

# Bahá'í International Community

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## **The Bahá'ís of Iran – A Persecuted Community**

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For over 40 years and to this day, the entire Bahá'í community in Iran has been subject to continuous, multidimensional and state-sponsored persecution, affecting every one of its members across generations and within every phase of life and even in death. While the specific tactics employed by the Iranian authorities have sometimes changed, including as a result of external pressure, there is no doubt that their aim of destroying the Bahá'í community as a viable entity in Iran continues in full force. Through various means, new and old, the authorities maintain focus on this goal by striving to exclude Bahá'ís from the public sphere and prevent them from expressing their beliefs; impoverish them economically; undermine their intellectual advancement; erase traces of their history and culture; as well as spread disinformation about them and incite the public so as to create an environment of hatred against them.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, early adherents of the Bahá'í 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 offense.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This 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.”

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, 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 memorandum obtained in 1993 by the United Nations Special Representative on the Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>2</sup> 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 suddenly declared illegal and disbanded, with each individual sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment of which they served 10 years and were finally released in 2018.

The above endeavors to oppress the Bahá'ís are facilitated by the fact that, within Iranian society, people's religious beliefs are more socially discernable. Furthermore, in many official registration forms—such as those for enrolling in school and applying for university or business licenses—individuals are required to declare their religion. Bahá'ís answer these questions truthfully, yet this very honesty of the Bahá'ís is used as an instrument with which to oppress and punish the community. Not only this, authorities also monitor and surveil the Bahá'ís to collect information for the systematic implementation of the state's program of persecution.

In recent years, Iran has witnessed economic and health crises, afflicting the entire population, including the Bahá'ís, who experience these in addition to the gross discrimination that is targeted against them. Despite these crises afflicting the nation, the systematic program of persecution against the entire Bahá'í community has increased in intensity. For instance, although some Bahá'ís were released from prison due to measures employed by the authorities in response to the coronavirus

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<sup>2</sup> The text of the 1991 government memorandum can be accessed through the following links:

Persian original:

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

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

pandemic, the number of pending court cases around the country have steadily increased, thereby subjecting hundreds of Bahá'ís and tens of thousands of their relatives to intense psychological pressure and ill-treatment as Bahá'ís have been forced to endure cycles of arrests, pay heavy bails, and spend months or even years awaiting to be called to court or to be imprisoned at any time. Furthermore, hundreds of Bahá'í-owned shops remain sealed by the authorities, depriving thousands from receiving viable incomes. For Bahá'ís, the entire public sector and numerous professions remain precluded, university studies inaccessible, and properties confiscated. Moreover, the authorities have leveraged the increasing presence of the Iranian population on the Internet to spread hate speech about Bahá'ís and their beliefs to various segments of society with increasing sophistication.

It is safe to say that no Bahá'í in Iran remains untouched by this persecution, as the authorities strive to heighten a state of constant insecurity against the Bahá'ís across every aspect of life. This represents the latest phase in a calculated plan by the authorities to eliminate the entire Bahá'í community of Iran through its gradual strangulation.

To date, Iran has 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, in fact, not a single one has yet been implemented.<sup>3</sup> 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. In the most recent third cycle UPR, Iran also supported, or partially supported, a number of recommendations, which it has again failed to adhere to. The sections that follow provide an overview of the current situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran in relation to the third cycle UPR and contain a sample of the latest reported and confirmed cases of persecution.

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

*In violation of third cycle UPR recommendations #26.1, 26.46, 26.145, 26.170, 26.172, 26.176, 26.178, and 26.180.*

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. Currently, more than a thousand Bahá'ís are awaiting their legal hearings on spurious

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<sup>3</sup> 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](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#vv1u85hT00lSXzhR.99>>.

charges or waiting to be summoned and placed into overcrowded prisons; their state of limbo presenting another form of psychological torture.

Those who are arrested suffer ill-treatment at the hands of governmental officials. As the number of arrests and imprisonments continue, there are still grave concerns owing to the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) through the prison system and in the country. For those who are arrested they are 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. Others are serving their unjust sentences under conditions which are now further compounded by the risk of being unnecessarily exposed to the virus in Iran's overcrowded prison system.

