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest”, Whose appearance was foretold by the Bab. Baha’u’llah was a step-brother of Mirza Yahya (Subh-i Azal) and was 13 years his senior. At the time, both brothers lived in Edirne, a town in the Ottoman Empire.

Mirza Yahya did not accept his brother’s claim and the differences between the two caused enmity and bloodshed among the Babis. Eventually, in order to alleviate the situation, the Ottoman government was forced to exile Yahya to Cyprus and Baha’u’llah to Palestine.

Edward Browne (1862-1929), an English scholar who visited both brothers, writes about this bloodshed which resembles the enmity between Shiah and Sunni in Islam or Trotsky and Stalin at the time of Bolshevism.³⁵

The followers of Baha’u’llah proclaimed their mission to be for the entire world and quickly grew in numbers. However, the followers of the younger brother [Mirza Yahya], returned to or stayed in Iran to fight against the political system and to reduce the influence of the Qajar dynasty. Two of Mirza Yahya’s sons-in-Law, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and Shaykh Ahmad Ruhi, emerged at the forefront of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-11).

They gave their life in this path in Tabriz. During the 1909 interval in which the Iranian Constitution was suspended, the successor of Mirza Yahya by the name of Yahya Dawlatabadi was collaborating with the prominent writer Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda (1879-1959) to publish the freedom-fighting newspaper Soroush in Istanbul.

Today, Azalis who continue to call themselves Bayani, that is, followers of the book of the Bayan written by the Bab, are a small minority community in Iran. Because of their practice of dissimulation, they hide their beliefs. By contrast, the followers of Baha’u’llah have their center in Haifa, have worldwide recognition and number several million.

³⁴ Dr. Naficy is mistaken in this regard. While the Bab consented to Baha’u’llah’s request for Mirza Yahya to be named a temporary head of the community, there is no evidence whatsoever that Mirza Yahya was named a successor. The title Subh Azal was not given by the Bab and was self-adopted by Mirza Yahya Nuri. [Translator]

³⁵ For an example of this discussion, refer to Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Cambridge University Press, 1927, pp. 559-62. In that book, Browne refers to the killing of seven Azalis in Akka by the followers of Baha’u’llah.

7. The Dualistic Approach of the Leftist Movement

During the 1970s, leftist intellectuals in Iran revisited the Bab's movement and grew attracted to it as a social uprising against feudalism — they also acknowledged the contributions of Azali thinkers during the Constitutional Revolution.³⁶ However, as Iranian Marxists on one hand did not respect the necessary role of freedom of conscience, and on the other hand believed the fictitious rumors about Baha'i collaboration with the government during the premiership of Amir-Abbas Hoveyda (and the evidence they had in this regard was that the notorious Parviz Sabeti ran the SAVAK's televised shows), they had a negative view of the Baha'is. This negative attitude increased, particularly after the revolution.

The Soviet-oriented Tudeh party, which considered itself a main backer of the Islamic regime, started helping the fundamentalist clergy in their anti-Baha'i activities. As written by Reza Fani-Yazdi, "Suddenly, in spring 1982, the Tudeh party sent a circular letter to all its regional offices throughout the country instructing that all Baha'is were to be expelled from its membership rolls."³⁷

The members of the Tudeh party were asked not only to expel the Baha'is, but also to divulge the identity of any members of the independent leftist groups who were anti-regime. Though the Tudeh party had played an important role in creating the new Islamic regime, it was not long after the revolution that they fell prey to the oppressive regime they had helped build.

On February 11, 1981, an independent Marxist and anti-establishment group, Peykar Organization had arranged a demonstration in Tehran's Enqelab Square to mark the anniversary of the anti-Shah revolution. There I was identified by two medical students (supporters of the Tudeh Party) with whom I had used to go hiking at the time of the Shah. The Islamic security guards had turned Capri, a movie theatre into a centre for interrogating demonstrators. They seized me, and were dragging me to the interrogation center when I managed to escape with the help of a few friends who started fighting with the vigilante. (Two of my rescuers are still alive and live in North California.) When I made it home, I found my wife Ezzat very worried; she had seen me captured, but had not seen my escape. Alas, only a few months later it was I who had to witness my wife leaving home and never coming back.

8. Appeal for Justice not Collective Shame

With 300,000 followers in Iran, the Baha'i community is the largest minority group after the Sunni sect of Islam. Nevertheless, Baha'is are deprived of all basic human and civil rights, including the freedom of belief, access to higher education, and employment in any government sector.

In a secret memorandum issued in 1991 and signed by the leader, Khamenei and President Rafsanjani, the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council instructed all its lower bodies regarding the principle policy of the government towards Baha'is: "prevention of their progress and advancement" at all levels of society.³⁸ This was also the policy of

³⁶ For instance, see Mohammad-Reza Feshahi, *Vapasin Junbesh Qurun Vusta'i: Akhbari, Usuli, Shaykhi and the Babi*. Javidan Publications, Tehran, 1977.

³⁷ Reza Fani-Yazdi, "Baha'i-setizi Pish va Pas az Enqelab" [Anti-Baha'ism before and after the Revolution], Iran-Emrooz, 6/11/2008.

³⁸ This document was uncovered by Reynaldo Pohl, the United Nations' special representative on human rights in Iran, and published by him in his report of 1993: <http://bic.org/assets/Pohl%20Iran%20report%20E.CN4.1993.41.pdf>. The passage related to the instructions

Khomeini before and after the revolution. While residing in Paris in the summer of 1978, Khomeini was interviewed by James Cockrof, a professor at Rutgers University. Khomeini was asked about his stance regarding the Baha'is and whether they would enjoy freedom of belief and action in an Islamic regime. Instead of a direct response, Khomeini stated, "Baha'ism is not a religion. It is a political party and a misguided sect". The interviewer again asked if Baha'is would be allowed to practice their religious duties. Khomeini responded, "No".³⁹

In Khomeini's terse responses, one can find two justifications for the Shia fundamentalist's suppression of the Baha'is. The first justification is that the Baha'i faith is not a religion, but a political party associated with the government of the Shah and colonialism, and which gives support to Israel. Therefore, the Baha'is should be suppressed for the sake of the country's security. The second justification is that the Baha'is are condemned for apostasy. According to Article 5 of the Criminal Code regarding the "law of apostasy" presented to the Islamic Parliament in February 2008, apostates (which includes the Baha'is) will be sentenced to death if they are male, and life imprisonment if they are female.

The first justification mentioned above is based on collective punishment. That is, if a member of a group is alleged to have committed a crime, then all members of that group, whether male, female, elderly, or child, are guilty through association, and will be subject to punishment. The second justification is based on sheer disregard for human rights, freedom of belief and of the right to choose a religion or no religion.

This justification has its roots in the obscurantism of the middle ages.

In both the above justifications, the right and individual responsibility is completely absent, and instead emphasis is placed on collective belief and group ideologies.

In contradistinction to the above, if we were to accept the principle that all humans, regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, social status and religious belief, are equal before the law and that they have natural rights to freedom of belief, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and such natural liberties, then the above two justifications for oppressing Baha'is and other minorities will have no foundation whatsoever. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize individual freedom in the country's Constitution in order to open the door of justice to all Baha'is and other minorities.

This appeal for justice has two inseparable parts:

1. Complete alignment of the country's Constitution with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations, which calls for the separation of religion and state;
2. Activities of the anti-Baha'i group Hojjatiyeh should be considered illegal and forced to end. All those who have been involved in the persecution of Baha'is and other minorities should be brought to justice in a court of law, in the presence of a jury and defense attorneys.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this essay, the greatest shortcoming of the open letter to the Baha'i community of Iran titled "We are Ashamed" is that instead of demanding justice for the Baha'is (that is, insisting that freedom of belief must be enshrined in the Constitution and that anti-Baha'i groups be made illegal), it proposed a collective shame upon all Iranian

issued after a joint meeting of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, President of Iran, and the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council is on p. 55, paragraph 310. [Translator]

³⁹ See The Denial of Higher Education to the Baha'is of Iran, by Geoffrey Cameron.

intellectuals for allowing 150 years of oppression against the Baha'is. Instead of calling on people to accept human rights, this open letter has established its foundation on collective shame and group repentance.

Without a doubt, when it comes to human and civil rights, the Baha'is of Iran are the most deprived. As I have mentioned earlier, the test of Iranian broadmindedness must be measured by his sensitivity to the cruelty perpetrated against this group of our countrymen. However, first, it is incorrect to accuse all intellectuals of "silence against crimes perpetrated against the Baha'is". Each person is responsible for his own actions and not for the oversights of others, whether in the past or at the present. Second, feeling ashamed or guilty for wrongdoings committed in the past is a personal matter and should be sincerely communicated directly to the individuals or families adversely affected by the acts of oppression. As I wrote in my July 2006 essay titled "Behazin and right of silence" published in "Shahrvand" magazine, I clearly explained that asking individuals to feel ashamed or to repent publicly for their beliefs is an old method of religious inquisition, dating back to the reigns of dictators such as Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and Khomeini.

The main objective of such practices is to undermine and destroy the individual's self-worth.

A liberated and broadminded intellectual would instead defend the rights of individuals, and would not allow public pressure to curtail individual beliefs and actions. They would insist on personal responsibility and choice.

Public shaming and public confession is a method used by Franciscan monks in their inquisition period and employed in fanatical environments for the purpose of extracting acknowledgment and breaking down personal will. In a similar manner, party administrators in the Stalinist era or under Mao's regime employed "self-critical sessions" which used such techniques, and Khomeini used them in his televised public "confessions", or for compulsory group meetings in Evin prison.

I say no to the so-called "original sin" of a group. I say no to metaphoric "baptism" by signing a letter that confesses to shame. We must fight for the freedom of belief and demand that anti-Baha'i activities be banned in Iran. Let everyone tell their own personal stories, and if one feels ashamed about keeping silent while crimes were committed, let him or her take personal responsibility and deal with it as he or she sees fit.

20 February 2009
Majid Naficy.

Persecution of Baha'i and Christians in Iran

By Wahied Wahdat-Hagh

Dr. Wahdat-Hagh is a Senior Fellow with the European Foundation for Democracy in Brussels and his essay below was published on May 4, 2009, at:

http://europeandemocracy.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13420&catid=4&Itemid=22 and on May 8, 2009 at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/2618>.

The systematic persecution of Baha'is in Iran intensified in the month of April. Again and again individual Baha'is are being arbitrarily arrested. They are sometimes released against a substantial amount of bail money. They are, however, not the only ones affected by state repression; Christians are under unprecedented pressure as well.

The treatment of religious minorities in Iran is a litmus test for society's freedom there. Iran has a four-class society when it comes to the treatment of religious groups and religious minorities. The Khodi are the recognized Muslims, who identify with the absolute rule of the clergy and submit to their dictatorial demands. In the second class are the less loyal Muslims, who do not accept the totalitarian dictatorship's religious constitution and advocate a secular democracy.

The third group is composed of the recognized religious minorities of the Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews, who, within the framework of the Islamic legal order, enjoy a lower legal status than Muslims. These minorities are legally discriminated against in many respects – by the blood law, for example. Muslims who have disavowed Islam, called apostates, whether atheists, Christian converts or Baha'is, are fundamentally persecuted. One can not consider such a political system to be an open one.

An example of arbitrary rule over Baha'is

On 8th of April an agent of the Iranian intelligence service phoned the Vahdat Dana family in Shiraz. Without giving any reason, the agent informed Mrs. Vahdat Dana that her husband was to appear at the Ministry of Information the following morning. Mrs. Dana insisted on a written notification, reported Iran Press Watch.

On 12th of April, as Mr. Vahdat Dana was leaving his house to go to work, agents met him on his doorstep and instructed him to accompany them to the intelligence service's prison, known as "Pelak 100", housenumber 100. Mr. Vahdat Dana insisted that he be issued with an arrest warrant. The officials produced a handwritten note that read, "Individuals of interest may be investigated and arrested." Mr. Vahdat Dana persisted that an official document with his name on it had to be presented before he would voluntarily go to prison. The officials left for the time being.

Mr. Vahdat Dana immediately wrote a letter to Hojjat-al-Islam Musavi-Tabar, the revolutionary court prosecutor. In response, the cleric wrote that if "the agents of the Ministry of Information are able to issue a warrant, then Mr. Vahdat Dana must accompany them."

At 12.30 on 25th of April, the intelligence agents again entered Mr. Vahdat Dana's house and instructed his wife to call him immediately. They said he had to return home straight away. When Mr. Vahdat Dana arrived home they arrested him and issued a warrant, signed with the name of judge Rezai-Dadyar, on the spot.

Mr. Vahdat Dana suffers from a heart disorder, but is receiving no medical treatment.

Several Baha'is were arrested in April: as reported by the Baha'i World News Service, on 21st of April Michel Ismaelpur was arrested without a warrant in Mazandaran. On 26th of April Mr. Safaju was arrested in Karaj without any explanation. On 27th of April, Siamak Iqani and Susan Tabianian were arrested in Semnan.

Around 39 Baha'is are currently being held in Iranian prisons without charge, solely because of their religion, because they believe in Baha'u'llah, who is a messenger of God for them and who founded the religion in 1863. This is a thorn in the eye of Iran's state clergy. On 8th of March 2009, the Islamist "Parliament" passed a budget of 3 million dollars for the country-wide fight against "Baha'is, Sufis and devil worshippers". By "devil worshippers" the Iranian government is referring to the youths who listen, for example, to heavy metal music. The "devil worshippers", Muslim Sufis and adherents of the Baha'i faith, the youngest world religion, all have one thing in common: persecution by the Iranian government.

Arrests of Christians intensifies

As the "Christian Examiner Online" reports, two Christian women were arrested on the accusation of "activities against the government". The arrested women are evidently in poor health. A Pentecostal church in Tehran was also shut down. Three other Christian men were arrested in this connection as well, also accused of "activities against the government". The "International Christian Concern" reported that, "Iranian officials have dramatically stepped up the persecution of Christians after a large number of Muslims converted to Christianity." In the last year alone, more than 50 Christians were arrested because of their religious conversion. Some of them are said to have been tortured, some to have died in prison as the result of this torture.

International Christian Concern calls attention to the Apostasy Law, which mandates the death penalty for converting from Islam. The Islamic "Parliament's" final decision on this law is expected in autumn of this year.

Supporters of Ayatollah Boroujerdi demand investigation of Baha'i case

Ayatollah Siyyid Husayn Kazemeyni Boroujerdi is an Iranian cleric who advocates separation of religion and government. He first expressed his opposition to the Islamic government of Iran in 1994, and opposed the theocratic concept of rule or guardianship by Islamic clerics/jurists. Boroujerdi and many of his followers were arrested in Tebran in October 2006 following a clash between police and hundreds of his followers. On May 25, 2009, supporters of the imprisoned Ayatollah Boroujerdi condemned the ongoing suppression and violation of the rights of the Baha'i community in Iran by posting a statement on http://bameazadi19.blogspot.com/2009/05/blog-post_25.html. The following translated was posted on June 2, 2009, on: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/3775>.

