

**BAHÁ'Í
INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY**

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His Excellency Hassan Rouhani
President
Islamic Republic of Iran

Your Excellency,

The Office of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations, representing Bahá'ís in more than 230 countries and territories across five continents, would like to respectfully draw your attention to the stark contradiction that exists between the statements of the government of “Prudence and Hope” regarding “creating justice for all Iranians equally” and “promoting job creation and reducing unemployment” on the one hand, and the unrelenting economic oppression imposed upon the Bahá'í community in your nation on the other, and to ask for the immediate consideration of the matter. This economic oppression has now been continuing for four decades, and regrettably there has been no sign of improvement since the inauguration of your government.

Bahá'ís are part of the citizenry of that same land whose diverse peoples Your Excellency has, in one of your recent talks, likened to the “branches of a strong tree called Iran”. The history of the past 170 years attests their loyalty and their constructive contributions to their cherished homeland. Regardless of the views held by some of the authorities towards Bahá'í religious beliefs and practice, the concept of all citizens having equal entitlement to basic rights is endorsed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is confirmed by the Islamic Republic of Iran's own Constitution, and represents one of the fundamental requisites for the creation of an enlightened society. Since the inception of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran in 1844, severe and continuous opposition from religious fanatics supported by the governments of the time has continued to endanger the persons, livelihoods, and properties of the followers of the Bahá'í Faith, including their holy places and extending even to their cemeteries. Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, this persecution took a different turn and became a major policy of the government of Iran. The purpose here is not to detail all the various forms of oppression inflicted on the Iranian Bahá'ís—for that would make of this letter a veritable treatise—but rather to offer a synopsis of the economic limitations with which for nearly 40 years they have been confronted.

In the early days of the Revolution, thousands of Bahá'í employees of government ministries, departments, and other entities were expelled from their posts without any compensation; their pensions were terminated, and some were even forced to pay back the salaries earned during their years of employment. Bahá'í workers were ousted from factories

and companies wholly or partially owned by the government without any compensation for their years of work, any termination payments, or any of the insurance benefits rightfully owed to them. The prohibition against employment of Bahá'ís in the public sector of their native land remains in full force.

Once Bahá'ís had been completely barred from government jobs, attention was turned to the private sector. Various methods, such as pressuring companies to dismiss their Bahá'í employees, forcing banks to block their Bahá'í clients' accounts, and using discriminatory tactics to prevent projects being awarded to appropriately qualified Bahá'ís, were used to severely limit the economic activities of the Bahá'ís in this sector. Under the irrational and offensive pretext of their being religiously “unclean”, Bahá'ís were forbidden to engage in a wide range of trades and professions. Issuing or extending business licenses for Bahá'ís in other trades are often impeded through numerous obstacles and deliberate delays. With the properties of the Bahá'ís being confiscated on the basis of specious accusations, how many the flourishing farms that were wrested from hard-working farmers, some of whom had previously received letters of appreciation from the government, and how many thriving factories and companies were closed down. Countless incidents of injustice—such as when a taxi driver was refused a business license and explicitly told that this was because of his Faith, when a kiosk owned by a physically disabled individual was repeatedly vandalized and finally confiscated because “a Bahá'í does not have the right to work”, or when the Bahá'ís in one province were arbitrarily denied the right to import goods from other provinces in Iran—are all justified under the baseless excuse of combatting the “threat to national security”. In the past few years, many Bahá'ís have faced a new problem: when they close their shops in observance of one of the Bahá'í Holy Days, which are very few and scattered throughout the year, authorities seal off their businesses and threaten to withdraw their permits.

Parallel with the actions mentioned above, many holdings belonging to the Bahá'í community, including sacred sites, administrative buildings, cemeteries, and even philanthropic foundations, were seized without any legal justification; valuable properties that had been donated to the community over the years were plundered; financial institutions holding considerable savings, some on behalf of Bahá'í children, were appropriated. In the cities, such confiscations were often combined with the imprisonment and in some instances even the execution of Bahá'ís, while in rural areas, these were typically done through coercion and violence.

