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***Oral Statement to the twelfth session of the
UN Human Rights Council (September 2009)***

Situation of the Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The seven former members of the Bahá'í leadership are still unjustly behind bars, and have been for well over a year – more than 16 months. Governments, civil society, and prominent people in many countries have called for the unconditional release of these seven men and women, who are innocent of all wrongdoing. They are being denied their freedom due to blatant religious persecution.

However, today, we are compelled to bring to the attention of the Council a new and even more callous stratagem, in which the city of Semnan is the site of a covert experiment to eliminate the Bahá'í community across Iran. The methodology involves systematic implementation of the various measures outlined in the government's 1991 secret memorandum, together with intensive efforts to incite the Iranian people to hate and distrust the Bahá'ís. The objective is to terrorize and repeatedly harass them with such severity that they will see no option but to leave the city, if not Iran itself. The Bahá'ís have not left Semnan, however, which forebodes further intensification in the persecution against the beleaguered community.

As you will recall, the 1991 secret memorandum – revealed and published by the UN Special Representative on Iran at the time¹ – explicitly calls for Iran's Bahá'ís to be treated in such a way “that their progress and development are blocked.” It reveals the government's intent to ensure that Iranian Bahá'ís remain uneducated, able to exist only at subsistence level, and fearful that even the smallest infraction will mean imprisonment or worse.

Incitement to hatred in incendiary sermons and media, terrorization and endless harassment, arson and vandalism, the ostracizing of school children, systematic efforts

¹ In 1993, the former UN Special Representative on Iran obtained and published this 1991 document, a secret memorandum establishing a policy on “the Bahá'í question”, which had been drafted by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (as well as by Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, then President of Iran). The text of the 1991 memorandum can be accessed through the following links:

Persian original: http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5_TheISRCCdocument.pdf

English translation: http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5_TheISRCCdocument_en.pdf

to deny access to work and a decent living, arbitrary arrests, detentions and interrogations – all this has become the lot of the Bahá'ís of Semnan, and all of these human rights violations are solely based on religious intolerance.

The situation in Semnan and the case of the “Tehran seven” are symbolic of a much larger issue, as these abuses reflect the government’s sharply increased persecution of the entire Bahá'í community: 300,000 people, who constitute the largest religious minority in Iran.

Irrefutable evidence shows that in Iran human rights are disregarded not only for Bahá'ís, but also for those who defend the rights of minorities and women, for trade unionists, journalists, students, peaceful demonstrators and others.

We call upon the High Commissioner and the international community to state once again, in the strongest terms, their demand that all of these violations cease.