With escalation in detentions, arrests, and threats of execution towards our Iranian Baha'i countrymen in recent times, supporters of Mr. Boroujerdi demand an investigation and greater attention by the international community to the ongoing violation of the basic rights of the Baha'is in Iran.

However, supporters of Mr. Boroujerdi believe that unfortunately, in dealings and the behind-the-scenes relations between nations, the issue of human rights is often sacrificed for temporary interests and political pragmatism. As such, raising awareness of this important issue falls on the shoulders of opposition groups, who, faced with great tyranny, have reechoed the suffocated cries of the shattered Iranian community.

Since the beginning of Ahmadinejad's administration, the systematic suppression of civil movements, heterodox intellectuals, and members of other religions has accelerated. Among these groups, the suppression of our Baha'i countrymen has been especially intense and malicious. The denial of the right to education for Baha'i students, the denial of basic civil rights, the repeated violation of their rights as citizens in the guise of "legal encounters," and the issuance of excessively harsh sentences and baseless allegations such as bombings or engaging in terrorist acts in an environment of opacity devoid of proper legal recourse have all painted a bleak picture for the future of our fellow Baha'i countrymen in Iran.

In addition to believing in freedom of religious expression and the freedom of worship by other religions, the supporters of Mr. Boroujerdi express their sympathy for the Baha'i community, and urge full implementation of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and full observance of those provisions in Iran.

Persecution of Baha'is and the Iranian Presidential Elections

By Wahid Wahdat-Hagh

This essay was posted on May 30, 2009, at <http://www.welt.de/debatte/kolumnen/Iran-aktuell/article6061721/Die-Verfolgung-der-Bahai-und-die-iranischen-Praesidentschaftswahlen.html> and a translation by Polly Janitzky appeared on June 4, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/3821>.

In the run-up to the so-called presidential elections in Iran, the persecution of Baha'is has become a political issue. Jamila Kadivar speaks of the rights that members of the religious community of Baha'i have as Iranians. In the meanwhile, during an election rally in Isfahan young Baha'is demanded their right to be admitted to college and university.

In Iran, only four Islamists from the group of the founders compete for the position of the Iranian President: current officeholder Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; Mohsen Rezai, ex-general of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and "moderate conservative"; Mehdi Karroubi, co-founder of the Association of Combatant Clerics Party; and Mir-Hossein Mousavi, ex-Prime Minister.

There can be no question of free elections. Rather, the so-called presidential elections point to the fact that the Islamist establishment of the totalitarian dictatorship of Iran does not always agree regarding tactics about how to achieve the goals of the Islamic revolution.

It is interesting that the persecution of Baha'is has become an issue prior to precisely these pseudo-elections in Iran.

Jamile Kadivar defends the rights of Baha'is as Iranians

The freedom of Baha'is has become an issue with reformist Islamist intellectuals. For example, Mrs. Jamila Kadivar, a professor of political science who is campaigning on behalf of the election of the cleric Mehdi Karroubi for President, has expressed: "Baha'is have rights as Iranian citizens which the government has to recognise and officially acknowledge." Ayatollah Montazeri has expressed himself in a similar vein. Yet he has furthermore argued that it is necessary to nevertheless fight the Baha'is politically, because as a Muslim he does not accept the Baha'i religion.

For Mrs. Diane Alai, spokesperson of the Baha'i International Community, the statements made by Mrs. Kadivar are to be assessed very positively, because through them it becomes apparent that the violation of human rights is in fact being discussed in Iranian society. It must be added that the human rights of Baha'is are nevertheless violated systematically by the totalitarian Islamist state.

Diane Alai emphasized that just as the Baha'is stand up for human and women's rights or the freedom of study for all Iranians, there is also solidarity within Iranian society with the Baha'is. Diane Alai accentuated that today many Iranians disapprove of the state oppression of Baha'is. Iranian Baha'is merely want to practice their religion, like all other Iranians, and to be of service in promoting the progress of their country as Iranians, Alai said in an interview with Radio Zamane.

Ayatollah Khomeini: Baha'is have no rights in Iran

Hossein Shariatmadari, editor of the newspaper Kayhan and an advisor to the Iranian "leader", however, portrays Jamila Kadivar as a traitor. Kayhan, a newspaper which is

regarded as the mouthpiece of the second Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, repudiates the Baha'i-religion. In Iranian legislation, the Baha'i religion also is not acknowledged as a religion. Shariatmadari is of the opinion that Baha'is are a "political party, the fifth column of Israel and a terrorist group".

Shariatmadari also quotes the first Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, who already demanded in the year 1962 that "Baha'is should have no right to conduct religious meetings". Today this has become state law.

Supporters of Ayatollah Boroujerdi defend Baha'is

Adherents of the arrested Ayatollah Kazemini Boroujerdi in a statement have criticized state oppression against members of the Baha'i religion.

The state of health of Ayatollah Boroujerdi, who is imprisoned, is at present particularly critical. This Shiite cleric calls for the separation of religion and state, which indeed would undermine the ideological basis of the prevalent Khomeinist state ideology of the "absolute reign of the clergy" (*wilayat-e faqih*).

State persecution of Baha'is is against the law

The dissident Iranian journalist Hossein Kashani believes that, when dealing with Baha'is, not even the prevailing criminal legislation is being considered. For example, it is stated in paragraph 570 of the Iranian criminal legislation that all "state authorities that – other than stipulated by law – violate the personal rights of individuals" must be punished.

In Iran, however, they are being rewarded.

To Kashani, even according to the prevailing Iranian law the treatment of Baha'is is illegal.

Kashani points out that Mahvash Sabet, one of the seven men and women who are imprisoned as members of a national ad hoc committee of the Baha'i community, had already been arrested on March 5, 2008. She had – as with many other Baha'is – been asked unofficially to report to the secret service, and had then been arrested. The reason for her arrest was that she had taken care of the funeral of a Baha'i in Mashad. Arbitrarily, Baha'is are prevented again and again from burying their dead. Recently, the compound of a Baha'i cemetery in the northern province of Mazandaran was even offered for sale by Iranian authorities. The cemetery had been destroyed beforehand, according to a Human Rights Activists Iran report.

Also for the other six leading Baha'is who have been imprisoned since 14th May, there are only absurd accusations – no concrete ones. They are accused of being spies, plotting conspiracies and campaigning against the State. Meanwhile they have been charged with "mofsed fel-arz", "being spreaders of corruption on earth". Islamic law stipulates the death penalty for this "crime". Kashani writes that magistrates often deliver their judgments out of pure "religious fanaticism".

The seven Baha'is have hardly seen daylight for one year. They live in small cells that have no window. During the week, they only have a possibility to receive a little daylight for a few minutes when they leave the room. According to Kashani, they must sleep for over one year on a hard concrete floor, so that their bodies already show painful wounds.

Kashani also mentions the fact that during regular arbitrary arrests Iranian state officials literally steal the private property of the Baha'is, ranging from cash to valuable objects to sacred books.

It has often happened that during arrests even children have been tortured.

Baha'i-students protest

As Iran Press Watch reported on 29th May, young Baha'is meanwhile protested in favor of the right of Baha'is to be admitted to college and university. During a speech of the presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi at Isfahan University on Saturday 22nd May, young Baha'is silently held up banners, on which the right of Baha'is to pursue academic studies was demanded.

Plainclothes members of the secret service immediately confiscated the posters. Candidate Mousavi, however, did not even react to this incident.

Open Letter from Urumiyeh University to a Presidential Candidate

Below is a letter from a group of Urumiyeh University students to the Iranian Presidential candidate, Mr. Mir-Hossein Mousavi. The original Persian was posted on May 27, 2009, on <http://javanblog.co.cc/post-104.aspx> and http://www.iranpresswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/urumiyeh_farsi.doc, and a translated appeared on <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/3877>.

Dated May 27, 2009

In the name of God

To Mr. Mir-Hossein Mousavi with respect:

We were very pleased that you graciously accepted our invitation and attended the gathering at our university. We all know that our beloved country is currently facing many problems and crises. You are a candidate who has committed himself to sustaining and protecting this land, and have wholeheartedly accepted all hardships and sufferings in this path. It is our hope that you will succeed in accomplishing this meritorious task.

Our dialog with you is not with respect to specialized political matters. Our discussion concerns issues that you brought up a few weeks ago when you announced your stand with respect to human rights and the civil rights of the citizens of our country. These announcements sparked the light of hope in the hearts of all Iranians. You brought out points such as: “forbidding any leader, government, parliament, or any power other than God to limit or violate human rights”; you mentioned rights that should not be contravened, including “the right to life, the right to freedom, the right to ownership of property, the right to security, the right to growth and happiness – God given rights and a right to oppose tyranny”. You added: “it is the responsibility of the government to support and guarantee these rights, through the establishment of necessary means in an organized and effective manner.” You have said “I will respect the privacy of citizens; I will support freedom of speech and freedom of assembly; I will revive the committee in charge of ensuring the implementation of these articles of the constitution; I will support the right to education; I will eradicate discrimination against citizens because of their political and religious convictions”.

Among the various cases of human rights violations, we would like to highlight an infringement that has escalated over the past few decades. We are certain that you are aware of this violation, since the record of your activities with respect to this aspect of human rights is available. We request that you continue reading to the end of our letter; perchance these comments will provide you with some suggestions in the path you are treading with respect to human rights.

In your speech on the subject of human rights, you commented: “I will recognize the nobility of human beings, the civil rights of religious minorities, the freedom to believe, and the freedom of conscience; I will disavow and prohibit interrogation and disrespect to individuals because of their belief systems”. As you are aware, our Baha’i countrymen have been under the most severe pressure and oppression for a long time. The question is: “Why are the slightest rights of members of the largest religious minority in our county being completely disregarded?”

In the few years succeeding the Revolution, the Baha’is were among the first groups of citizens to be subjected to the most brutal persecution (executions, confiscation of their property, expulsion from universities, imprisonment, etc.). Due to the particular sensitivity of the Islamic regime’s security organizations and religious establishment, very few were able

to point out this oppression. In addition, the government has continuously attempted to label defenders of the “rights of Baha’is” as “defenders of the Baha’i faith” in order that no one would take a stand to uphold their rights!

We should be aware that it is not a crime to defend other religions, and that it is among the rights of human beings to do so. For example, we continuously question the legitimacy of limitations imposed on Muslims in some Western countries or we question restrictions inflicted on Shi’ite Muslims in Saudi Arabia. However, when Iranian authorities are questioned about imposing restrictions on the rights of religious minorities, these critics even are denied the right to pose their questions. These victimized minorities have committed no transgression other than to believe in their own religious convictions.

It is heartwarming that, contrary to the first years after the revolution, the discussion has shifted from the Baha’is’ right to life to a discussion regarding Baha’i civil rights. Despite all the forms of oppression which have been applied against them, we witness that the Baha’is have never acted against the law, have never associated with any parties or political groups, and have always been advocates of benevolence toward the government and its citizens. The goodwill of the Baha’i community, in their widespread cooperation with the security establishment of the country, has repeatedly been proven. However, during the ninth government of the Islamic Republic, not only has their situation not improved, but with the establishment of the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the pressure on them has escalated. Only four days after Ahmadinejad’s inauguration as the President of the country, the government-backed newspaper, Kayhan, started publishing a series of articles comprised of historical rumors, conspiracy theories about espionage activities, and disinformation about the immoral conduct of Baha’is. Narrating the details of the escalating oppression during the ninth government is not the subject of this letter – for that you can refer to the reports published by human rights organizations.

We sincerely wish you success in the implementation of your human rights proposals. We also hope that you will not be dismayed by the attacks of government-backed newspapers. These same papers launched an attack against one of the supporters of Mehdi Karroubi [Speaker of the Iranian Parliament from 1989-92 and from 2000 to 2004, and a Presidential candidate in 2005 and now again in 2009 - translator] for considering Baha’is to be human beings entitled to civil rights. Be assured that a large number of Iranian citizens will support you in your endeavor to uphold the rights of the followers of this religion. As an example, in the suffocating atmosphere of the pre-election days over 500 intellectuals, political activists and writers signed a letter and announced their shame that they had been silent while witnessing all the atrocities inflicted upon Baha’is. As another example, a few months ago, when three Baha’i students were expelled from Sahand Tabriz Technical University, their classmates condemned this act of violation of the constitution. A few days ago, when you were in Isfahan, the Iran Human Rights Activist’s committee for the Right to Education carried signs to silently voice their demand for the return of expelled Baha’i students to their classrooms. However, these students were immediately attacked by undercover members of the secret service.

It is befitting to note that all those who are attempting to reinstate the rights of Baha’is are well aware of the slanders and accusations launched against this religious minority. We have all heard: “Baha’is are not a religious group, but a political group disguised as followers of a religion. They intend to bank on the sympathy of international organizations.” We all know that the authorities justify the ill-treatment of Baha’is by falsely accusing them of being puppets created by Britain and other colonizing countries, for the purpose of causing dissension and disunity among Muslims. We all have heard that, “Baha’is

are spies for Israel, Baha'is had close connections with the Pahlavi Regime and the Iranian Secret Police (SAVAK) during the era of the Pahlavi Dynasty..."

However, which of these accusations have been proven in legal venues?

You mentioned in your letter number 11-4462, dated February 1, 1989: "spies should be strongly confronted based on the established laws and regulations, but with regards to other citizens, with respect to the latter part of Article 23 of the Constitution, they should be treated as ordinary citizens, irrespective of their beliefs. However, attempts should be made to correct their belief system. No authorities of the Islamic Republic are permitted to deprive citizens of their civil or social rights unless they have been proven to be spies, or as stipulated by laws established by the official legal authorities of the country".

Publishing such a letter in the stultifying atmosphere of the 1980s is testimony to your courage in defending human rights. Possibly mentioning "attempts should be made to correct their belief system" was a way to calm objections by religious leaders of that time.

Even though principals 14, 19, 20, 22, 23 and items 8, 9, and 14 of Article 3 are relevant to the deprivation of rights of Baha'is, the Attorney General of the Islamic Republic of Iran [Ayatollah Ghorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi, in 2009], has declared: "... Baha'is have benefitted from all opportunities provided to citizens of the country, and have even been treated more favorably than others...". Toward the end of the presidency of Mohammad Khatami [1997-2005], a letter was sent to him on behalf of the Baha'i community of Iran, requesting the reinstatement of the rights of which its members had been deprived. This request was followed by a series of unwarranted arrests and imprisonments, ordered by the civil authorities of the country.

We are all well aware that in our country, whenever the cry of a wronged one is raised, he will be subjected to punishment! We also know that the wrongful persecutions of this religious minority have negatively affected our country's public image worldwide. If time were to permit, we would present you the 18-page report documenting the present lack of educational opportunities for Baha'is, the infringement of international covenants, the tyrannies inflicted upon Baha'is – nevertheless, the Baha'is have responded to the government with goodwill and purity of motive. This report also includes activities of High Consul of Cultural Revolution and the famous approved document number 1327/m/s dated February 25, 1991, much more.