The economic consequences resulting from the denial of opportunities to Bahá'í youth to nourish their God-given talents are considerably more serious than many other forms of oppression. Numerous are those Bahá'í artists or athletes who have been prevented from developing their evident talent and pursuing successful careers in their fields. And many are those who passionately wish to further their studies but, banned from either entering schools for gifted students or attending universities, see their advancement through the educational institutions of the country cruelly blocked. Soon after the Revolution, in addition to expelling Bahá'í academic professionals from universities, those responsible for the cultural aspects of the Islamic Republic also expelled Bahá'í students—some in the very last months of their education—and debarred new Bahá'í applicants from entering universities. This expulsion was formally instituted as government policy when, in 1991, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution created a statutory regulation that officially deprived Bahá'í youth of entry into institutions of higher education. The third clause of this document not only forbids the registering of Bahá'ís at university but also stipulates that, if students are identified as Bahá'í at

any point during their studies, they should be immediately expelled and denied any further education.

The Bahá'ís face yet further acts of persecution, every one of which has significant negative economic consequences, including repeated attacks on their homes and the plundering of their belongings, illegal imprisonment for spurious “crimes” and the setting of extremely high amounts for bail, constituting legal limitations on inheritance among the Bahá'ís, and efforts to instill fear and insecurity through implementing anti-Bahá'í policies.

Mr. President,

This economic apartheid against a significant segment of Iran's population has undeniable negative consequences for the economic dynamism of the country and has ultimately deprived Iran of considerable human and financial resources. How will history judge those who have designed and carried out this scheme of economic strangulation? How can the deliberate policy of a government be to impoverish a section of its own society? How will those who are responsible for the financial, social, and psychological consequences of these discriminations justify what they have done? What religious or civil standard allows for a calculated exclusion of a population from participation in the economic life of its own country? How can talk of building a just and progressive society continue in the midst of such systematic injustice? What guarantee exists that other segments of the population will not face the same discrimination with similar excuses? What answers could satisfy the concerns voiced by informed Iranians over this oppression inflicted upon their fellow citizens? How can the contrast between these deprivations and the desire for the economic development of Iran through cooperation with the international community be reconciled? In what way do the discriminations against the Bahá'ís accord with the claims made by respected representatives of the Islamic Republic at international fora that the goal of their government is to improve the economic condition of the country for all its citizens? Above all, will the responsible authorities in a government claiming adherence to the ideals of Islam, account, in the presence of Almighty God, for such actions?

It would be laudable were the members of the government to ponder the damaging effects that these injustices exert on Iranian society, on the youth of that land, who are its future—youth who uphold the equality and nobility of people from diverse backgrounds, races, and beliefs and who are aware that the ultimate prosperity and happiness of their country and its citizens are unattainable except through this path. The question these forward-looking young people have for Your Excellency, as the custodian of the protection of the rights of all the citizens of Iran, is this: since belief in the Bahá'í Faith is not a crime, why do Bahá'ís face such all-embracing violation of their civil, economic, social, and cultural rights? How lamentable that because of ingrained prejudice, the distortion of history, and enslavement to conspiracy theories, the loyalty of Bahá'ís to their country and their sincere efforts to contribute to its well-being have been systematically disregarded, while bigoted individuals are left free to propagate unsubstantiated slander against them.

*When prejudice appeared, virtue became hidden,
A hundred veils rose from the heart to the eye.*

Your stated aim to bring “hope, tranquillity, and economic prosperity” to Iran and to find innovative ways for it to benefit from the capacities and capabilities of all its citizens,

regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or religion, is commendable. The vision you have described of “equal citizenship rights and opportunities for all people” and “fair distribution of wealth to improve living standards of the people” has not been forgotten, and there are still those who hope that they will witness, in the not too distant future, the fulfilment of these high ideals. The Bahá’ís of Iran dearly love their homeland. They endeavour to contribute to the building of a progressive and dynamic society. They believe in the oneness of God, the oneness of humanity, and the oneness of religion. They regard the fostering of unity and accord to be their moral duty and, despite the severe oppression they endure, hold no hostility towards any authority or individual. They aim to educate their children so that, with reliance on spiritual and material resources, future generations will be enabled to dedicate their lives to the service of humankind and their country. It would be fitting that an environment be created in which the experience of the Bahá’í community, along with the experience of other citizens, could be utilized for the progress and advancement of the country.

The expectation of the Bahá’í International Community is that you call upon your government to undertake an immediate review of the economic oppression imposed on the Bahá’ís, the largest non-Muslim minority in your country, and to remove the obstacles over time but with reasonable pace.

Yours respectfully,



Bani Dugal
Principal Representative
Bahá’í International Community

cc: Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations