

Bahá'í International Community

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The Bahá'ís of Iran – A Persecuted Community

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Following the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, members of the Bahá'í Faith—the largest religious minority in the country—have been subjected to a relentless campaign of persecution. This persecution has impacted the lives of generations, from young infants to the frail elderly. In the words of the former-United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, Iranian Bahá'ís experience persecution “from the cradle to the grave, and beyond.”

Since the mid-nineteenth century, early adherents of the Faith faced violent opposition from the ruling establishment in Iran, which responded to its growth with fierce opposition, inciting violence against followers of the new religion. The persecution continued intermittently thereafter with varying degrees of severity and the Bahá'ís were often being used as scapegoats.

From the early 1980s, Bahá'ís have suffered under a new wave of persecution, this time systematic and, clearly, state-sponsored. The campaign initially targeted many Bahá'ís of influence and those who served on Bahá'í administrative institutions at the local and national levels. In August 1980, for example, all nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly—an elected national council that forms part of the Bahá'í administrative structure in all countries—together with two individuals serving on other Bahá'í institutions, were abducted by a group of armed men from their meeting in a private home and taken to an unknown location. These individuals disappeared without a trace, presumably the victims of extrajudicial killings, although the government authorities have never admitted to this fact. In the years that immediately followed, members subsequently elected to this council, as well as scores of other Bahá'ís, were executed by the government without due process of law. On 29 August 1983, the Iranian Attorney General announced a legal ban on all Bahá'í administrative and community activities in Iran, making membership of Bahá'í administrative institutions a criminal offence.¹

In response to this announcement, in an open letter dated 3 September 1983, addressed to Iranian authorities, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran detailed the abuses faced by the Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic, and appealed to the Iranian people and the Islamic government to restore their rights as Iranian citizens and as human beings. This letter was the final act of the National Spiritual Assembly before it voluntarily dissolved itself and the rest of the administrative structures within the country as a demonstration of goodwill towards the government.

Since then, over 200 Iranian Bahá'ís have been executed or murdered, thousands have been arrested, detained and interrogated, and tens of thousands more have been deprived of jobs,

¹This ban was announced in a statement by the Attorney General, published in the newspaper *Kayhan* on 29 August 1983; translated excerpt from statement reads as follows: “Now, if a Baha'i himself performs his religious acts in accordance with his own beliefs, such a man will not be bothered by us, provided he does not invite others to Baha'ism, does not teach, does not form assemblies, does not give news to others, and has nothing to do with the administration. Not only do we not execute such people, we do not even imprison them, and they can work within society. If, however, they decide to work within their administration, this is a criminal act and is forbidden, the reason being that such administration is considered to be hostile and conspiratorial and such people are conspirators.”

pensions, and educational opportunities. The Bahá'í community's holy places, cemeteries, and properties have been confiscated, vandalized, or destroyed, and many Bahá'ís have had their homes and other property seized or damaged.

The official policy of the Iranian government against their Bahá'í citizens is summarized in a government memorandum² obtained in 1993 by the UN Special Representative on the Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Produced in 1991 by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, this document, entitled 'The Bahá'í Question', sets forth specific guidelines for dealing with the Bahá'ís. It states that "[t]he government's dealings with [Bahá'ís] must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked". It outlines a series of measures to restrict the educational, economic, and cultural life of Iranian Bahá'ís. This memorandum remains in effect today.

In 2008, all seven members of the Yárán, or "the Friends"—an ad hoc group tending to the social and spiritual needs of the Bahá'í community in Iran, created because of the ban on Bahá'í administration and with the knowledge and approval of the government—were arrested. They were each sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment and, in 2015, their sentences were belatedly reduced to 10 years, in compliance with amendments to the Iranian Penal Code. They were all released in 2018 after having completed their unjust sentences.

Iran has, to date, been reviewed three times under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), in February 2010, in October 2014, and more recently in November 2019. In 2010, Iran accepted a number of recommendations, while also claiming that some others had either already been implemented, or were in the process of implementation. In 2014, of the 10 recommendations that dealt specifically with the situation of the Bahá'ís, only two of them were partially accepted by the Iranian government. However, the Bahá'í International Community, in a recent analysis of the implementation of these recommendations, accepted by Iran in 2010 and 2014, confirmed that not a single one has yet been implemented.³ In effect, by failing to abide by the commitments and assurances it made to the international community, Iran has gravely undermined the entire UPR process. The sections that follow provide an overview of the current situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran in relation to the second cycle UPR and contain a sample of the latest reported and confirmed cases of persecution. The most recent UPR cycle is not being used because its report is still to be adopted in March 2020.