Mr. Mousavi, your supporters are well aware of the rights of religious minorities (especially the rights of Baha'is). They know that because of the political structure of the government, the issue of the Baha'i Faith (and in general all religions except Shi'ite Islam) is judged as a security risk to the country. However, there is no justification for robbing Baha'i citizens of their legal rights by branding them as spies or as followers of a fabricated religion. This is not acceptable, and we condemn such views. We hope that you put into practice your pledge and covenant to the nation: "I will make the necessary modifications to the laws regulating legal rights so that the law will be respected and followed by governmental institutions..."

We wish you success. We would like to note that on May 23, 2009, a summary of this letter was forwarded to Dr. Tufiqi, the former Minister of Sciences during the government of Mr. Khatami.

In conclusion, if you are elected president in the upcoming election of the tenth government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the authority in charge of implementation of the constitution, we request that you take the necessary steps to reinstating the civil rights of Baha'is. We, as students of Urumiyeh University, wish to show in writing our support for your activities in this regard.

Wishing you divine confirmations,
Signed,
A Group of Students at Urumiyeh University

Genocide Against the Iranian Baha'is Is Possible

By Wahied Wahdat Hagh

Published on July 10, 2009, at

http://www.europeandemocracy.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13475&catid=4&Itemid=22 and reposted on July 11 at <http://www.iranpressmatch.org/post/4305>.

According to a study by the Sentinel Project, genocide can be predicted. Christopher Tuckwood concludes in this study that the Iranian regime is making certain preparations in order to perform an act of genocide on Iranian Baha'is when the political order is given. The following text is based on the central statements made in a study by the Sentinel Project, in which it is convincingly put that certain factors make an act of genocide against the Baha'is probable.

From the very beginning of its existence the members of the Baha'i faith were persecuted. Human rights were not respected prior to the Islamic Revolution, but since 1979 the human rights of Baha'is in Iran have been systematically violated.

An Act of Genocide Is Probable

Growing economic hardship in society increases the probability of an act of genocide on Iranian Baha'is. When under pressure, the majority in society constantly seeks scapegoats to carry the blame for all problems. The majority society makes the minority responsible for its own misfortune, treating it with notable aggression. At the same time the majority in the population seeks security in radical and charismatic leaders, particularly when these promise to improve living conditions for the majority. They are mostly unemployed young people who show readiness to attack minorities. The official unemployment figures for Iran were only 12.5% for the year 2008 but the real figure is much higher; added to this is the aspect of low wages.

The Iranian State Controls the Media

Tuckwood lists the strong state apparatus as a further factor that makes genocide probable. The Iranian state controls the media and has police, military, paramilitary and secret service forces at its disposal. Such a system is capable of committing genocide without having to fear punitive measures.

Furthermore, the Iranian regime is an ideologically motivated and revolutionary one, which pursues utopian visions that can prove very dangerous for minorities. Tuckwood rightfully points out that it is very difficult to determine whether the regime is in fact planning a genocidal extermination of the Baha'i community, but there are indeed sufficient documents available substantiating that the Baha'i community's survivability is to be prevented.

State documents published in 1993 substantiate that the Iranian government wishes to 'block' the 'progress and development' of the Baha'i community. The Baha'is should not be allowed to study at universities and their religious activities should be suppressed. It was under the presidential term of Hashemi Rafsanjani that a secret document demanded "the destruction of their cultural roots abroad".

Tougher Measures on the Part of the Dictatorship cannot be rules out

In late 2005 an order by the Iranian army to the Iranian police, the secret service and the Revolutionary Guards commanded the identification of all Iranian Baha'is.

Although it was not directly demanded that the Baha'is be physically eliminated, they were clearly to be forced to give up their faith and convert to Islam. Currently the Iranian government attempts to assert its objectives of suffocating the Baha'i communities with 'soft' approaches, but tougher methods on the part of the dictatorship cannot be ruled out.

Evidence for and Stages of a Process of Genocide

The author of this study acts on the assumption that the persecution of the Iranian Baha'is will bear strong similarities to history's well-known genocides.

Firstly, the members of the Baha'i faith in Iran are not classified as a religious minority and therefore have no rights and receive no state protection.

Secondly, the majority of Iranians have no personal experience with individual Baha'is and are influenced entirely by state propaganda. Facts like these play a significant role in the formation of stereotypes and in the dehumanisation of target groups, Tuckwood writes.

Thirdly, the state and media hate-propaganda aiming to dehumanise the Baha'is is having an impact. The Baha'is are seen as heretics because they believe in a prophet who appeared after Mohammed. Furthermore, Baha'is are accused of working for foreign powers such as the USA and Israel. Baha'is suffer verbal abuse, being called 'prostitutes'. They are said to be 'incestuous' and 'filthy'. Tuckwood rightfully points out that it is easier for perpetrators to murder Baha'is when they have previously been dehumanised. At the same time, their dehumanisation encourages neutral observers to either become involved in the murders or to remain quiet.

Individuals are Arrested Arbitrarily

Point four: the Iranian state disposes of forces that make genocide entirely possible: the conventional army, the Revolutionary Guards, the police and the Basij militia. Since the Basij militia and the Ansare Hezbollah are under the command of state bodies but are not affiliated with them, they are able to carry out extensive violent acts against Baha'is. Incidentally, this is already happening: houses and buildings belonging to Baha'is are set on fire, cemeteries are destroyed or individuals arbitrarily arrested.

Point five: the aim of the Iranian government is to separate the Baha'is from the rest of society. Any Iranian demanding that Baha'is and Moslems be treated equally is therefore accused of collaborating with foreign powers.

Point six: the Iranian government has long since adopted steps to diminish the position of Baha'is in society. This is in preparation for a possible extermination of the community. Preparatory measures include exclusion from state bodies, restriction of their economic participation and exclusion from academic education.

The Regime Is Potentially Capable of Annihilating the Baha'i Community

The author of the study assumes that the Iranian regime is determined to destroy the Baha'i community's cultural survivability. In addition, the regime has the potential to physically eliminate the Baha'i community. While the regime has not yet undertaken such a step towards physical elimination, some factors point towards the fact that persecution is to be intensified or even a genocidal massacre be carried out.

The security situation of the Baha'is can deteriorate under the following circumstances:

- If the economic situation in Iran worsens, this can lead to an increase in social conflicts with the result that young unemployed people become even more radicalised, allowing themselves to become recruited by the Basij militia and thus developing even greater hostility towards Baha'is;
- The more the radical conservative forces monopolize power, the more they will use the opportunity to suppress religious minorities, in particular the Baha'is;
- Whenever the conservative powers feel particularly challenged, their crimes can become ever greater;
- The rulers can proceed even more aggressively if they become aware that soft means of 'converting' Baha'is to Islam have failed with the consequence that the physical elimination of the Baha'i community could be planned.

Potential Factors that Make Genocide Possible

With growing external threats the regime could feel pressured into eliminating what they perceive to be their internal enemies. A dilemma of this nature could become more likely if Israel or the USA were to stage a military attack on Iran. Indeed, the Baha'is are considered to be the 'fifth column' of these countries. Consequently, an increase in the danger of war likewise increases the danger of genocide.

Domestic unrest and protest movements, whether from political rivals or ethnic minorities, can increase the danger of rulers intensifying their persecution of the Baha'is.

Which Factors Point towards a Future Escalation?

There are several factors that lead to genocide: the government attempts to block escape routes that the persecuted target group could use in order to travel abroad. The Baha'i community could become ghettoised, which would make mass arrest a simple affair. In the history of genocide, men and women were separated within communities. There is also the danger of Baha'i children being separated from their parents, since the aim of the regime to convert the Baha'i to Islam has failed. Separating children from their families could succeed in preventing growth in the community.

The Iranian regime could deploy its military and paramilitary instruments in order to achieve its goals: army, Revolutionary Guards, police, Basij militia, Ansare Hezbollah or the Hojjatieh group.

Finally, the study comes to the conclusion that no concrete systematic genocidal intentions on the part of the regime are at hand, but the intention to destroy the Baha'i faith is clear and further steps could be taken in this direction. The Iranian Baha'i community is poor, without leadership and without legal protection. As a consequence, the Iranian regime has already made numerous preparations to carry out an act of genocide on the Iranian Baha'i community, should the political order be issued.

Furthermore, this phenomenon waiting for an order to commit genocide against Iranian Baha'is is reminiscent of Iran's nuclear programme. Non other than Hans Rühle, from 1982 to 1988 leader of the planning committee in the German Federal Defense Ministry, made clear in an article that Iran wants to persist on the level of a 'virtual power' "so as to await a convenient global political opportunity in order to perform the last step".

At Present Further Executions Are Possible

A judgment in the show trial against seven prominent Baha'is in Iran is expected on 11 July 2009. They are wrongly accused of "spying for Israel and the USA". Evidence has not been

provided to date. The Iranian Baha'is are persecuted solely due to their beliefs and values because they believe that Mohammed was not the last prophet.

International Law Professors Demand Tribunal against the Iranian Regime

Payam Akhavan, a Canadian human rights professor who lectures at McGill University, fears that state repression could end in mass executions and in the torture of the leaders of the reform movement. Large-scale human rights violations committed by the state must be punished, just as President Slobodan Milosevic was punished. The United Nations must issue a statement that crimes against humanity will not go unpunished, says Professor for Human Rights Akhavan.

Human Rights Professor and Canada's former Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler is seeking prosecution for Ahmadinejad before an international criminal court. The Iranian rulers not only oppress Baha'is on a large scale; they also invoke hate and genocide against Jews. This makes them accomplices in crimes against humanity. The Iranian government must be held accountable.

Baha'is as Precedents for Execution of Political Dissidents

By Reza Fani-Yazdi

Fani-Yazdi is an Iranian-American human rights activist and freelance writer. He has published extensively on the plight of Iranians under the current regime in Iran. The following essay was published in Iran Emrooz, July 10, 2009, at <http://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/politic/more/18706/> and a translation appeared at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/4390>.

Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court will be holding the trial of the 7 informal [former] leaders of the Baha'i community of Iran [also known as the Yaran, or "Friends"]. This is the same branch that charged Roxana Saberi [an Iranian-American journalist] for espionage and sentenced her to 8 years of imprisonment. Subsequently the same court, obeying orders from above, convened for a mock appeals trial and exonerated her of the espionage charges! It is worrisome that the Revolutionary Court is setting the stage for a large scale assault on those arrested during the recent demonstrations following the presidential election of Iran. Though our Baha'i countrymen are not involved in politics, persecution of the Baha'i community is often used to set the stage for a widespread attack on political opponents of the regime.

Members of the Yaran, who were responsible for the Baha'i community's affairs in the absence of the dismantled National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran, are: Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, Vahid Tizfahm and Mahvash Sabet. Their court hearing was scheduled to start on July 11, 2009 [the trial date has since been put off for an unspecified time - translator]. The fact that their trial was set to proceed during the current civil unrest, and in the wake of the bloody hounding of demonstrators subsequent to the election of the tenth government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is a cause of great concern.

From its inception over 150 years ago, members of the Baha'i community have always been like chickens, slaughtered at both weddings and funerals. Baha'is have been at the forefront of large scale executions.

Savage hounding of Babis [the forerunners of Baha'is] and the persecution and condemnation of Baha'is during the constitutional revolution soon gave way to the harassment and execution of countless broadminded, philanthropic, social and religious reformers in society at large.

To create horror and terror and to suppress any form of opposition, Qajar dictators forced followers of the newly established Babi community to walk in the streets while burning candles were inserted into holes cut in their flesh. In the history of our country, this may have been the first time that torture to this level of intensity was publicly displayed; moreover, mobs of people were also encouraged to participate in such savage and inhumane treatment of the Babis.

The burned bodies of the Babis were then given to the incited mob to cut into pieces and to hang at the entrance gates of the cities or to throw into ditches as food for wild animals.

By publically displaying such horrific scenes, Qajar dictators were not only terrifying and encouraging the ignorant ungovernable mob to participate in these crimes, but were also setting the stage for hounding and persecution of the free-thinking constitutional revolutionists. In a country where hundreds and thousands of Babis were tortured and

executed in the most horrible, unimaginable, inhumane ways, the execution of a few free-thinking individuals, spiritual leaders, social and religious reformers, would not cause the least sensitivity or reaction. Certainly, banning the publication of magazines and newspapers in such an atmosphere would not cause any objections at all.

After the revolution of February 1979, the same historical tragedy was repeated. Again Baha'is were the first victims of the revolution, followed by the subsequent victimization of other citizens.

Iranian society, rattled and destabilized by the revolution, did not show the least reaction or attention to the persecution and tyranny inflicted upon Baha'is, the largest religious minority of the country. The Islamic government executed all of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran, and then again put to death those who were subsequently elected as Assembly members. The members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in many cities across the country were also arrested, and some were executed. All followers of the Baha'i faith without exception were dismissed from their employment at government offices and agencies. They were banned from entering universities, were subjected to repeated harassment and oppression by government officials and inflamed mobs.

While free-thinking individuals and political and social activists remained apathetic and unmoved by the gross human rights violations against the Baha'is, their indifference would soon haunt them as the persecution engulfed them as well. A government that had up to that time justified the execution of Baha'is by accusing them of spying was easily able to justify the murder of other citizens based on the same unfounded imaginary charges. Shortly after imprisoning, executing, harassing and marginalizing a large number of Baha'is, the wave of execution and torture spread to the thousands opposing the regime, all over the country, filling the prisons.

Graveyards for heretics, named Lanat-Abad, which at the beginning of the revolution were for dumping executed Baha'is, started accepting other condemned citizens of the country with open arms. For many years, Baha'is have been convicted and hanged as "spies for Israel" and dumped in anonymous plots in neglected corners of the cities. Today, thousands of young Iranian boys and girls, accused of spying for different countries in the West and the East, are being executed and buried in the same cemeteries.

When Ahmadinejad was elected President in the election of the 9th government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the mafia gang of Hojjatieh were on more solid ground, there began a new wave of executions and persecution of dissident political activists and free-thinkers. During his reign, persecutions again started with the harassment of a large number of Baha'is. The atrocities against them intensified, and finally the seven Baha'is, appointed to take care of the affairs of their community [with the full knowledge of the government of Iran -- see <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/glossary> under "Yaran"], were taken into custody, accused of spying, and have been languishing in prison for over a year. Once again, as history bears witness, the persecution will not be limited to the Baha'is. We now see that many who were yesterday in the inner circle of the ruling authorities, have today been arrested, accused of spying and of paving the way for a velvet revolution. These detainees have been tortured, and based on the assertions of the authorities of the Islamic government, they voluntarily confess on televised interviews to spying and plotting to overthrow the regime. It is interesting to see that among the captives are those who held highly sensitive positions in top government offices, such as a deputy to the President, governing authorities, elected members of the Islamic Council, and advisors to Presidents of previous governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Trial of the Baha'i Leaders

It is worrisome that the revolutionary court proceeding for the Baha'i leaders, which is expected to convict them of serious charges, may go on to convict those arrested in the recent demonstrations. This time, the charges levied against Baha'is are not only for spying, but also for terrorism.

Yesterday, Tabnak [<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=54684>], the official website of Sardar Mohsen Rezaei – Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran – in a statement that resembles hallucinations leaking from the defective brain of Hosain Shariatmadari – Special Investigator and the Supreme Leader's representative at the government-backed newspaper, Kayhan – for the first time portrayed the Yaran as “seven Baha'i terrorists”, convicted of terrorist activities including conspiracy and carrying out the bombing of Rahpouyan Hossaynieh in Shiraz [the Iranian government has never accused any Baha'i of complicity in this terrorist act] and spying for the occupying regime of Israel. It is interesting that in his shameless statement, the fabricated allegation of spying for Israel is again mentioned. Mohsen Rezaei claims that the arrested members “have never denied their association with the occupying regime of Israel; even the Baha'i world headquarters is located in Haifa”.

If Baha'is are guilty because their World Centre is in Haifa and are therefore spies, then all Muslims should be tried as spies for Saudi Arabia on the grounds that their focal headquarters of worship is in the heart of Saudi Arabia. It is the wish of every Muslim to go on pilgrimage to Mecca even if only once in a lifetime. No Muslim denies his yearning. Documenting such allegations on government-backed websites, including Mohsen Rezaei's Tabnak, is an indication of the severity and brutality of a catastrophe in the making.

With Respect,
Reza Fani Yazdi
July 9, 2009

There Can't be a Happy Ending to Our Story

By Soheila Vahdati

Dr. Vahdati is an Iranian-American human rights activist and freelance writer who has published extensively on the effects of the death penalty, women's rights and gender issues in Iranian journals. The following article was published on July 16, 2009, in the online Persian journal Iran-Emrooz, <http://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/bright/more/18792/> addressed to Mrs. Fakhri Mohtashamipour, wife of Seyyed Mostafa Tajzadeh, who served as the Political Vice Minister of the Ministry of the Interior of Iran in the government of President Mohammad Khatami. Tajzadeh was arrested in June 2009, amidst the Iranian election protests.

There can't be a happy ending to our story, if only the human rights of certain segments of society are considered!

I have read the letter that you have written to your husband,⁴⁰ a widely published correspondence that was written for the purpose of seeking public attention and support in the wake of your husband's arrest and the uncertainty surrounding his fate. I sympathize with you as a wife, whose husband has been arrested. I am writing to tell you that I absolutely feel your pain, and I hope there will be a happy ending for everyone.

Moreover, I am writing you as a human rights activist, who is concerned about the infringement of the rights of your husband. I want to draw your attention to the fact that there will be a happy ending to our story if, and only if, all of us, whether Muslim or not, participate in writing our story, as human beings who respect and defend each other's civil liberties and do not keep quiet when anyone's rights are violated.

You mentioned that when your husband was arrested, you yelled and screamed at the top of your voice in order to wake your neighbors in the middle of the night. When they took my husband, it was in broad daylight in front of the public, with their eyes wide open, but no one saw his arrest. In the exact same way, Baha'is have been apprehended in daylight and you have not seen their arrests – if you had, you would have screamed earlier.

Don't be mistaken, the issue is not about being Husayni or Yazidi [pro or anti-Islam], or being Muslim, Communist or Baha'i. If the catastrophe resulting from the human rights violation is ignored, it will be repeated again and again. Human rights have such immense importance that if slaughtered, countless numbers, all those with different convictions including Muslims, will be taken to slaughterhouses, one after the other. When human rights were assassinated in the Islamic Republic of Iran, I wish you and your husband had screamed; today you would not be the victims of human rights violations.

You talk about solidarity and mention that that you have luckily had longstanding friendships and associations with the majority of the families of the warriors in the path of God and freedom. What is your definition of the warriors in the path of God and freedom? Are you sure you know the majority of the families of the warriors?

You talk about meetings for prayers and Qur'an recitations to gain resoluteness and steadfastness. You mention gatherings in front of Evin prison for the purpose of making noise. Not only were we confronted with insults and profanities in front of Evin prison, but we were not permitted to recite prayers when mourning the loss of our executed loved ones.

⁴⁰ <http://news.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/news/18758/>

These days, there are those who not only have no rights as detainees' families, but they also have no place to bury their murdered loved ones in the vast spacious lands of our country. You talk about contacting your husband's lawyer. My husband did not have an attorney. At the time, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it was not customary for political convicts to have lawyers representing them. Even now, when hiring lawyers is allowed, my Baha'i friend says that it is very hard to find a lawyer to defend her imprisoned spouse. Baha'is are prevented from obtaining higher education – they can't become lawyers – and non-Baha'i attorneys hardly have the courage and audacity to stand up for a Baha'i in the Islamic courts.

You talk about spreading information about persecution and you write open letters. When my husband was in prison, spreading the news was of no consequence. Everybody knew there were many detained in prisons, some of whom were tried and executed without having access to any legal counsel. Human rights was led to the slaughterhouse, followed by those who were not entitled to any rights. Do you think it is possible to spread information and write open letters to the ruling authorities for the prisoners who have never been in the inner circle of the governing bodies? At one time, your husband had access to many podiums and microphones to spread information about the atrocities committed; did he ever voice any objection to stoning? Did he try to stop the stoning of Abdullah Farivar, who was a victim of this atrocity just a few months ago?

You mention, "visits and meetings with the Path of the Imam Khomeini Faction has been a good choice – members of the offices of Nation's Home, Nation's Representatives, and Nation's Concerns have expressed their sympathy. The gentlemen said they had established a follow-up committee and will pursue it until final results are achieved". How many spouses of those who are languishing in jails because of their belief system – Baha'is – do you think can go to the Path of the Imam Khomeini Faction in the parliament and ask for Nation's Home, Nation's Representatives and Nation's Concerns? Has the Path of Imam Khomeini Faction in the Parliament heard or will it hear the squeal and desperate cry of those whose loved ones, wrongfully accused of drug dealing, are to be hanged or are about to face execution?

You go to Mr. Hashemi Shahroudi - head of the judicial system of Iran - you meet with Mr. Jamshidi - official spokesman for Iran's judiciary - you talk about Hashemi Rafsanjani and say, "visiting him as the Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Chairman of the Assembly of Experts is encouraging and brings hope". Have you ever wondered which top officials of the country could bring a glimmer of hope for the women whose spouses or children have been charged with small offences for which they are being executed?

You talk about your visits with religious leaders and influential authorities. Which of the clergymen or authorities that you have met are willing to meet with the Baha'i families or to receive open letters from the children whose mothers have been wrongfully convicted of adultery and are waiting on death row?

Dozens of Baha'i prisoners have been detained for months; some have spent months in solitary confinement. Which of their spouses can have their voices heard like yours, or can have their open letters published by the media? Are you, now victimized by human rights violations, willing to defend the rights of Baha'is?

You sarcastically say that you are Yazidi [anti-Islam]. Isn't it true that whoever is detained and who has had his rights violated is labeled as a Yazidi? When human rights can be contravened by labeling, then excuses for labeling will be easily found, and human rights can be infringed on a large scale.

When the government attempts to violate a minority's civil rights, the first step is to create apathy towards that minority. The government labels them in a way that promotes negative attitudes. When fabricated allegations are repeated enough times by the government-backed media, lies become so firmly entrenched in public minds that sympathy towards that minority gradually fades away and those whose rights are to be violated will be considered strangers, aliens and bad citizens. When a society becomes indifferent towards a minority, atrocities can easily be inflicted in whatever manner the authorities desire, without anyone voicing an objection. Labels such as taghooti [one closely associated with the pre-revolution, Pahlavi regime], mofsed fel arz [one who causes corruption on earth], mohareb [fighter - a term used in Iran's Sharia law to describe a major crime committed against Islam and the state], monafegh [one who pretends adherence to Islam, but in reality is against Islam], mortad [apostate], fergheh zaleh [misguided sect - used to label Baha'is], are among the above mentioned fabricated labels.

From its inception, the Islamic government, with especial shrewdness, has attached labels to group after group of dissidents; has separated them from society and then victimized and sacrificed them. These days, the common labels are activities against national security and conspiracy to foment a velvet revolution.

If, at the moment that label was attached to the first individual who was to be sacrificed, all of us, without minding the allegations, had defended his human rights, today we would not be victimized group by group. In reality, the main casualty of the revolution has been human rights. If all of us had stood side by side, making sure the rights of no individual or minority were violated, then today human rights would be guaranteed for us all. How long have Baha'is in this country been called misguided? Did anyone defend their rights to believe in their own system of belief?

How long has it been that being called a heretic or apostate is equal to being guilty? Who defended our right to think independently?

There will be a happy ending to our story, provided no one claims to be Husayni [pro-Islam], calling others Yazidi [anti-Islam]. Can't we look at one another and respect each other as human beings, irrespective of our convictions? Can we let words such as apostate, irreligious, Baha'i or Israeli not be considered to be profane? Isn't the right to life so valuable that it should not be violated by any mere label, even drug dealer, murderer or mohareb? If the right to life, which is the most basic right of human beings, can be taken away by applying a label, how can we expect to safeguard other human rights?

Mrs. Mohtashamipour – at the end of your letter, while making a recommendation to your husband, you tell him that some are imitating Israeli murderers, though in their birth certificate, Muslim is written as their belief system. Really, according to your standard, is every Israeli a murderer and every Muslim a symbol of humanity?

Maybe your writing will incite the prejudice of the governing Muslims in your favor, but for sure it will not bring a happy ending to our story.

I wish you, who want your voice heard, would hear the lamentation of the other victims of human rights violations. Know that you are not alone. We are all with you. Many of us have been the victims of human rights violations, and it is through these sufferings that we have learned that what brings us together is not our beliefs, but our common humanity, our sufferings and our hopes. I sincerely sympathize with you; not only I, but all of us are with you. Don't separate yourself from others. These all-encompassing sufferings will not be cured separately. Come – join us in our defense of human rights, and accept that humanity is not defined by being a Muslim.

Signed,
Dr. Soheila Vahdati

Rehumanizing the Dehumanized

By Koroush Agah-Kesheh

Kayhan London, an influential Persian-language newspaper outside Iran, published the following article on July 24, 2009, at http://www.kayhanpublishing.uk.com/Pages/archive/announces/bahai_1265.pdf and a translation was prepared by External Affairs Office of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom and posted on the same date at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/4505>.

The detention for more than a year in Evin prison of the Iranian Bahá'í community's seven-member ad hoc leadership committee has been widely reported. Their continuing imprisonment, without charge or access to any legal counsel, has resulted in expressions of concern and protest from all quarters – including governments, human rights activists, non-governmental organizations, influential personalities and ordinary citizens, among them countless Iranians.

An early morning sweep to arrest the entire leadership of Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority is dramatic enough to make headlines. But the imprisonment of the seven was just the latest development in a 30-year campaign by the Iranian authorities to eradicate its Bahá'í community. A secret 1991 memorandum, ratified by Iran's Supreme Leader and released by the United Nations in 1993, outlined a comprehensive plan to block the development and progress of the Bahá'ís, denying them every opportunity to have an influence on Iranian society. Furthermore, the memorandum ominously requested that a “plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country.”

Creating a culture of hate

One aspect of the ongoing campaign of persecution against Iran's 300,000 Bahá'ís, however, is less well reported. Since September 2005, the state-run Kayhan newspaper has published scores of articles degrading the community and its beliefs. Their intention: to arouse feelings of suspicion, distrust and hatred for the Bahá'ís among its readers. Kayhan's articles – along with other publications being widely circulated in Iran – deliberately distort and denigrate Bahá'í doctrine and practices, falsify the lives of its revered founders and leaders, revive allegations against the Bahá'ís from historical documents long proven to be fakes, and manufacture memoirs of “former Bahá'ís” who have now “seen the light” and returned to the fold of Islam. All such articles represent Bahá'í beliefs in a manner designed to cause maximum offence to Muslims.

Such blatant hate speech is not limited to the press. In a recently reported case, a secondary school student who had corrected misinformation about her Bahá'í faith in a history class, and whose comments the teacher was unable to counter, was subjected to a presentation by a clergyman who attributed to the Bahá'ís such shameful immoral acts that the student could not even reveal to her mother what he had said. He concluded his remarks by stating that a “naked American lady” led the Bahá'ís.

The world media did not hesitate to cover the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper and the subsequent outbreaks of violence around the world. Yet nothing has been written about the 4000 copies of a children's picture book entitled *The Deceitful Babak*, posted as a “gift” to Iranian schoolchildren. The book is a slanderous, historically distorted and deeply insulting account of the life of one of the Bahá'í faith's prophetic figures, known as the Báb, depicting him as a half-witted village boy whose

long exposure praying in the midday sun results in his making fanciful claims of prophethood, leading to his demise.

History demonstrates the dangers of such propaganda, directed at adults and children alike. During previous government campaigns of persecution against Bahá'ís, such as in 1955 and 1979, violence has been perpetuated initially by words, sermons and false pronouncements. “Words should be seen as a force with the potential of unleashing powerful energy, positive or negative,” political scientist Professor Eliz Sanasarian has written. “Name-calling and stereotypes, through repetition, become accepted as truth with ‘fully elaborated systems of concepts, beliefs and myths.’”

In such a culture, the hatred of an entire population can be stirred up by the relentless, systematic repetition of falsehoods, which become common credence as a result. When aroused citizens take violent action against their neighbors – whom they have been repeatedly told are traitors, corrupt or unclean – the offending authorities absolve themselves of responsibility by blaming the actions of the populace.

The dehumanizing effects of speech

The Bahá'ís' Prophet-Founder Bahá'u'lláh himself was keenly aware of the effects of speech. “For the tongue is a smoldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison,” he wrote. “Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century.” Certainly the calumnies against the Bahá'ís persistently pumped out to the Iranian people for more than 150 years have coloured the opinions of even the most liberal-minded of its citizens who have only recently begun to speak out in defence of their Bahá'í compatriots.

Dehumanizing a section of society is a deeply troubling development in any circumstances. In his theory that genocide is a process that develops through a number of stages, Gregory Stanton, President of Genocide Watch, argues that the first stage sees people categorized into distinctive groups based upon race, religion, nationality or ethnicity. They are then marked out from the rest of society, their otherness emphasized by forcing them to be branded, almost like cattle. Such an example was the yellow star that German Jews were made to wear under Nazi rule. The third stage is dehumanization. The victim's humanity is denied, physical features are caricatured and cultural behavior is mocked through graphic depictions, inflammatory speeches and the mass media. The economic and social problems of the country – and the world – are his fault.

The pattern has been repeated throughout history time and again. The “other” is vilified as an animal, a vermin, a pest, a disease or as practicing witchcraft. In Rwanda, the Tutsis were portrayed as cockroaches and snakes, and accused of eating vital organs. The Jews in Germany were, among other things, “poisonous mushrooms”, pigs and spiders. “Humans who follow anything but Islam,” Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of the powerful Guardian Council, has said, “are the same as those animals who wander about and commit corruption.” Bahá'ís in Iran have variously been labeled as “perverted instruments of Satan and the followers of the Devil and the superpowers and their agents.” They have been accused countless times of espionage. But when in human history has there ever been an entire community of spies in one country, numbering hundreds of thousands of people ranging in age from infants to the elderly?

Bahá'ís are labeled enemies of Islam who are “warring against God” and “spreading corruption on earth”. Yet the Bahá'í scriptures refer to Islam as “the blessed and luminous

religion of God” and the Prophet Muhammad as “the refulgent lamp of supreme Prophethood,” “the Lord of creation” and “the Day-star of the world.”

The international headquarters of the Bahá’í Faith is today located within the borders of modern-day Israel. But how can Bahá’ís be described as “Zionists” when Bahá’u’lláh was banished by the Persian and Ottoman governments to the fortress-city of Akka in 1868, several decades before the Zionist movement began, and eighty years prior to the establishment of the state of Israel.

In an orchestrated program of persecution, the Iranian authorities have persistently attempted to disguise the fact that their actions have been purely motivated by religious prejudice and hatred. They have justified their campaigns against the Bahá’í community by asserting that theirs is not a religion but a political organization. When they are not being branded as spies or agents for various imperialist or colonialist agendas, the Bahá’ís face persistent allegations of immorality, immodesty and indecency. Nothing could be further than the truth.

A dignified response

Iran’s Bahá’í community, however, is not dispirited, demoralized or downtrodden. Nor have they risen up to counter-attack their oppressors with force or any trace of bitterness. Rather they have calmly stated their case and called for their fundamental human rights with dignity and courtesy, winning the admiration of their compatriots, observers and, in some cases, even those who are obligated to oppress them under government policy. When Iran’s Prosecutor General recently made a statement that any kind of Bahá’í organization was illegal, the imprisoned seven leaders announced that they would immediately disband their committee and all others around the country as a gesture of goodwill towards their government. More than this, however they have increased their activities to serve Iranian society and contribute to the discourse on social change.

At the root of this unusual response to persecution has been a series of extraordinary letters of encouragement penned by the international Bahá’í leadership, the elected governing council known as the Universal House of Justice which, within its constitution, has a duty to defend and protect the worldwide Bahá’í community and emancipate it from the fetters of repression and persecution.

“In these difficult days laden with tribulation, we are with you in spirit, our hearts heavy at the injustice that continues to rain upon you,” the Universal House of Justice wrote on 9 September 2007 to Iran’s Bahá’í students, barred from entering higher education. “Recent events call to mind heart-rending episodes in the history of the Faith, of cruel deceptions wrought against your forebears. It is only appropriate that you strive to transcend the opposition against you with that same constructive resilience that characterized their response to the duplicity of their detractors. Peering beyond the distress of the difficulties assailing them, those heroic souls attempted to translate the Teachings of the new Faith into actions of spiritual and social development. This, too, is your work.”

Iran accuses Bahá’ís who render service to their young compatriots by offering classes teaching language skills and moral education as promoting anti-regime “propaganda”. “You, too, seek to render service to your homeland and to contribute to a renewal of civilization,” the Universal House of Justice told the students. “(Your forebears) responded to the inhumanity of their enemies with patience, calm, resignation, and contentment, choosing to meet deception with truthfulness and cruelty with good will towards all. You, too, demonstrate such noble qualities and, holding fast to these same principles, you belie the slander purveyed against your Faith, evoking the admiration of the fair-minded.”

The Universal House of Justice has directed the young Bahá'ís of Iran to strive for the regeneration of their country, with “an illumined conscience, with a world-embracing vision, with no partisan political agenda, and with due regard for law and order”. “Service to others is the way. Let it be your watchword. Strive to work hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder, with your fellow citizens in your efforts to promote the common good,” they wrote.

Following the arrest of the seven leaders in 2008, the Universal House of Justice addressed another stirring letter to the Bahá'ís of Iran describing those detained as a group of the country's “most faithful, obedient, capable and innocent citizens”. Their response to the arrests and an uncertain future should be to “attach no importance to the acts of oppression and cruelty meted out to you. Indeed, respond in the opposite manner. Focus your thoughts on being a source of good to everyone who crosses your path. Make every effort to serve your fellow citizens—heirs to a rich and humane culture—who themselves suffer from many an injustice. Eschew divisiveness and conflict, consort with all people with kindness and sincerity, and engage your compatriots in discussions on matters that are of serious concern to them. May you convey to their hearts the hope, faith and confidence, already carried in yours, that the future of Iran is bright and the destiny of humankind glorious.”

Despite the dangerous repercussions a more overt response might provoke, the Universal House of Justice has nevertheless urged the Bahá'ís of Iran to step more boldly into the arena of social action and improve the lot of the underprivileged in their society, including realizing the principle of equality between men and women: “Many of your compatriots are eager to see the realization of the universal principle of the equality of men and women. They will no doubt welcome you to join them in learning how to promote, step by step, conditions that enable the women of Iran to overcome impediments blocking their progress and participate fully, as equals of men, in all areas of human endeavour,” they wrote in another communication.

“Undeterred by the voices which insist that you believe but in silence, as if belief and the expression of it can be separated, you are engaged, wisely and unobtrusively, in exchanging views with your friends on themes central to the progress of Iran and its glorification,” wrote the Universal House of Justice again in July 2008. “At a time when Iranian society is being torn apart by long-standing prejudices of religion, ethnicity, gender and class, the experience of your community for more than a century and a half can serve as an abundant source of insight to the people of that land. On the one hand, you have been able not only to withstand but also to reciprocate with loving kindness the most virulent form of religious prejudice, which has been perpetuated by the enemies of the Faith ever since its inception to distort public opinion. On the other, you have ceaselessly exerted effort to eliminate, both within your community and in your relations with others, prejudice of every kind.”

“Persevere, therefore, with diligence and steadfastness along this path of endeavor. As you do so, strive to perceive the nobility in every human being—rich or poor, man or woman, old or young, city dweller or villager, worker or employer, irrespective of ethnicity or religion. Help the poor and deprived. Attend to the needs of young people and foster in them confidence in the future so that they may prepare themselves adequately for service to humankind.”

They must eschew conflict and dissension, the Universal House of Justice informed the Iranian Bahá'ís in October 2008. They should avoid contest for worldly power. They do not aspire to overthrow governments, nor do they participate in the scheming of others to

do so. To combat attempts to ferment conflict among the Bahá'ís by those who wished to undermine its unity, the Universal House of Justice urged the Iranian Bahá'ís to strengthen the ties uniting them. “Be at all times a source of encouragement and support to one another, and together seek after new avenues of service. In association with friends, neighbors and acquaintances, may you dispel the darkness of iniquity and tyranny with the light of love and fidelity.”

“Persevere with sincerity and earnestness to secure your rights through recourse to the law, and deal with those who oppress you with loving kindness, with patience and forbearance, and counter their insults with words of peace and affection. Continue to strive in the arena of service to your homeland, and through your participation in constructive discourse with your neighbors, co-workers, friends and acquaintances, play a decisive role in society’s progress,” the Bahá'ís of Iran were told in February 2009. A month later, the Universal House of Justice noted that the resolve and steadfastness they had demonstrated “in carrying forward your day-to-day affairs, in discharging your spiritual duties and in serving your country, together with the dignity you have manifested and the constructive resilience of spirit you have evinced in the face of countless hardships—these have won you widespread admiration.”

Sympathetic support

To respond in such a manner to the continuing onslaught of slanderous propaganda is remarkable. Equally unexpected has been the discovery that the majority of Iran’s citizens have not been found to view the Bahá'í community in the manner that the authorities portray them. As a result of the encouragement from their international leadership, and their exemplary response to virulent persecution, the Bahá'ís of Iran have discovered that a growing portion of the populace has been praising their courage, audacity, patience and steadfastness. They have been discovering that Bahá'í ideals resonate with those among their fellow citizens who also wish to see their country progress. Some of them are also suffering similar oppression – as students and academics, as journalists and social activists, as artists and poets, as progressive thinkers and proponents of women’s rights, and even as ordinary citizens.

In the midst of oppression aimed at their very eradication, the Bahá'ís are thinking about the contribution they can make to change society. Fundamental Bahá'í ideas – truthfulness, trustworthiness, the elimination of prejudice, the equality of the sexes – are being explored in conversations that are integral to the wider discourses of society from which the Bahá'ís are debarred. This is a community committed to social progress despite the fact that every measure is being taken to silence its voice. They are sharing insights they have gleaned from the Bahá'í teachings with their fellow countrymen, all the while recognizing that their own community-building efforts are still very much a ‘work in progress’ in need of the energetic application of minds and talents and constant refinement. Far from being cowed by the forces of oppression leagued against them, the Bahá'ís have determined to stand proudly by their principles and, while obedient to the laws of their land, continue to live according to the teachings for which so many thousands of their forebears were willing to give their lives. They are refusing to let the dehumanizing impact of public propaganda against them result in their becoming the very embodiment of such allegations. In showing what they stand for, the Bahá'ís of Iran are demonstrating the falsity of the language of those who wish to see their progress blocked and influence diminished, if not eliminated completely.

In the Name of Truth and Justice

By Hojjatoleslam Hasan Yousefi-Eshkevari

Eshkevari (b.1950) is an Iranian cleric, researcher, journalist and reformist. He has been described as “an active supporter of the revolution” who became “an outspoken and influential critic of the current Iranian version of theocracy”. He spent seven years in prison after having been convicted in the Special Court for the Clergy for a number of charges including “insulting Islamic sanctities”. As a result of his conviction, he was de-frocked. Prior to his arrest, Eshkevari was the Director of the ‘Ali Shari‘ati Research Centre and contributing editor of the newspaper Iran-e Farda, which was banned in April 2000. Mr. Eshkevari has written several articles in support of human and civil rights of the Iranian Baha’i community. The present article was posted on July 9, 2009, at <http://www.kbandaniba.eu/items.php?id=682>, <http://asbena.com/news/181/ARTICLE/1888/2009-03-11.html> and, <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/fa/post/267>. A translation appeared on August 14, 2009, at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/4717>.

Recently, a statement titled “We are Ashamed” was published, addressing the Baha’i community of Iran. About 270 writers, researchers, journalists, actors and actresses, and intellectuals residing outside Iran put their signatures on this statement. Anyone, even those least familiar with the contemporary history of Iran (from the time of the Qajar dynasty to present time), knows that this undertaking has immense importance and implications. It is a turning point for numerous reasons, especially with respect to the yearning for freedom, equality, or to sum it up, “human rights”.

The bitter reality is, from its inception as a religious phenomena, in 19th century Iran, followers of the Babi [forerunner of the Baha’is] and Baha’i religions have been continuously subjected to condemnation and persecution by the Muslim society of Iran. There have been bloody confrontations by Muslims and by governmental authorities in different parts of Iran. This coercion continues in different shapes and forms to date.

Historically speaking, there is not much room for discussion and argument as to why there has been suppression and why Baha’is have been subjected to atrocities. Since the beginning of human history, there have always been confrontations between the followers of new and old religions. It could be said that even now there exist confrontations between new and old religious groups. This trend is only a historical reality, it has nothing to do with which group is right or wrong, whether the truth lies with the followers of the new religion or with the ones attached to old belief systems and rituals. The same differences have existed between the messengers of God and the followers of different religions of their time. Also, in the internal history of all the old religions (Zoroastrians, Judaism, Christianity and Islam), there have been harsh confrontations between sects within the same religion and, to a lesser degree, between devout followers who have different viewpoints. For example, consider the relentless and bloody attacks on Protestants by Catholics, and the cruelties inflicted on Catholics by Protestants from the 16th to the 18th century, and massacres by both sides all over Europe. It is said that in the St. Barthelme Paris battle, about 30,000 Protestants were slaughtered.

The issue is that the followers of the prevailing religion label heterodox thinkers who exit their religion as heretics and apostates and ultimately consider them as enemies of God, enemies of their prophet, and enemies of their legitimate devout governing bodies. They are under the impression that, as a religious obligation and to attain God and His messenger’s

salvation, it is their responsibility to protect their faith. This is the logic behind the harsh confrontation of religious rulers of different eras with the apostates of their time. It should be noted that at the beginning the issue is only religious, but later on, especially when the dissenting group completely branches out and separates from the existing religion, numerous political, economical and even personal and group egotistic factors play a crucial and decisive role in prolonging the violence.

If we look at the Baha'is of Iran from a historical perspective, their mistreatment is clearly the repetition of what has happened a thousand times throughout the history of Iran, the world, and Islam. Shortly after its growth and expansion, combined with political, social, and cultural factors, the struggles and complexities between the ruling religious groups and the Baha'is increased.

From the start of the Babi movement, over 150 years ago, we have experienced a lot of social, cultural and political changes; moreover we have initiated and put behind us two big social and political revolutions. It is surprising that in this long period, with respect to human rights and civil rights, the "Baha'i issue" has not only remained unresolved, but has become even more complicated and even more grievous in recent years. The important matter is that in the long periods of human and civil rights discussions, the rights of the followers of the Baha'i faith have been completely overlooked. There has been a silence and ambiguity as if a religion by the name of Baha'i faith did not exist in Iran and a considerable number of followers of this religion did not live alongside other citizens in our homeland.

The silence on the part of Muslims is somewhat understandable, but this intentional and unintentional silence is also noticeable among non-religious groups, such as secular humanists, democrats, freedom fighters, and irreligious leftists. In all the talks and writings of the freedom fighters and justice seekers from the pre-constitutional revolution to date, there has been almost no mention of Iranian Baha'is and their civil rights. In the Constitution not only is there no mention of them, but their role in political and social change is undermined. At that time, even being a Babi (forerunners of Baha'is) was equivalent to being guilty of being an "enemy of the people". In the Islamic revolution of 1979, and in the Islamic Constitution, the silence is even heavier.

The main reason, or one of the main reasons for this silence is that the "Baha'i issue" has been taboo; no one has dared to approach the Baha'i faith and openly discuss it. It is surprising that in the Islamic regime, non-religious and anti-religious persons have been victims of the same taboos and oppressive atmosphere.

Because of the ongoing, wide-scale boycott and censorship, few researchers have taken the liberty to study Baha'i ideologies and to familiarize the public with Baha'i beliefs, ideas, spiritual and social laws, an accurate history of their faith and of its followers. Hardly any researchers have been free from religious and political quarrels and pre-judgments, in order that they could mention who the Baha'is are, what they offer and what role they play in shaping the contemporary history of Iran. For this reason, even today, neither the general public nor researchers have accurate information about Baha'is and their convictions. Accurate and trustworthy documentation about the Baha'is is rare or nonexistent in Iran.

On the contrary – the immense volumes of anti-Baha'i writings that are available are often worthless, void of substance, non-scientific and laden with blind religious discrimination and prejudice. The same boycott and censorship imposed upon Baha'i ideas has in general harmed the free flow of information and research findings. In any case, the emergence of the Baha'i faith in Iran at the time of the Qajar Dynasty is a part of our history. Neutral, scientific research and an overall understanding of the Baha'i faith is integral to a thorough understanding of the general, religious, and social history of our land.

