

UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF CONCERNED ABOUT TREATMENT OF FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ'Í FAITH IN IRAN

20 March 2006

The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir, made the following statement today:

"The Special Rapporteur is highly concerned by information she has received concerning the treatment of members of the Bahá'í community in Iran.

A confidential letter sent on 29 October 2005 by the Chairman of the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces in Iran to a number of governmental agencies has been brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur. The letter, which is addressed to the Ministry of Information, the Revolutionary Guard and the Police Force, states that the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, had instructed the Command Headquarters to identify persons who adhere to the Bahá'í faith and monitor their activities. The letter goes on to request the recipients to, in a highly confidential manner, collect any and all information about members of the Bahá'í faith.

The Special Rapporteur is apprehensive about the initiative to monitor the activities of individuals merely because they adhere to a religion that differs from the state religion. She considers that such monitoring constitutes an impermissible and unacceptable interference with the rights of members of religious minorities. She also expresses 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 Bahá'í faith, in violation of international standards.

The Bahá'í community has an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 adherents throughout Iran. However, members of the Bahá'í community are not recognized as a religious minority in the country and do not have the right to practice their religion. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief has closely monitored the treatment of religious minorities in Iran, and has long been concerned by the systematic discrimination against members of the Bahá'í community. Since taking up the mandate in July 2004, the Special Rapporteur has intervened with the Government on a number of occasions regarding the treatment of the Bahá'í community.

The Special Rapporteur is concerned that this latest development indicates that the situation with regard to religious minorities in Iran is, in fact, deteriorating. She takes this opportunity to emphasize that the fact that a religion is recognized as a state religion must not result in any discrimination against adherents to other religions. She calls on the Government of Iran to refrain from categorizing individuals according to their religion and to ensure that members of all religious minorities are free to hold and practise their religious beliefs, without discrimination or fear".

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