I. Home Raids, Unlawful Arrests, Arbitrary Detentions, and Violations of Due Process

² The text of the 1991 government memorandum can be accessed through the following links:

Persian original:

<<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/iran/1991%20Bahai%20Question%20Memo%20PER.pdf>>; English translation:

<<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/iran/1991%20Bahai%20Question%20Memo%20ENG.pdf>>.

³ See Islamic Republic of Iran: Non-implementation of accepted and partially-accepted UPR recommendations - Concerning human rights violations against Iranian Bahá'ís (January 2018),

<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/iran/iran_upr_mid-term_report_january_2018.pdf>.

See also Bahá'í International Community's publication *Unfulfilled Promises: Iran's failure to act after its 2010 Universal Periodic Review*, <<https://www.bic.org/publications/unfulfilled-promises#vvl85hTO0ISXzhR.99>>.

In violation of UPR recommendations Rec #138.25: Strengthen its national legislation in accordance with the international treaties that it has ratified. (Burkina Faso)

In violation of UPR recommendations Rec #138.28: Make all efforts to guarantee and to protect the rights and freedoms enshrined in the international instruments the country is a party to. (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

Bahá'ís are not free to practice their religion without harassment. Arbitrary detentions and interrogations are continually carried out against adherents of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the country, and the charges they are accused of reflect the absence of freedom of religion or belief for Bahá'ís in Iran. Sadly, the situation has not improved since the election of President Hassan Rouhani in August 2013. Since he came to power, we have documented at least **498** arrests of Bahá'ís and **95** summons to prison. In the last year, there have been **66** arrests.

Those who are arrested suffer ill-treatment at the hands of governmental officials. In nearly all cases, their homes and/or workplaces are searched and the usual items, such as personal belongings, are confiscated, particularly books, photographs, computers, copying machines, and other supplies, as well as items related to the Bahá'í Faith. Many have been kept in solitary confinement for long periods and are often detained for weeks or months before being released on bail. The bail demands are exorbitantly high, requiring families to hand over deeds to their properties or business licenses.

Since the start of the year, there has been an increase in the number of lengthy prison sentences handed down by the courts. This comes at a time of grave concern owing to the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) through the prison system and in the country. The unjust conditions under which these innocent individuals were being held is now further compounded by the risk of being unnecessarily exposed to the virus in Iran's overcrowded prison system.

The following cases are some examples:

On 10 May 2020, seven Bahá'ís from Shiraz were put on trial, which was held in the presence of four of their lawyers. They were each issued with heavy sentences by the court:

- Mr. Navid Bazmandegan and his wife, Mrs. Bahareh Ghaderi, who were arrested in connection with their environmental activities, were each sentenced to five years of imprisonment for the charge of formation of a group in opposition to the regime and to one year of imprisonment under *tazir* law for the charge of propaganda against the regime;⁴
- Mr. Ehsan Mahboube-Rahe-Fada was sentenced to 1 year of imprisonment under *tazir* law for the charge of propaganda against the regime;
- Ms. Soudabeh Haghghat was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment, charged with formation of a group in opposition to the regime and to 1 year of imprisonment under *tazir* law for propaganda against the regime totalling a prison sentence of 6 years.

⁴ *Tazir law* (discretionary punishment): Punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.

- Mrs. Elaheh Samizadeh was sentenced to six years in prison by Branch 1 of Shiraz Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Seyed Mahmoud Sadati, on charges of “propaganda against the regime and membership in opposition groups” Ms. Samizadeh is the mother of a toddler boy, and charges brought up against her for “propaganda against the regime” and “collaborating” with “dissident “groups” are because she worked as an arts instructor for children. The charge of “forging a university degree” was brought up against her in July 2019 and caused her bail to be increased by 60 million toman (approximately \$14,000 USD).

On 22 May 2020, Mrs. Samizadeh was sentenced by Branch 105 of Shiraz Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Fakharzadeh to a further 1 year of imprisonment under *tazir* law and two years’ ban from public service, i.e. holding of any government, and public job. The Court communicated to her that “usage of scientific titles”, which refers to her studies at the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), is the underlying reason for her sentence.⁵ Given the restrictions in the country barring Bahá’í students from obtaining higher education, Mrs. Samizadeh completed her studies through the BIHE. However, the court considered her diploma received from the BIHE as illegitimate. After posting bail, she was repeatedly summoned and interrogated regarding these issues. The latest verdict increases her total sentence to 7 years.

- Mrs. Niloufar Hakimi has been sentenced to 5 years’ imprisonment for the charge of formation of a group in opposition to the regime, one year of imprisonment under *tazir* law for the charge of propaganda against the regime, 5 years for the charge of insulting the sanctities of Islam, and 2 years for the charge of insulting the imams, totalling 13 years of imprisonment under *tazir* law; and lastly,
- Mrs. Noura Pourmoradian has been sentenced to 5 years for the charge of formation of a group in opposition to the regime and to one year of imprisonment under *tazir* law for propaganda against the regime.

It is important to note that Ms. Haghighat, Mrs. Hakimi, Mrs. Pourmoradian, and Ms. Samizadeh were arrested by the Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Shiraz for working in preschools and daycares as teachers, educators, and child counsellors. They were specifically accused and punished for the crime of teaching and counseling children.

- It was learnt in January 2020 that Mrs. Hengameh Ahmadzadeh was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment by Branch 104 of the Criminal Court in Ghaemshahr. The case is being appealed.
- On 16 November 2019, the Court of Appeal of Bushehr, without providing any reasoning or ensuring due process, confirmed the sentences of Mrs. Farrokh Faramarzi (Ansari), Mr. Asadollah Jaberi, Mr. Emad Jaberi (son of Asad and Ehteram), Mrs. Farideh Jaberi (Asad’s sister), Ms. Pouneh Naseri (daughter-in-law of Mrs. Faramarzi), Mrs. Minou Riazati (Zarei), and Mrs. Ehteram Shaikhi (wife of Asadollah), each to 3 years of

⁵ Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE): An ad hoc higher educational institute, created to meet the higher educational needs of Bahá’í youth. It primarily draws on the volunteer services of Bahá’í professors and lecturers who had been dismissed from their university posts.

imprisonment under *tazir* law—as per the initial ruling of the preliminary court. It was learnt in February 2020 that Mr. Asadollah Jaber, Mrs. Farideh Jaber, Mrs. Riazati, and Mrs. Shaikhi had been sent to prison to start their sentences. These individuals were all initially arrested on 13 February 2018 after their homes were raided and computers, mobile phones, and photographs, and personal items associated with the Bahá'í Faith, were confiscated.

- It was learnt in January 2020 that the Court of Appeals of Semnan Province sentenced Mr. Behnam Eskandarian to three and a half years imprisonment, Mr. Ardeshir Fanaian to six years imprisonment, and Mrs. Yalda Firouzian to two and a half years of imprisonment under *tazir* law. These individuals were initially arrested on 30 April 2019.
- It was learnt in January 2020 that Mr. Kamran Shahidi has been sentenced by Justice Moghiseh at Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran to 5 years of imprisonment. Mr. Shahidi, who is a jeweller, had about two kilograms of gold and a substantial amount of coins and dollars to the value of 300 million tuman (approximately \$72,000 USD), which were confiscated by the authorities at the time of his arrest. The court subsequently ordered the confiscation of the rest of his belongings and assets kept at his workplace. Was initially arrested on 25 September 2017.
- On 20 April 2020, Branch 2 of the Birjand Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Hojjat Nabavi, sentenced Ms. Farzaneh Daymi, Ms. Nasrin Ghadiri (Navazi), Mr. Ataollah Melaki, Mr. Saied Melaki, Ms. Roya Milaki, Ms. Arezou Mohammadi (Rouzi), Ms. Banafsheh Mokhtari (Zamani), and Atieh Salehi (Hajipour) to 6 years in prison each. Mr. Rahmatollah Daymi was sentenced to 3 years and 8 months in prison, due to his advanced age. The charges against these citizens are “membership in the illegal and anti-security deviant Baha’i sect, and propaganda in favor of the Baha’i group as an organization opposed to the sacred Islamic Republic.”
- On 22 April 2020, Mr. Farough Izadina was sentenced by Branch 36 of the Court of Appeal, presided over by Justice Ahmad Zargar, to ten years’ imprisonment under *tazir* law for acting against national security through management of Bahá'í administration. He was notified of the court decision on 19 June 2020.
- It was learnt in May 2020 that Mr. Farzan Masoumi and Mr. Farham Sabet, two Baha’is living in Shiraz, were sentenced—by the First Branch of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court presided over by Judge Seyyed Mahmoud Sadati—to 6 years in prison each on charges of “propaganda activity against the regime” and “membership in anti-regime groups.”
- On 17 May 2020 Ms. Soheila Haghghat and Ms. Shahnaz Sabet, residents of Shiraz, were each sentenced to 6 years in prison by the First Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz on charges of “propaganda against the regime and membership in anti-regime groups”.
- On 30 May 2020, Mrs. Mitra Bandi and Mrs. Hiva Yazdan residents of Yazd, were arrested by the authorities. Their homes were searched and usual items were taken.

- On 1 June 2020, the home of Mrs. Mahboubeh Missaghian in Yazd was searched by the security forces and, after confiscation of the usual items, she was arrested. Mrs. Missaghian was subsequently released on bail on 16 June 2020.
- It was learnt in June 2020 that Mr. Tooraj Amini, whose home in Karaj had been searched on 4 August 2019, was sentenced by the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Karaj to one year of imprisonment under *tazir* law and two years' exile. The decision has been appealed to the Court of Appeal.
- It was reported in June 2020 that Mr. Sahba Farnoush was sentenced by Branch 26 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court, presided over by Justice Iman Afshari, to 16 years' imprisonment under *tazir* law.
- It was reported in June 2020 that Mr. Farid Ziraki Moghaddam was sentenced by Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Birjand for membership in illegal Bahá'í organization and propaganda against the regime to a total of six years' imprisonment under *tazir* law.
- It was learnt in June 2020 that Mrs. Vida Haghighi Najafabadi (Parvini), resident of Vilashahr, Isfahan—who had been arrested nine years ago in Vilashahr and who had after three years been sentenced by the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Yazd to one year of imprisonment under *tazir* law and one year of suspended sentence—was summoned to the police station in Vilashahr where she was arrested and transferred, at the instruction of the prosecutor's office, to Dolatabad Prison in Isfahan for the enforcement of her order, six years after receiving her sentence.
- It was learnt in June 2020 that Ms. Fariba Ashtari was sentenced by Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Yazd for membership in groups against the regime, and propaganda against the regime and in the interest of groups against the regime, to five and one years' respectively, to a total of six years' imprisonment under *tazir* law. Mrs. Ashtari completed her three-year term of imprisonment for propaganda against the Islamic Republic and adherence to the Bahá'í Faith in Yazd in January/February 2017. It was further reported that she was recently arrested again in Yazd and sentenced to six years' imprisonment under the charges of deception of the complainant in luring [her] towards Baha'ism, propaganda against the Islamic Republic and participation in groups in opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- On the morning of Monday, 7 June 2020, three Bahá'í women—Ms. Nahid Naimi (Missaghian), Ms. Bushra Mostafavi (Naimi), and Ms. Didar Ahmadi (Naimi)—were arrested by the agents of the Intelligence Office in Rafsanjan. The agents, who identified themselves as the officers of the municipality, entered one of the homes invasively by climbing the wall. The officers confiscated all Bahá'í materials, such as books, portraits, prayer books, etc., as well as a mobile phone and laptop. The warrant had been issued by the judicial authority of Kerman for Rafsanjan, and most likely the arrestees were transferred to Kerman. The three women were released on bail on 16 June 2020.
- On 10 June 2020 Mr. Mehrdad Mousavi Kholenjani, resident of Shahinshar, was sentenced by the Court of Appeal in Isfahan Province, presided over by Justice Seyed

Javad Mansouri, and court advisor Mohammad Mohammadi Kamalabadi, for propaganda activities against the regime to six months' imprisonment under *tazir* law.

- On 18 June 2020 Mr. Shahriar Atrian was sentenced in absentia and without the presence of a lawyer by the Court of Appeal of Fars Province for propaganda activities against the regime and in groups against the regime to six years' imprisonment under *tazir* law.

II. Economic Persecution

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec. #138.88: Continue its national policy to promote equal opportunities and treatment with respect to employment. (Sri Lanka)

Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the government commenced a systematic campaign to deny Bahá'ís the right to work and employment in violation of Article 23.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Part III and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In hundreds of cases, the authorities have taken measures to make it nearly impossible for Bahá'ís to earn a living. Incidents include arbitrary shop closures, unjust dismissals, the actual or threatened revocation of business licenses, and other actions to suppress the economic activity of Bahá'ís.

Since 2014, Iranian authorities have intensified their discriminatory policies and practices towards members of the Bahá'í Faith through different measures of economic disruption. In many cities, for example, the authorities systematically seal Bahá'í-owned shops, giving spurious reasons for doing so. Official documents prove that these abuses are not isolated cases but are, in fact, a matter of established government policy. In particular, a letter from Tehran's *Amaken* (Public Places Supervision Office)⁶ dated 9 April 2007 confirms orders to the commanders of police and heads of intelligence and security throughout its province that members of the “perverse Bahaist sect” must be prevented from engaging in certain occupations.⁷ The letter stipulates that Bahá'ís must be denied work permits and licenses for over 25 kinds of specifically-listed businesses and are barred from any other “high-earning businesses”.

Furthermore, with the adoption of this governmental policy, applicants applying for business licenses are required to fill out and sign a form asking them to declare their religion. The authorities attempt to actively and pre-emptively deny legal recourse to those already subject to mistreatment under discriminatory regulations. Moreover, since 2006, various trade associations, unions, and business organisations have been instructed to compile lists of Bahá'ís in every type of employment under their purview.⁸

⁶ *Amaken* (Public Places Supervision Office): Is reportedly responsible for the enforcement of accepted moral codes in places of work and other offices.

⁷ Letter dated 9 April 2007 from the Public Intelligence and Security Force F.A.A. [F.A.A., Headquarters of Intelligence and Security] in the province of Tehran—Public Places Supervision Office, to the Commanders of Police Forces of the Provincial Regional Municipalities—Heads of the Public Intelligence and Security Force; <<https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/measures-restrict-involvement-bahais-many-business-categories>>.

⁸ For example, in May 2006, the Trade Affairs Association Manufacturing & Technical Services of Kermanshah sent a letter to the Battery Resellers Trade Union, directing it “to provide this Association with the list of the names of the members of the Baha'i sect who are members of your Union.”

<<https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/requesting-names-bahais-battery-trade-kermanshah>>.

Since President Rouhani came to power, there have been at least **1080** documented incidents of economic persecution or discrimination with **31** incidents in the last year. It is important to note that the above figure includes shops that have been forcibly closed and sealed for spurious reasons, approximately **739** since 2013, many of which have not been allowed to reopen. The following case represents an example of economic persecution:

- On 4 November 2019, the Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution decided to confiscate all of the properties belonging to Bahá'ís in the Village of Ivel. It is worth noting that these properties were in the possession of the Bahá'ís since the mid-1800s. Appendix 1 contains a provisional translation of the court verdict.

III. Denial of the Right to Education

A. Access to higher education

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.111: Adopt provisions to prevent all forms of discrimination against women and girls and, in particular, promote access to higher education for members of the Bahá'í community and other religious minorities. (Chile)

Iranian Bahá'ís have long been denied access to higher education. It is an official policy of the government to expel individuals from universities and vocational training institutions as soon as they are identified as members of the Bahá'í community. The 1991 government memorandum concerning “The Bahá'í Question”, produced by Iran’s Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, specifically called for Iran’s Bahá'ís to be treated such “that their progress and development shall be blocked.” The document indicated, for example, that the government aims to keep the Bahá'ís illiterate and uneducated, living only at a subsistence level. The section that defined the “educational and cultural status” of adherents to the Bahá'í Faith includes the instruction that “[t]hey must be expelled from universities, either in the admissions process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís.”

In addition, other government documents have been identified that indicate that this discriminatory treatment represents formal and settled official state policy. Chief among these is a communication sent in 2006 by the Central Security Office of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and addressed to 81 Iranian universities, the names of which were listed.⁹ The letter instructed these universities to expel any student that was found to be a Bahá'í at the time of enrolment or during their studies. Even during the academic year, university authorities have summoned students and demanded that they identify their religion. Whenever a student has identified as a Bahá'í, they have been expelled.

The authorities are well aware that Bahá'ís, as a matter of principle, will not deny or lie about their religious affiliation. Every year, hundreds of Bahá'í students are denied enrolment to universities and other institutions of higher education such as vocational training schools under the pretext of having an “incomplete file”. These young Bahá'ís participate in the national examination and receive high scores making them eligible for entry into university, and yet, they are denied the right to education only because they are Bahá'ís.

⁹ A scanned copy of this letter and a provisional English translation are available at the following link: <https://iranbahai persecution.bic.org/archive/bahais-must-be-expelled-university>.

IV. Denial of Cultural Rights, including Desecration and Destruction of Bahá'í Cemeteries and Violations of Burial Rights

In violation of UPR recommendation Rec #138.221: Ensure the freedom of religion and belief for all citizens of Iran. (Romania)

The desecration and destruction of Bahá'í cemeteries began methodically during post-revolutionary Iran as a means to strip the Bahá'ís of their cultural identity and to erase any ties to the community as a whole. Although, in some cities, Bahá'ís have been given access to land for a modest cemetery, such initiatives on the part of the authorities are not acts of compassion; rather, it is a reflection of their deep-seated prejudice towards the Bahá'ís. Most alarming are their rationales that Bahá'ís should not be buried in Muslim cemeteries because they are considered *najis* (unclean)¹⁰ and they are not “people of the Book [Qur'an].”¹¹ When Bahá'ís are provided property to use as a cemetery, oftentimes officials fail to respect the rights of the deceased Bahá'ís to be buried according to Bahá'í laws.¹² For example, many deceased Bahá'ís from Tabriz and Sanandaj are required to be buried in the Miandoab and Ghorveh Cemeteries respectively, which are at least 160 and 90 kilometres away, and take well over an hour to get to. This is because the authorities have barred the use of Tabriz and Sanadaj Bahá'í Cemeteries. Ghorveh Cemetery itself has also faced vandalism and destruction of its facilities. In several cases, where the authorities have taken over the burial process altogether, the families concerned were only informed of the location of their loved ones after the burials had already taken place. Moreover, there have been at least **83** attacks against Bahá'í cemeteries in different localities throughout Iran since August 2005. Vandals have attacked Bahá'í cemeteries with total impunity, destroying graves and causing extensive damage.¹³ Below is a recent example:

- It was learnt in July 2020 that the cemetery of Taft—a region in the province of Yazd—which had been confiscated from the Bahá'ís shortly after the revolution in 1979,

¹⁰ For example, in April 2017, the Bahá'ís in Tabriz visited the director of the *Vadiy-i-Rahmat* (“Valley of Mercy”, referring to a cemetery) in Tabriz to ask about the refusal to bury Bahá'ís in the cemetery. The Bahá'ís were told that instructions had been issued by higher authorities, and were advised to wait patiently for a response to a complaint filed earlier. A member of the Islamic Council in Tabriz wrote to the Mayor of Tabriz requesting him to make it possible for the Bahá'ís to bury their deceased in the city. However, in response, the authorities, determining the Bahá'ís to be *najis* (“unclean”) based on the fatwa of the religious jurists, stated that the people were opposed to the burial of the Bahá'ís in the public cemetery.

¹¹ In the early 1980s, the Mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Kazem Seifian, instructed cemetery directors to prohibit the burial of Bahá'ís in Muslim cemeteries. In one letter dated 12 December 1981, the mayor said, in part, “Many simpletons have been misled by this sect and many Muslims have wasted their time arguing with them [the Bahá'ís]. It [“Bahá'í sect”] is therefore, not an officially recognized religion and these individuals [i.e., the Bahá'ís] must be buried in the section of the cemetery that is allocated to those people who are not of the Book.” <<https://iranbahai persecution.bic.org/archive/bahais-must-be-buried-part-cemetery-reserved-those-who-are-not-people-book>> In another letter dated 27 December 1982, the mayor said, “In view of the approval given by Sharia Judge Hojjat al-Eslam Mohammadi Gilani and to prevent contamination of the environment and to maintain cleanliness [purity], it is permissible to construct in the cemetery a facility where individuals who are not of the Book can be washed in the cemetery.” <<https://iranbahai persecution.bic.org/archive/permission-build-washing-area-cemetery>>.

¹² Bahá'í teachings require that the bodily remains of a deceased be buried in a location that is less than an hour's journey from the city in which he or she died.

¹³ For more historical information, see the Bahá'í International Community's report *Situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran with respect to their cultural rights*, November 2016; <<https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/srculturalrights-1116.pdf>>.

is now being divided and sold. Appendix 2 contains further information about this cemetery.

V. Incitement to Hatred

In violation of UPR recommendations Rec. #138.50: Continue its policies and initiatives aimed at the promotion of dialogue, cooperation and tolerance between different cultures and religions of the national minorities of Iran. (Armenia)

Rec #138.53: Strengthen and expand interreligious and intercultural dialogue. (Lebanon)

The upsurge in human rights violations against the Bahá'ís in Iran since 2005 has been preceded and accompanied by efforts to incite hatred, distrust, intolerance, and even violence against them. Some officials have openly encouraged the persecution, and some members of the clergy have preached sermons against the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents. National and provincial budgets have included allocations for “educational” programmes to “confront” the Bahá'í Faith, and official organs have been established and dedicated to that purpose. This is institutionalised incitement to hatred.

The materials present a wide range of completely false allegations. Incitement to hatred against the Bahá'ís has long been a mainstay of campaigns by the government to promote religious orthodoxy. Members of the Bahá'í community across Iran receive threatening telephone calls, text messages, and anonymous letters, and they encounter anti-Bahá'í pamphlets in shops, schools, and other public places. In many localities, graffiti is spray-painted in and on Bahá'í cemeteries, houses, shops, orchards, and vehicles. Without fail, these secondary sources of slander contain the very same malicious lies and incendiary language found in media affiliated with and controlled and sanctioned by the government as listed below.

In the last year, there have been more than 9,511 articles, videos, or web pages appearing in government-controlled or government-sponsored media featuring anti-Bahá'í propaganda. In all cases, the dissemination was sponsored and/or approved by the State. Since August 2016, hundreds of influential figures, including clerics, religious figures, academics, editors, and government representatives have publicly issued speeches, articles, or written declarations against the Bahá'ís. Such statements have been published on websites of various media organizations affiliated with the Iranian government that regularly attack the Bahá'ís. They include Aftab News, Basij News, Fars News, Ferghe News, Hawzah News, Iranian Quran News Agency (IQNA), QudsOnline, Rasa News, and Shabestan News.

Moreover, because Iranian Bahá'ís have long been denied access to all means of communication with the public, they cannot counter the lies and misinformation propagated about them and their religion, which, in many cases, come from those who give the Iranian people guidance in spiritual matters. When Bahá'ís have tried to contact newspapers and other media requesting right of reply, they have been ignored, or else mocked for having thought that they would be granted the means to deny published allegations or to present their own point of view. This refusal is in total contradiction with Article 5 of Iran's *Press Law*.¹⁴

¹⁴ Article 5: The press are lawfully permitted to acquire and disseminate domestic and foreign news aimed at enhancing public awareness by taking into consideration the best interests of the community and by observing

On 26 March 2018, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei issued, via his website,¹⁵ a new religious decree (fatwa) concerning “association and dealing with Bahá’ís”. He stated that, “[y]ou should avoid any association and dealings with this perverse and misguided sect.” An English translation of the entire decree is included in Appendix 3 to this document.

the provisions of the existing law. *Press Law* (Ratified on 19 March 1986) And Its Executive By-law (31 January 1987) With amendments of 18 April 2000.

¹⁵ <<http://www.leader.ir>>.

Court Order Number: 9809971512800084
Date of Issuance: 13/08/1398 [4 November 2019]
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“Do not follow (your) base desires, lest you deviate”

Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution Mazandaran Branch

Court Order

Judiciary of Mazandaran Province

Case reference: 9809981512800075, Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution Mazandaran Branch, final order number 9809971512800084

Report: 1- Residents of the Village of Ivel; 2- *Sitád-i-Ijrá'íy-i-Farmán-i-Imám*,¹⁶ Mazandaran Division [address]

Subject: Review of the remaining possessions of [the members of] the perverse sect of Baha'ism in the Village of Ivel, Sari

[stamp – Certified Copy]

Court Decision

As to the decision concerning the remaining possessions of the members of the perverse sect of Baha'ism in the Village of Ivel, in Sari, and the appeal of the local residents in the village, as well as the *Setad-e-Ijraiy-e-Farman-i-Imam*, pertaining to the issuance of a decision against the legality of the ownership of the Bahá'ís in the Village of Ivel—including many parcels of farmland, totalling approximately 10 acres, and many smaller pieces of land with erected buildings, totalling approximately 5,000 m²—the investigation carried out by the court indicates that prior to the victory of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the perverse sect of Baha'ism moved to the area through the influence and support of the government of the time, and took up residence in the region with intent to spread its perverse belief and ideology, and while occupying fertile lands in the area, registered the lands in their names, and for the purpose of establishing their power and spreading their perverse ideology, invited the person of Hoveyda to visit the region. For this reason, the person of Hoveyda, the prime minister at the time, who himself was a Bahá'í and one of the leaders of the sect, visited the area along with the other leaders of this sect, and while endorsing the governance and influence of the Bahá'ís in the area, engaged in creating fear and terror in Muslims through threats, intimidation and harassment. After the glorious victory of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Bahá'ís of the Village of Ivel dispersed around the province and now live under the supervision of the government and control of the security forces.

After the passage of three decades from the victory of the Islamic Republic, in light of the pressures on the Islamic Republic from the arrogant governments of the United States and other hostile states, and by taking advantage of the existing atmosphere, some of the remaining families

¹⁶ *Setad-e-Ijraiy-e-Farman-i-Imam*: The Execution of Iman Khomeini's Order, known as EIKO

of this perverse sect returned to the village and the area and built structures for their own pleasures and economic advantages, and to establish assemblies to promote their perverse ideology—at which point the local residents appealed to the government authorities and expressed their objection and disgust at the presence of this perverse sect. For this reason, the director of the Presidential Office at the time visited the area and appeared among the martyr-raising residents of Ivel—who had suffered for years under trying circumstances and the atmosphere of suffocation under the authority of this sect—and issued an instruction to resolve the problems of the local residents. However, owing to the pressures from various hostile states in the international field, nothing in particular has been done with respect to final resolutions about these lands.

According to the investigations and reports from the locals and the governor's office, and the record of this perverse sect, they came to the area, with financial support from the head of Baha'ism in the centre, with intent to spread their perverse ideology in the village and in the area, through their influence in the court of the Shah and with the support of the occupying Zionist regime, to occupy lands which had historically belonged to Muslims, and to use the financial income from the lands to spread the perverse ideology. Following the reaction of the local residents and the commencement of the judicial procedure, the members of this group, through communication with opposition groups and networks outside the country, made efforts to reflect the news of the case in an attempt to weaken the regime and the people. The connection and collaboration of the Bahá'í group at the time of *taghut*¹⁷ with the outlawed SAVAK¹⁸ and the prime minister at the time (the annihilated Hoveyda) and other such leaders is made clear in a piece of correspondence dated 20/3/1342 [10 June 1963] with General Parviz Khosravani, then chief commander of the Central Gendarmerie, who labelled the God-loving Muslim residents in the area rabble rousers and louts, and publically pledged his allegiance to guard and protect the Bahá'í figures and history, and throughout his presence in the region persecuted and harassed the local residents.

To prevent the formation of clusters of propaganda for the perverse ideology, the sacred regime of the Islamic Republic, based on the principle of Islamic mercy, obtained an undertaking from the Bahá'í leaders, and permitted their stay and livelihood in cities in the Mazandaran Province, where they are now dispersed, and by disallowing their presence in the area and through supervision over their behaviour and actions they are controlled against the possibility of any action against the regime.

After three decades from the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the said individuals, under the pretext of tolerant living for the purpose of making a livelihood and checking the land and following up, have again attempted to return to the area, and their presence in the area has caused the uprising and strengthening of this perverse group, as all of the residents in the region are Muslims of the Twelver Jafari school. By the establishment of this group in the area and by fortifying the roots of this perverse group, with the support of agnostic groups, they try to claim ownership over lands in the area by procuring documents in which, for the most part, the parameters of the land are unclear. This is how they attempt to establish and spread their perverse ideology in the area. Furthermore, according to the esteemed points of imitation, the perverse sect of Baha'ism is confirmed as heretical and *nejasat*¹⁹; there is no legitimacy in their ownership, and it is incumbent upon the fervent believers to confront the deception and corruption of this

¹⁷ *Taghut*: Elitist, arrogant.

¹⁸ SAVAK: The intelligence service of the Shah's regime.

¹⁹ *Najis*: Religiously unclean or dirty.

perverse sect and prevent the deviation and attraction of others towards them, and any contact with them has been declared *haram*.²⁰

As such, pursuant to the *fatwa* from the esteemed points of imitation and the order of the Imam, dated 19/12/1359 [10 March 1981], as well as the procedural act concerning matters in regard to Article 49 of the Constitution, and given that certain individuals associated with this perverse faith among their leaders are now outside the country collaborating with the opposition groups against the regime, the court rules that there is no legal merit in leaving the remaining properties in the possession of the perverse sect of Baha'ism in the Village of Ivel, Chahar Dangeh Division, and issues a court order in that effect. Considering the decades of the presence of this perverse sect in the area for the purpose of spreading Baha'ism, the lands that are subject to this court order will be endowed upon the *Setad-e-Ijraiy-e-Farman-i-Imam*, Mazandaran Division, so that by the sale of the land to people with meagre properties in the Village of Ivel, a cultural centre may be established for the propagation of *Mahdaviyyat*²¹ and the remaining funds from the sale of these lands could be used for cultural matters and the expansion, development and flourishing of the village.

This court order, with respect to those who are abroad and were not present in court, is issued *in absentia* and can be appealed for review within 20 days in this court. With respect to others who were present, this court order can be appealed within 20 days in the Special Court of Appeal in the Province of Tehran for Article 49 of the Constitution.

Seyed Morteza Mousavi

Chief Judicial Advisor and Head of Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution in Mazandaran Province

²⁰ *Haram*: Forbidden by Sharia law.

²¹ *Mahdaviyyat*: Coming of the Mahdi.

Appendix 2

Details regarding the Bahá'í cemetery in Taft

- Name of the property owner: Nawnahalan or Umana Company
- Type of deed: Bahá'í Endowment (confiscated property)
- The area of the land is approximately 18,000 square meters, 3,000 square meters of which is enclosed and the rest of which has been marked for sale.
- Date of confiscation: circa 1360 (1981/1982)
- Current situation of the property: A telephone number had been posted on the wall of the property which reads, "This property is for sale (contact Mr. Dehgan at XXXXXXXX)" It is not known whether or not this is a private individual or someone connected to a government institution. However, recently, Mr. Hormoz Behifar, a resident of Taft, went there and saw that the walls had been destroyed and the land had been furrowed and sectionalized.
- The government institution holding the land: Unknown
- Number of deceased buried there: Approximately 60 Baha'is
- Other notes: There was never any greenery in the Bahá'í cemetery and no headstones were placed on the graves. The property, however, had some walls and there was a small room for washing bodies, which is now completely levelled.

Appendix 3

Provisional translation of the decree issued on the website of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei concerning association and dealing with Bahá'ís

6 Farvardín 1397 [26 March 2018]

<http://www.leader.ir>

[Emblem] The Office of the Supreme Leader Website

New Enquiry (Farvardín [March/April])

[This website provides answers to various religious enquiries. The following question relates to Bahá'ís:

Association and dealing with Bahá'ís

- Q. What is the judgment about association and dealings with a Bahá'í?
A. **You should avoid any association and dealings with this perverse and misguided sect.]**