Now is the time to forgo this boycott and censorship. It is mainly the responsibility of broadminded people and researchers to investigate Baha'i ideologies and to end this void and poverty of accurate information. It is the ethical and the humanitarian duty of open-minded free thinkers, democrats, freedom fighters and human rights activists, to defend and endeavor to restore the lost rights of the Baha'is. Similarly, it is their responsibility to uphold the rights of all other Iranian residents, irrespective of their religion, convictions, political and social views. The foundation of democracy and liberty is based on the equality of human beings, meaning that the innate and natural human rights of any Iranian living in any geographical part of the country is equal to the right of any other Iranian. Based on this logic no one is considered more Iranian than any other. On the surface, we have accepted this reasoning since the time of the Constitutional Revolution, but in reality, we are living in an era before the Constitutional Revolution.

It seems that in our culture, our main quandary is due to religious beliefs. There is a lot of room for argument and discussion in this area which I can't get into at this time. I only make a suggestion to the theologians and the learned, to ponder and issue laws based on the duty to act rationally and to follow the guidelines within the framework of the general Islamic laws and wholesome religious principals. I request a response to my question: "Assume the first generation of the Baha'is were considered heretics: why, and based on what rationale, should the next generations until the day of resurrection be called heretics?" Is the religious ruling for the Baha'is any different from the ruling for Muslims converting to Christianity or Judaism? I believe it does not make any difference whether one is converting to a religion recognized by Islamic rulers (Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians) or not. When someone strays from Islam, he is exiting Islam, whether the conversion is to any religion or to no religion.

Today we are living in a world whose foundation of social interaction is based upon the equality of human beings. No citizen may be deprived of his civil rights because of his beliefs, convictions, race, religion or any other differentiating factor. At one time Sheikh Fazlu'llah Nuri⁴¹ said, "in Islam the foundation is based on discrimination and not on equality". Are our theologians upholding the same belief after the passage of a century? If that is the case, what is the meaning of the claim "Islam values human beings", and is a "just religion"?

In response to the repeated questions and enquiries of his followers as to the treatment of the Baha'is, Shaykh Morteza Ansari⁴² once said that since he had no knowledge about the Baha'is, he was in no position to express any opinion.

I suggest that the respected theologians and researchers give higher priority to the scientific investigation of different religious and non-religious beliefs, especially the Baha'i faith, while following the guidelines of Islamic principles, in order to come up with responses that are fair, logical, defensible and implementable. This is what some theologians, such as Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri,⁴³ have courageously started. He has

⁴¹ Sheikh Fazlollah Noori was a prominent Shiite Muslim cleric in Iran during the late 19th and early 20th century who fought against the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and was executed for treason as a result. Today he is considered a martyr in the fight against democracy by Islamic conservatives in Iran.

⁴² Sheikh Morteza Ansari (~1781-1864), was a Shia jurist who was generally acknowledged as the most eminent jurist of the time. Ansari has also been called the "first effective" model or marja' taqlid [source of emulation] of the Shia or "the first scholar universally recognized as the supreme authority in matters of Shii law. See, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morteza_Ansari.

⁴³ Hossein-Ali Montazeri (1922-2010), was an Iranian scholar, theologian, writer and human rights activist. He was one of the leaders of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. He is best known as the one-time designated

openly and in writing defended the human rights and the civil rights of the Baha'is. He has forbidden the imposition of offences and transgressions on their belongings, lives and other rights. This is an important step forward within the framework of Shiite religious rulings.

Silence and indifference will not resolve problems; rather it will increase problems and will open the way for further transgressions of the civil rights of our Baha'i countrymen.

I would like to have a few words with the ruling authorities of the Islamic Republic. Thirty years have elapsed since the onset of the Islamic revolution. Still, the rulers are the dissidents and the fighters who opposed the dictatorship of the Pahlavi regime. Still, the promises made by the leader of the revolution – Khomeini- and the other revolutionists, are not forgotten. Please clarify for the public: was the establishment of Islamic Justice for the Nation of Iran with respect to human rights and access to opportunities based on discrimination, and intended only for specific segments of society?

I specifically and clearly ask: are Shiite Muslims who follow the path of the Imam, who believe in the Theological Protector (Vali-e Faqih) as the absolute, univocal ruler, and who are melted in Islamic theology the only ones entitled to all the amenities and the opportunities that the country has to offer? Are all the options and prospects only available to the saved Muslims? If the answer is “yes”, why weren't the people informed at the start of the revolution – when all were fighting for freedom from dictatorship? Please clarify: is equality, by its true meaning or even its relative meaning granted to all, in your Islamic regime? Can you give a positive response to my question? Even if you say, “yes”, it won't be believable. There are thousands of clear and undeniable instances that are contrary to such a claim, which would prove your claim false.

It is clear that the Iranian revolution was for the purpose of the implementation of the Constitution, providing freedom and justice for all. These two aspirations will come to fruition only if the principals of equality and equal rights which are the innate and natural rights of individuals are accessible to all and cover all aspects of the nation's personal and social lives, without the slightest discrimination. This is a clear stand without any ambiguity and cannot be transgressed or justified otherwise.

Now, I ask: aren't Iranian Baha'is part of the Iranian nation? Where is there any mention of their rights in the Islamic Constitution? Certainly, in response to my question you will talk about the constitutional rights of the followers of major recognized religions who have Holy Books.

I should say, first, documenting laws in the articles of the Constitution applicable to the recognized religions is wrong. These rules are openly in contradiction with the principal of complete equality and individual civil rights. The exceptions exclude a sizable number of Iranian citizens from their natural rights.

Second, the more fundamental problem is that, with respect to citizens without so-called Holy Books (Ismailia's, Zaidiehs, Baha'is, irreligious, etc.), there are no defined civil rights entitlements in the Islamic Constitution.

Third, in some of the articles of the Constitution equality is confirmed, freedom to believe in any conviction is substantiated and inquisition into individual beliefs is forbidden. This means those other than Shiite Muslims should have religious freedom and their rights must not be contravened merely because of their convictions. It is nonsense to say individuals are free to choose their belief system, but have no right to public education,

successor to the revolution's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, but fell out with Khomeini in 1989 over government policies that Montazeri claimed infringed on freedom and denied people's rights.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosein-Ali_Montazeri.

employment or to teach their religious beliefs. If there are contradictions in the articles of the Constitution, that is your predicament. Iranian citizens should not pay for your problems.

Fourth, let us forget about everything else. Baha'is and others are living in an Islamic society and under the rules of Islamic governing bodies – shouldn't the law of Mostaman [under protection] be guaranteed for them? Shouldn't they feel safe in an Islamic regime? Shouldn't their belongings, lives and dignity be safeguarded? Shouldn't they be entitled to the basic rights of living in peace, receiving education and employment? Isn't it true that they are denied the right to enter universities? Isn't it true that even their dead cannot rest in peace in their graves? Which religious rules and laws permit such heinous, inhumane and repulsive acts? Do you believe this treatment is to the benefit of religion – of Islam – and the followers of this religion?

One issue remains unresolved, and that is with respect to allegations against Baha'is, Sufi's and others. As I am neither an investigator nor a judge, I refrain from expressing any opinion in this regard. Only as a Muslim and a well-wishing Iranian, I clearly see my religion and my country subject to public scrutiny. I request that you proceed with the court hearings of the Baha'is [Yaran], in a just assembly and adhering to complete and proper legal proceedings, in order to remove any trace of doubt or suspicion regarding your true motives. If this request is not adhered to, no one inside Iran or outside of Iran will believe in the legitimacy of your alleged charges. You are claiming that you have convincing, indisputable and irrefutable evidence. Why shouldn't you welcome the proceedings in an open court, in which Baha'is are represented by their own legal counsel, in a just assembly?

This behavior has caused questions to be raised about Islam and the Islamic revolution of Iran; moreover, a number of ignorant, rigid and prejudiced individuals insist that the rules and procedures implemented in the country are as they were meant to be from the beginning, and that promises to the contrary which were made at the onset of the revolution were only intended to deceive the nation.

As far as I, a pro-revolution Muslim clergyman, who is more or less familiar with Islam and Islamic principles, can honestly testify, in the years preceding the revolution the thought that there would be discrimination in an Islamic regime in which free-thinkers, non-Muslims and even Muslims would be deprived of their lawful rights did not even cross my mind. Maybe I was naïve and did not see the obstacles in the way, but I was under the impression that the old inapplicable laws and commands would give way to renewed and revived religious rules suitable for this day and age, by adoption of the principle of Ijtihad [the Islamic legal principle of procedures for making rulings on matters not included in the Qur'an – translator].

At this time, I cannot further discuss the matter. For today's generation, however, I will describe two incidents in order to impart a sense of my feelings and thoughts from that time [the onset of the Islamic revolution – translator].

In early 1979 [shortly before the establishment of the Islamic regime – translator], I was on a religious teaching trip in Soghad – Abadeh. One night, two young men visited me. They asked my permission for a midnight raid on the Baha'i Center of that area in order to obtain incriminating documented evidence [to be used against the Baha'is – translator] and permission to ultimately destroy that center. Hearing such a strange and unexpected request so shocked and terrified me that for several moments I was dumbfounded, unable to talk or show any reaction. Then with full force, I made all possible attempts to discourage the two zealous youth from committing such an atrocity. I reasoned with them saying, "it is not the

intention of the Islamic government to persecute anyone because of his adherence to a different faith or conviction. Everyone will be free to choose his own path”.

I especially remember quoting Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, to this effect. With reasoning and even pleading and insisting, I tried to stop them from committing a heinous act. By the time they left, they seemed convinced. However, the two youth came back two days later; they had raided the Baha’i center and obtained some documents, but had refrained from demolishing the place. They gave me a bunch of papers to investigate. I strongly condemned their act. Of course, I should mention that in those bunched up papers there was nothing but a few membership receipts and some flyers about Baha’i teachings.

The next memory is from the post-revolution period. I was elected as a member of the first parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran representing electoral units of Shahsavari [now Tonekabon] and Ramsar. Two representatives of the Baha’i community came to visit; they congratulated me and presented a letter. In that letter, after expressing immense respect towards Islam and the prophet of Islam, they had requested entitlement of the Baha’is to their human and civil rights and an end to their long-lasting deprivations. They added, “Baha’is, due to their religious laws, avoid involvement in partisan politics at all times. Baha’is desire the progress of Iran and want to be citizens of Iran”. I thanked them and said, “The purpose of the revolution is to bring about freedom and justice for all Iranians, I hope everyone benefits from liberty; Baha’is are Iranians and are entitled to the same benefits”. I added, “In this path, there are cultural obstacles; time is required to remove all impediments. Be patient and don’t be in a rush to obtain your full rights. As a member of the parliament and representative of the people, I will defend the rights of the whole nation without any exceptions or discrimination”.

Alas, after a short while at the parliament, I realized that the course of affairs was such that there was no possibility for me or others like myself to defend the rights of other parliament members, let alone the rights of Baha’is and other citizens. In other words, I, as the people’s representative, could not even defend my own rights. When a member of parliament is beaten up by another member because his speech was not liked, how can he defend the rights of others?!

Today, 30 years after the start of the revolution, holding memorial services for devout Muslims like Mr. Bazargan – the first prime minister of the first government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or for Dr. Sahabi - a member of the National Religious Group, or even holding purely religious ceremonies for special religious occasions, is prohibited; you can imagine what it is like for others!

In Support of the Baha'is of Iran

By Abbas Milani

Prof Milani is Director of Iranian Studies at Stanford, where he is the co-director of the Iran Democracy Project. Following is the text of Dr. Abbas Milani's speech at the Herbst Theater in San Francisco as published in *The New Republic*, on August 15, 2009:

<http://www.tnr.com/politics/story.html?id=6f52df18-cf88-4fd8-8e94-f4e5c4c1e5aa>.

Editorial Introduction by *The New Republic*

This Tuesday, seven leaders of Iran's Baha'i movement will go on trial on capital charges of espionage and threatening national security. They have been in prison for more than a year. The group's two lawyers have not only been refused the legally required visits with their clients, but neither will be in court on Tuesday. One Abdulfattah Sultani, is in prison on charges of participating in the "Velvet Revolution," while the other, the Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, stands accused by the regime of participating in the same "conspiracy"—but has been fortunately traveling in the West.

For the last few weeks, all around the world, there have been meetings in support of the Baha'i Seven in Iran. And last Wednesday, at the San Francisco Herbst Theater, where the meeting to draft the declaration of Human Rights was once convened, a delightfully multi-ethnic, multi-faith group came to show their concern for the fate of the Baha'i Seven and solidarity with the 300,000 Baha'is who still live in Iran. Ross Mirkarimi, an Iranian-American member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, was among the political leaders who spoke at the gathering. The president of the University of San Francisco offered a few words of prayer to begin the meeting. Here is the text of the talk I gave on that night. I am not a member of the Baha'i faith, and like many in the hall, I was there in solidarity with a much persecuted religious minority in Iran.

By Prof Abbas Milani

My name is Abbas Milani, and I stand here as an Iranian contrite and resolute—ashamed for what I consider Iran's disgraceful past in our treatment of our Baha'i citizens, and resolute in my determination to say, Never Again, And Never More.

Pogroms were a fact of life in 19th century European Anti-Semitism. In the 20th century they begot the Holocaust. In Iran, there have never been more than a handful of murderous pogroms. But by the 19th century, Iranian Anti-Semites had turned a kind of psychological, emotional pogrom into a sinister art, and tragically, all the subtle and crude techniques of this persecution were turned against members of the Baha'i faith, the new bane of Shiite zealots.

One can certainly understand why Shiism, and its belief that its prophet ends the prophetic line, and that the Messiah that must come is none other than its twelfth Imam, might have profound theological tensions with the Baha'i faith. But it is a singular requirement of civility in our modern world that we no longer try to solve our theological difference at the point of a gun, or the end of a whip.

But there is also another reason for the obsessive zeal of many Shiites in fighting the Baha'i faith. The Baha'is message of peace in contrast to the Islamists' increasing use of violence; the Baha'is promise of gender equality in contrast to a faith where misogyny has long been a way of life; and finally the Baha'is almost Jeffersonian devotion to the principle

that in matters of faith there must be neither coercion, nor acceptance by happenstance of birth, but that children born to Baha'i parents should at the moment of maturity decide for themselves their own faith in contrast to a state religion that mandates conversion a capital crime, punishable by death—all combine to create a glaring set of contrasts that render traditional Shiism sclerotic. In comparison, their nemesis faith is a harbinger of modernity and its incumbent reformation—a reformation wherein faith is a private matter between men and women and their own notions of the sacred.

Cultures and societies, no less than individuals, are differentiated by how they reckon with what is shameful in their past. Some prefer the false comfort of ignorance. Others are stubbornly obdurate about even accepting the fact that there is something shameful, and still a third group continues to practice and pursue, often with renewed vigor, the very practices and policies that necessitated repentance in the first place. Democratic societies, like healthy individuals, perpetually and critically contemplate their past, uncovering dark moments of injustice or inequity, and moving to end or amend them. For Iran, the treatment of the Baha'is in the last 150 years, our society's acts of omission and commission, what we said and did or failed to say and do, all create an embarrassing blot of shame on our history. Iran can't become a democracy unless it has had a full reckoning with its Baha'i problem. Iran can't be a democracy unless the Baha'is are considered full citizens of the society and their faith—like those of Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Muslims, or members of any other faith, belief, or even disbelief— is recognized as a private matter where the state, social institutions, or actors have no right of inquiry, interference, or harassment.

Sadly in our society, as has often happened in the past, one step forward is often, even invariably, followed by two steps back. If Qajar kings reveled in torturing the first generation of converts to Bab; if even the great reformist chancellor of the age, Amir Kabir, spoke to the new converts not in the language of the liberal constitution he so coveted but in the brutal manners of the oriental potentates he so despised; if even the early 20th century Iranian advocates of democratic constitutionalism suddenly forfeited their fervor for equality when it came to granting it to the Baha'is of Iran—but a change of some significance happened during the Pahlavi era, particularly during the 37 year rule of Mohammad Reza Shah.

In this period, Iran began to accept the rights of citizenship for Baha'is of the country. The relative safe harbor provided by the Pahlavi kings unleashed an impressive burst of creative, industrial, commercial, and intellectual energies and innovations by members of the Baha'i community. In writing *Eminent Persians*—two volumes devoted to the lives of 150 of the country's innovators and industrialists—I was pleasantly surprised at how many of them were members of the Baha'i faith. Iran's biggest home appliance industry—more specifically the pioneering work of the Arj Group—the introduction of Pepsi Cola and television by Habib Sabaet, the advent of child and family psychology by Dr. Rasekh, who had been a student of no less a giant than Piaget—are all examples of the immense contribution of members of the Baha'i community to Iran's modern development. The Shahyad Arch and Square, now renamed incongruously Azadi or Freedom Square, was the work of a Baha'i architect—a young man just out of college who surmounted incredible odds and obstacles to win the biggest architectural competition of his generation. Even after 30 years, the Islamic regime has not succeeded in supplanting this majestic structure, imbued with elements of Iran's hybrid and only partially Islamic culture, as the symbol of Tehran.

And the Baha'is accomplished all of this, and much more in spite of constant pressure by the clergy, demanding stricter pressures, even punishments, for members of the

community. In 1955 Ayatollah Boroujerdi, the highest Shiite Ayatollah at the time, virtually blackmailed the Shah into organizing the shameful attack on Baha'i houses of worship.

Around this time, a nefarious group of Shiite zealots was founded by a clergy named Roghani. The group called itself Hojjiyeh and it was formed for the specific purpose of parlaying their members' pieties, and their fervent devotion to the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, into a ruthless obsession against the Baha'is. The Hojjiyeh zealots went so far as to infiltrate Baha'i circles only to learn the identities of the members. They became a ruthless force of containment and surveillance of the Baha'is under the Shah and a merciless arm of enforcement against members of the faith after the 1979 revolution. On the eve of that revolution, the knowledge the Hojjiyeh had so meticulously and unscrupulously gathered over the decades was used to put pressure on members of the faith to either renounce their faith—or in the parlance of the clergy, give up their complicity with a force so sinister that must not be named by its own name but only referred to as that “sinister sect” (Fergeyeh Zalle)—or suffer heartbreaking, and sometimes life-ending consequences. Thousands of Baha'is at the time lost their lifetime pensions, houses, businesses and did not submit to the regime's bullying tactic. Today, seven of the leaders of this determined community stand to be tried for “Spreading corruption on Earth” and for being “agents of Zionism,” nefarious charges that could each carry the death sentence.

Today, 30 years after the relative enlightenment of the Shah's policies on religious freedom for Baha'is and for Jews, a man calls himself Iran's president who long ago learnt his anti-Baha'i fervor at the foot of one of his spiritual gurus—Mesbah-Yazdi, the de facto current leader of the “Sinister Sect” Hojjiyeh. The marked increase in persecution of the Baha'is—persecution that in its scope bears some resemblance to the Racial Laws initially passed in Nazi Germany in 1935—is the direct result of this infamous group's ascent.

But not all is gloom and doom. In spite of the concentrated efforts of the regime to poison the minds of the Iranian people about the Baha'i faith, in spite of its monopoly hold on the media, there is a new surging consciousness amongst millions of Iranians, dozens of intellectuals, and even a handful of Shiite clerics that the treatment of Baha'is has been a shameful part of our past. More and more people are convinced that Baha'is have, like any other Iranian citizen, the inalienable right to practice their faith, and that as citizens of Iran, they should be entitled to all the rights allotted to any other citizen, from any faith. An impressively large number of Iranian writers, poets, scholars, and filmmakers have come to recognize that as a nation, we owe the Baha'is a word of apology, and a debt of gratitude. Apology for all they have suffered, and apology for all our silences; and gratitude that in spite of these inequities, they have invariably abided by the civility and peacefulness their faith professes, but they have never wavered in their love of a free, democratic Iran. From Encyclopedia Iranica and the tireless work of Professor Yarshater to the brilliant scholarship of professors Banani and Moayyed, they have stood in the vanguard of the effort to show the world that there is an Iran different from the zealotry, bigotry, and brutality of its current rulers—an Iran of Neda Agha Sultans and Goratol-Ayns, the 19th century early convert to Bab, a great poet and scholar and the first woman to lift her veil and give a public lecture in Iran. Let this evening then be the beginning of a new national covenant: Never Again, Never More, Never in the Name of Iran.

They Hanged Her for Teaching Love

By Amil Imani

Imani is an Iranian-born American citizen and pro-democracy activist residing in the United States. He is a columnist, literary translator, novelist and essayist, who has been writing and speaking out for the struggling people of Iran and maintains a website at <http://www.amilimani.com/>. The following essay was posted on August 26, 2008, at: http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2008/08/they_hanged_her_for_teaching_l.html and reprinted at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/4998>.

She is called the Angel of Iran, because she lived her short life angelically. The demonic Islamist Mullahs, true to their nature, couldn't bear an angel in their midst. On June 18, 1983, they hanged the young woman, barely past childhood, for refusing to renounce her belief: the belief in love, justice, and equality for all children of God.

Her name was Mona, a 17-year old Baha'i Character School (Sunday school) teacher. Her pupils loved the indescribably gentle loving teacher who taught them to grow up as exemplary humans with hearts brimming with the love of God, all his people and his creation.

One day the Mullahs' agents came to her house while the young school-girl was studying for her next day English exam. The savage Islamists had another much tougher exam in mind for her to be administered in the horrific prison of the Mullahs. They were certain that they could break the frail young woman under pressure and torture; that they could make her recant her faith and adopt their bigoted creed.

Our great Zoroaster, the luminous ancient prophet of Persia, spoke of the ongoing battle between the forces of good under Ahuramazda-God, and the forces of evil directed by Ahriman-the Satan. Zoroaster warned us not to fall for the enticements or be deceived by the machinations of Ahriman. He further informed us that evil can be recognized by the deeds of its people; people who would oppose the precepts of Ahuramazda.

And the child-woman Mona was seen by the Islamist clergy as a threat to their very demonic precepts and practices. They felt compelled to either convert her to their creed of darkness or extinguish her young life.

Mona, the young teacher, deeply loved children and believed that they had to be brought up as champion workers for Ahuramazda.

Baha'is claim that the founder of their religion, Baha'u'llah, is the reappearance of the spirit of Zoroaster; that Zoroaster's triad teachings of Good Thoughts, Good Speech, and Good Behavior are elaborated in greater details by Baha'u'llah.

Mona's lessons for the children, a detailed exposition of Zoroaster's teachings, are summarized in the passage below by Baha'u'llah.

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer to the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of

the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, and a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.

Ten Baha'i women of Shiraz, Iran were among the many Baha'is who were arrested by the Islamists for their faith. The young Mona was one of them. These women endured months of endless abuse in the prison of the Mullahs, yet every one of them refused under threat of death to recant their faith of love.

The heartless Mullahs finally decided to make good on their threat and hanged these magnificent human beings, one-by-one. The Angel of Iran was the last to be hanged for she wished to pray for each woman as she was hanged. When Mona's turn came, she kissed the noose and placed it around her own neck with prayers on her lips.

The savage Islamists hanged the magnificent child-woman Mona after a long period of tortuous imprisonment. By killing her, the agents of Ahriman aimed to kill love. But assuredly they can never kill love. They only kill the lover.

Oh, you earthly angels!
You immigrating birds,
Whose only adornment
Is a bed of white feathers!
The innocent children of Iran,
Are wearing your white glowing robe,
And have left the memories of life,
To others!

I see the poor black swallows,
Flying over the ruins of our city!
I see overflowing pain,
Intertwined,
With the hearts of every Persian!

My heart stops palpitating!
My breath starts to dry up!
My faith simply fades away,
And my bed falls silent.

We will celebrate the end of religious despotism

By Abdolkarim Soroush

Dr. Soroush is one of the most prominent Iranian political philosophers, intellectuals, religious scholars and writers. He is a former professor at the University of Tehran.⁴⁴ On September 9, 2009, he published an open letter to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, expressing his belief that Iranians would triumph over "the decline of religious despotism", at, <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/news.jsp?essayId=23793>. The following translation of this remarkable letter benefited from earlier rendering of Homylafayette.⁴⁵

The blood-soaked wedding ended and the untrue groom left the bridal chamber.
[Ballot] boxes trembled and evildoers danced in the darkness.
Victims stood watching in their white shrouds and the prisoners clapped with their severed hands.
And the people, one eye filled with rage, the other with hatred, bore off the groom.
The eyes of the world cried bitterly and blood flowed over the republic's head.
The Devil laughed, stars were extinguished and virtue fell into a slumber.

Mr. Khamenei,

[...] In this drought-year for virtue and justice, everyone complains against you, but I thank you. "Of that beloved of the heart, either is he thanked or criticized." It is not that I have no complaints. I have, and they are many; but I have set them before God. Your ears have become so full of the praise and caresses of sycophants that they have no room for the voices of those with grievances. But I thank you deeply. You said, "The sanctity of the regime has been torn asunder" and its honor has been robbed. Believe me when I say that in all my life I have never received such glad tidings from anyone. Bravo for announcing the misery and affliction of religious despotism.

I am joyous that finally the sighs of morning prayers have reached the celestial spheres and awakened the fires of divine vengeance. You were prepared to allow God to be shamed, in order to preserve yourself from shame. To have people turn their backs on piety and religion, but not to turn their backs to your guardianship. That tradition and the path and the truth be crumpled up, so that not a wrinkle would besmirch your leadership. But God did not want this. The pained hearts and muzzled mouths and spilled blood and cut hands did not want it, and prevented it. The pure and the devout and the prophets did not want it. The deprived and the peacemakers and the oppressed and the righteous prevented it.

"The fairy hides her face as the fiend is about," [a line from Hafez – translator] this is the story of your republic of guardianship. Praise God that the veil of this fiend's false purity has been torn. His secrets have been disclosed, his hands opened, and his guilt placed before the sunlight. And the world has looked upon its naked form with anger and astonishment.

Mr. Khamenei,

⁴⁴ For biography see, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdolkarim_Soroush

⁴⁵ Available at: <http://homylafayette.blogspot.com/>

I know that you are passing through bitter and hard times. You have committed an offense, a severe offense. I explained this offense to you twelve years ago. I told you to choose freedom as your method. Forget that it is virtuous and just; choose it as a method of successful governance. Is this what you want? Why are you doing things backwards? Why do you send denouncers and spies among the people to look into their hearts and pull words from their mouths through trickery, and then report lies as truths to you? Leave the press, political parties, associations, critics, teachers, writers... alone. The people will express themselves in a thousand ways and cast open their windows to you and help you in organizing the country and the system. Don't strangle the press. The press is the breath of society. But you took dead ends and weaving paths. And now you are under the spell of nothingness and have become the prisoner of a closed regime that you yourself created long ago, in which neither criticism, nor opinions, nor science, nor information flourish. You think that by reading confidential bulletins or listening to subservient advisers, you will grasp the reality of what is going on. Both the election of Khatami and the green election of Mousavi must be obvious to you, otherwise disdain and the charms of despotism would not have chased away the knowledge and shrewdness within you. And now, to make up for that sin, which is due to ignorance and despotism, you are turning to even greater crimes. You are washing blood with blood in order to regain purity.

Treason and fraud were not enough, you turned to murder and crime. Treason and crime were not enough, you added the rape of prisoners to everything else. Murder and rape and fraud were still not enough, you added accusations of spying and dishonor to the lot. You did not spare dervishes or clerics or writers or students. And in the end, you reward the killers and wrongdoers. Then you laugh in everyone's face and take a poor soldier to task for stealing an electric razor. [Translator: Soroush is referring to the student movement of July 1999 in Iran. Dormitories were raided, students beaten and arrested, and an unknown number of people killed. The ensuing trial acquitted all police commanders and security officers, except for one soldier who was fined and imprisoned for stealing an electric razor from the student dorms, and a police officer who was jailed for assault.]

[...] I knew that bereaved mothers and fathers were weeping behind closed doors and asking God, Save us from this place of oppression and send us succor! [...] The prisons were temples where worshippers genuflected day and night, and prayed — and are still praying — to God for the collapse of the guardianship.

When Neda Agha Soltan was martyred, her chest pierced by oppression's bullet, I wailed to God. Do You not hear the voice of the people? As Jesus said on the cross, I asked "Father, why have You forsaken us?" [...]

Until the day when I heard that forced admission, I mean those life-giving words, "The sanctity of the regime has been torn asunder." It was as if the words had come from You, God. I knelt and thanked You. [...]

Mr. Khamenei,

I want to tell you that the page has turned and the regime's fortunes have shifted. It has been disgraced. [...] Even God has turned His face and taken His light from you. Those acts you committed in secret places and behind curtains have been revealed. [...] Even the path of repentance has been closed to you. Religion will not intercede in your favor, you who have lost legitimacy. The green Iran will no longer be that black Iran of devastation. This movement's whiteness and greenness have taken precedence over the blackness of your tyranny. The earth and water and fire and clouds and winds... are aligned against you on God's orders.

For years, your cohorts and agents, under the umbrella of your protection and guardianship, savaged the people like hungry jackals and took safety and justice away from them. [...] They took them prisoner, like an invaded tribe, trampled their rights, plundered their freedoms, broke their dignity, subjugated their thoughts, and turned their religion upside-down. They started producing sanctities as if in a factory and sold superstition as religion. They shoved their treasonous hands into the people's ballot boxes. They placed the universities under the supervision of the uneducated. They filled a house of woes called the Islamic Republic's radio-television with lies and insults, and gave the nation lessons on how to despair and be slaves. They created fake and extravagant gatherings and sold lies to the world about how the people loved the regime of the Supreme Leader. In prisons and houses of death, they murdered, raped, committed injustices, assaulted, and tortured to an extent unseen even during the Mongol invasion. They trampled the law and encouraged the science of ignorance and fanaticism. They lifted up the benighted and pushed down the wise. They took joy from the young and dignity from elders. They created colorful ayatollahs and obtained heavy fatwas from them. [...] Their psychosis about imaginary enemies created daily crises. People were imprisoned and ridiculous confessions were placed in their mouths and horrendous punishments were meted out. [...]

[These acts] lit a blaze in the conscience of the people that burned the house of the guardianship. The post-election protest was neither a military exercise, nor sedition, nor the Zarrar Mosque — a term you have coined in your mint and employ often. [NB The Zarrar Mosque, mentioned in the Koran, was built by religious hypocrites to tempt the true Muslims.] It was an outburst of honor over plunder. The people, with awakened consciences, defended their vote, their elected choice, their rights as citizens, and their freedom of thought in a calm and collected manner against those who would plunder their vote and rights and freedom. The thieves were up in arms, but we heard God's laughter. He was satisfied with us. He had heard our prayers and had disgraced the murderers and the wrongdoers. Taraneh Mousavi's death was the death knell of tyranny.

The green movement has been established with determination to create a green Iran. This movement has found its green martyrs, green poets and poetry, its green literature and arts and phrases. It is the fruit of 20 years of efforts on the part of intellectuals and activists in the political and cultural spheres. You are wasting your time trying to break it with your militarism.

This lion is not one that you can escape

There is no escaping the curse of God [from Rumi – translator]

The fading fear of the people and the vanishing legitimacy of the concept of Supreme Leadership are the greatest achievements of the revolt of honor over plunder. The slumbering lion of courage and resistance has been awakened. Neither usurpation by the military, nor rape committed by the corrupt; neither dust thrown in the eyes of humanity, nor hot air to puff up the [regime's] ragged clothes; neither dependence on animal savagery, nor attacks on human sciences [he refers to a recent speech by Khamenei in which he voices concern that humanities being taught at universities instills secularism – translator]; neither the flattery of flatterers in your pay, nor the poetry of poem-selling fools; none of these will bend the back of the resistance. Religious tyranny has been besieged by blasphemy and religion, and it is time to cut it down in the green fields of the movement. We have asked this of God and God is with us.

There is no sweeter proof of your turning fortunes than the fact that all your celebrations have become mourning ceremonies. And whatever tweaked your mirth once, now brings you tears and tremors. The universities which you wanted to kiss your feet now provoke your nightmares. Street demonstrations, the usual gatherings, Ramadan, Muharram, the Hajj, and mournful prayers have all become curses which work against you. We are of a fortunate generation. We shall celebrate the disappearance of religious despotism. A moral society and a government beyond religion are the beacons of our Green nation.

We shall cherish and esteem freedom, that same freedom which you did not value and onto which you heaped injustice. You sold fascism and said that freedom is whimsical and permissive. [...] If you had allowed the press to be free, it would have divulged corruption and the corrupt would not have dared engage in their misdeeds. If you had allowed people to criticize you, you would not have fallen into the abyss of dictatorship and the corruption of power. The people's true words would have dispelled your daze of ignorance. They are the schools of the nation, not 'enemy bases.' And what would have been so terrifying if the doors of those schools had been kept open and you had been able to learn there?

We will cherish religion, that same religion that you made a tool of your power and in whose name you gave lessons in slavery and melancholy. You did not understand that joy and freedom walk alongside true faith [...] and that religious power corrupts both religion and power. Governing a joyous, free, informed, and nimble people is an achievement, not lording over a bound and dejected nation.

I ask myself for whom do I write this? For a regime whose luck has turned? [...] And then I recall the words of God:

When some of them said: "Why do ye preach to a people whom Allah will destroy or visit with a terrible punishment?" – said the preachers: "To discharge our duty to our Lord, perchance they may fear Him." (Qur'an, Sura 164)

O God, bear us witness. I who have spent a lifetime longing for religion and teaching religion, distance myself from this despotic regime's oppression, and if I once aided the evildoers out of error or sin, I ask for your forgiveness and absolution. O God of wisdom and virtue, accept our prayers, [...] and leave not your friends in the hands of enemies.

Call upon the winds to tear away despotism's tabernacle, and call on fire to burn away the roots of oppression. Call on the seas to drown the pharaohs and the earth to bury the Qaruns [an arrogant Qur'anic character; for example, see 28:76-83].

Call clouds and rains so that they may rain bounty and justice and joy and compassion upon this wronged people, and that this barren land of oppressors may become the flower meadow of the just.

Water and sea, O God, are at Thy service,
Wind and fire are under Thy command.
If Thou willest, fire will be as cool as water,
Or if Thou wishest, water will become as fire.
O Lord, make Thy wish known,
So the world may be filled with light.

When Baha'is are free, then all Iranians will be

By Hamid Dabashi

Prof. Dabashi is the author of "Iran: A People Interrupted." He is Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York. His Web site is <http://www.hamiddabashi.com/>. The following essay was published on September 16, 2009, at: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/09/16/dabashi.iran.tolerance/> and reprinted at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/5091>.

In their latest communiqué regarding the fate of seven arrested members of the Baha'i religious minority in Iran, Amnesty International has expressed grave concern they may face the death penalty if they are found guilty of the charges of "espionage for Israel," "insulting religious sanctities," and "propaganda against the system."

As the Islamic Republic of Iran experiences the most serious challenge to its legitimacy in its 30-year history, the vulnerability of religious and ethnic minorities is the most accurate barometer of the crisis that all Iranians face in these dire circumstances.

Of all the various Iranian minorities, the Baha'i community historically has been the weakest and most vulnerable. The world's attention is rightly drawn to the fate of prominent reformists charged with treason, and to the arbitrary arrest, torture, rape and murder of young Iranians. But the fate of the Iranian Baha'is should not be eclipsed under the cloud of other civil rights abuses, for they represent much more than their own small community.

Minorities have always been at the mercy of belligerent authorities, particularly when they face a crisis of legitimacy. Kurds in western Iran, Arabic-speaking communities in the south, Azaris in the north, as well as Turkmans and Baluchis in the east have been at the forefront of such discriminations, which has in turn instigated chronic separatist movements in these areas.

At the same time, Iranian Zoroastrians, Jews and Armenians have also faced varied degrees of discrimination, at official or cultural levels and registers, as they have joined their Muslim brothers and sisters in opposing domestic tyranny and foreign intervention alike.

Among all these minorities, the Baha'is remain the most fragile in part because of intra-Shia sectarian hostilities that go back to mid-19th century and the rise of a vastly popular messianic movement known as Babism, of which the contemporary Baha'is are an offshoot. Its adherents consider themselves the followers of an entirely new religion, in fact the very latest Iranian monotheistic faith with over five million followers scattered over 200 countries.

While other religious minorities are specifically protected under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, this is not the case for the Baha'is.

Article 13 of the Constitution has specifically and exclusively recognized Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian Iranians as "the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education."

The word "only" in this article seems specifically designed to exclude the Baha'is from this clause. Having the same effect, Article 14 of the Constitution stipulates the constitutional protection of the minorities to be exclusive to those "who refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The location of the Baha'i holy sites in Haifa, Israel, has been a principal source of harassment and intimidation against the Baha'is. This goes back to the late Ottoman period and obviously predates the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. It's also something over which the Baha'is have had no control.

In the face of systematic abuse of civil liberties of the Baha'is, there is very little that the American government can do, particularly in the aftermath of the Bush presidency and eight years of widespread Islamophobia in the United States that did not leave even the last presidential campaign unscathed.

Having waged war on two Muslim nations, the U.S. government is in the least favorable position to defend the rights of non-Muslim minorities in their own homeland. In addition, during the eight years of Bush presidency, and in the aftermath of the events of 9/11, being a Muslim became a liability in the United States, creating PR problems even for President Obama's middle name.

It was not until former Secretary of State Colin Powell came out strongly against such vilification of Muslims that a prominent public figure put the problem on the national consciousness.

As much as the U.S. government is in the worst position to come to the Baha'is' aid, Muslim Americans are perfectly poised to voice their outrage against the abuse of religious minorities in Iran or anywhere else in the Muslim world, for they know what it feels like to be a political pariah and a religious minority in an overwhelmingly alternate context.

Since the terrifying events of 9/11, American Muslim communities have endured much religious and racial profiling and suspicion, as they have seen the terms and icons sacrosanct to their faith maligned and ridiculed in Western Europe, North America and Australia.

Multiply that experience many times and extend it back to the late 19th century and that would be the experience of the Iranian Baha'is, trapped inside their own homeland, banned from or exercising the terms of their own sacrosanct principles.

The experiences of Muslims as a minority here in the United States, or in Europe for that matter, gives them a unique position to raise their voice against the abuse of non-Muslim minorities in Iran and the rest of the Muslim world.

In a world now defined by the presence of multiple faiths inside many nations and as American Muslims learn to come together to protect their own constitutional rights in an old democracy, it would only be fitting if they were to raise their voice in defense of other religious minorities seeking to secure their basic rights to religious liberties in countries aspiring to become democracies.

The fate of Iranian Baha'is is not only a matter of their fundamental civil rights in the context of any republic, Islamic or otherwise. It is the very cornerstone of democratic citizenship without which the Muslim majority of Iranians is denied their constitutional protection. Watch the fate of the Iranian Baha'is carefully.

The day they are free to practice their religion without fear, Iranians at large will have finally secured their civil liberties.

Ordeal of a Baha'i Family

By Amil Imani

The following essay by Imani was posted on September 19, 2009, at <http://bakemiat-e-mardom.blogspot.com/2009/09/amil-imani-islamic-republic-compassion.html>. It was also reposted at: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/5171> and appears below with slight modification.

It is not true that the Islamic Republic of Iran lacks compassion. It is not true that the Islamic Republic hangs people without a hint of mercy. Here is the proof.

Recently, I met Mrs. M at a gathering of Iranian ex-pats in a park. I would also like you to meet this elderly widow, who is suffering from a variety of brain, neurological, and vision disorders. She is a lonely woman without a country, moving from one shelter to the next on her way to the final resting place to which we all are destined.

One dreadful day, Mrs. M and her husband were arrested by IRI [Islamic Republic of Iran] agents in the city of Qazvin for being active members of the Baha'i Faith. The litany of charges included being members of the ferghe zalleh (misguided sect), mohareb (fighters against God), propagandists for their sect, and agents of the Great Satan and Israel. The couple's three young children were spared imprisonment, and ended up as wards of other Baha'i families in the town.

Neither is it true that the Islamists don't give people an opportunity to mend their ways and see things the Islamic way. First, the clerics reason with the candidate and offer a tempting package of incentives such as immediate release from prison, the possibility of a secure job, becoming a local celebrity to be paraded around for the benefit of other infidels, so they may also see both sides of the deal — a menu of horrific punishment for refusing to bend and a set of attractive offerings for complying with a simple thing like accepting Islam as the one true and final religion of Allah.

In the case of Mr. and Mrs. M, all attempts by the Islamic authorities to reason with the couple to deny their religion and convert to Islam failed. The pair insisted that their faith was the most precious treasure to them and that no inducement or threat could rob them of it.

The Islamists authorities were terribly angered by the couple's "obstinacy" and initiated their fall-back plan, a plan of cruel psychological torment as well as severe physical torture; the kind of IRI treatment that brings to mind the worst of the Inquisition era of centuries ago. The authorities felt that they had exercised great patience, to no avail, to persuade the couple to abandon their blasphemous belief and adopt the one and true faith of Allah — Islam.

Exercising patience is highly commended in Islam: Allahoma yejezi al saberoon be ajron min ghyre hesab (God compensates those who are patient with infinite rewards). Yet, they eventually ran out of patience and it was time to deal with them as the repentant kafirs (unbelievers in Allah) that they were judged to be.

After many months of incarceration, interrogation, and persuasion came the trial. All along, the couple had been denied access to legal representation of any kind. A barely literate mullah in a perfunctory meeting condemned the couple to death by hanging. Yet, the sentence was not carried out for many months. The couple languished in separate jails with no visitation rights of any sort, either with each other or with their children.

The couple was condemned to death by hanging on the charge of apostasy. The same decree ordered that all their property and possessions, including household furniture, be confiscated, since taking away the possessions of an apostate is halal (religiously approved).

Once a person is judged as an unrepentant kafir by the religious authorities, he or she becomes a target of an unending variety of severe torment, since a kafir is viewed as an enemy of Allah and it is the duty of good Muslims to punish the kafir in any way that their sadistic cruel hearts lead them.

It is beyond the scope of this essay and too heart-wrenching to detail the kind of prolonged torture the couple suffered. There is no reliable information regarding what transpired with regard to Mr. M. during the long months of incarceration before he was hanged.

But Mrs. M was, from time to time, denied her prison ration of food. She endured long periods of thirst in the deadly heat of summer. She was even periodically denied access to the washroom for days. All along, she was severely beaten by female jailers. The jailers' favorite way of beating Mrs. M was to hit her with frying pans on the head, although they also used soda bottles, clubs, and even their bare fists. The beatings were so severe that, on several occasions, blood popped out of her eyes. Head bumps and injury became routine, as she languished, waiting to be hanged.

The women jailers were intent on matching and even surpassing the brutality of their male counterparts. These fanatical Islamists are brainwashed into believing that tormenting non-believers will earn them great merit points from Allah. They truly believe that the greater the suffering they inflict, the greater is their reward.

Months later, she was informed that the sentence would be implemented at dawn the next day. This presented the last chance for the jailers to beat her as severely as they could before she died. They were intent on making the most savab (performing religiously meritorious acts) they could while they had the chance.

The beating she received on that day was so severe that she lost consciousness. When the executioners arrived to hang her, they could not revive her. They faced a serious problem. How can an unconscious woman who cannot stand on her feet be hanged?

A temporary stay of execution was ordered. In due time, Mrs. M regained consciousness only to suffer many more months of the dreadful ordeal. On several occasions, the order to hang her was re-issued. But the severe repeated beatings had shattered her body as well as her mind. She could no longer stand on her feet. She got around only by crawling. The jailers were relentless in their viciousness. On several occasions, they staged mock hangings. They would come to her cell and say the fatehe (prayer for the dead), place the noose around her neck, and hold her up and let her collapse on the ground.

Eventually, no one knows why, she was released from prison, barely able to walk. She did not get to die in one day, as did her innocent beloved husband. The demonic agents of the Islamic Republic saw to it that she got to live a life of dying every day for the rest of her life.

The Islamist's credo is fairly straightforward in dealing with religious minorities or infidels living in their midst: if you can't reason with them to change their belief, then literally beat some sense into their heads. And if that doesn't work, then a bullet to the head or a noose around the neck ought to put an end to the "problem."

What happened to the children? All three are in different parts of the world. One son is in England, a daughter is in Spain, and another son is in Texas. Each is trying valiantly

to survive and make a new beginning, thanks in large part to all the “infidel” nations and organizations that come to the rescue of the world’s persecuted people. The more fortunate ones end up in refugee camps. Some of the even more fortunate individuals eventually find sponsoring host organizations or countries.

Yes, the Islamic Republic of Iran does exercise compassion. They didn’t hang the severely-beaten incapacitated woman who was unable to walk to the gallows to be hanged. They simply dumped her on the streets to suffer a painful slow death for every day of her remaining life.