In nearly all cases of those detained, their homes and/or workplaces are searched and items confiscated, such as personal belongings, particularly books, photographs, computers, copying machines, and other supplies, as well as items related to the Bahá'í Faith.

The situation has not changed since Ebrahim Raisi became president, nor has the government's adherence to due process and equal citizens' rights as detailed in Iran's own Constitution and its obligations under its international commitments.

Below are some examples of recent home raids, arrests and detentions, and sentencing of Bahá'ís in Iran merely because of their religious beliefs.

- It was learned on 13 June 2022 that 26 Bahá'ís from Shiraz were sentenced by Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court to a total of 85 years in prison, 24 years in exile, and are banned from leaving the country. In addition, these citizens must report to the provincial intelligence office daily for 2 years. The third court hearing of these Bahá'í citizens was held on Wednesday, 18 May 2022.

According to the verdict, Yekta Fahandezh Saadi, Lala Salehi, Bahareh Norouzi, Rezvan Yazdani, and Mojgan Gholampour, were each sentenced to 5 years in prison under *tazir* law, banned from leaving the country for 2 years by revoking their passport, and required to report daily to the provincial intelligence office for 2 years.<sup>4</sup> Nabil Tahzib, Sahba Moslehi, Behnam Azizpour, Esmail Rousta, Ramin Shirvani and Saied Hasani, were each sentenced to 5 years in prison under *tazir* law, banned from leaving the country for 2 years by revoking their passports, and forced residency (exiled from Shiraz) for Nabil Tahzib in Izeh, Sahba Moslehi in Ferdows, Behnam Azizpour in Dehdasht, Esmail Rousta in Bafq, Yazd, Ramin Shirvani in Baghmalek, Saied Hasani in Lordegan, along with daily reporting to the provincial intelligence service.

Maryam Eslami, Parisa Rouhizadegan, Marjan Gholampour, Shadi Sadegh Aqdam, Ahdieh Enayati, Samareh Ashnaie, Nasim Kashaninejad, Sahba Farahbakhsh, and Noushin Zenhari were each sentenced to 2 years in prison under *tazir* law, banned from leaving the country for

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

2 years by revoking their passports, along with daily reporting to the provincial intelligence office for 2 years. Mahyar Sefidi, Varqa Kaviani, Shamim Akhlaghi, Farzad Shadman, Farbud Shadman and Soroush Ighani were each sentenced to 2 years in prison under *tazir* law, banned from leaving the country for 2 years by revoking their passports, and exiled for 2 years forced residency for Mahyar Sefidi in Lamerd, Varqa Kaviani in Kashmar, Shamim Akhlaghi in Semirrom, Farzad Shadman in Minab, Farbud Shadman in Firuzabad and Soroush Ighani in Mehriz, along with reporting to the provincial intelligence service on a daily basis for 2 years.

Each of the 26 Bahá'ís were charged with assembly and collusion “for the purpose of causing intellectual and ideological insecurity in Muslim society.” The Bahá'ís had, in fact, been gathering across Shiraz as part of their efforts to address local community needs and to assess the severity of the region's water crisis.

The accused have 20 days to lodge an appeal against the convictions.

In addition to the sentences received by these 26 Bahá'ís, another 7 Bahá'ís were awaiting their court hearings in late June (further information will be provided once received).

- Ms. Shaghayegh Khanezharrin, 20, and Ms. Negar Ighani, 22, both living in Shiraz, were arrested by security forces on 26 June 2022 and taken to an unknown location.

Sources have informed us that Ms. Khanezharrin's father suffered a stroke due to lack of information about his daughter's condition and the stress caused by her arrest and he is currently receiving medical treatment in a hospital in Shiraz.

As of the time of writing, the charges against them and the whereabouts of the two young women are unknown. Ms. Negar Ighani, one of a number of Bahá'ís participating in the 2019 National University Entrance Examinations, had previously faced problems with her test results, including receiving a response of “Incomplete file” (a response typically provided by the Authorities to Bahá'ís to exclude them from acceptance to enter University), and as a result she was deprived of further education because she was a Bahá'í. In September of that year, at least 23 Bahá'ís were similarly deprived of education in the National University Entrance Examination.

- On 18 June 2022, Mr. Fardin Naddafian, from Tehran, was transferred to Evin Prison to serve his one-year sentence after being summoned to the First Branch of the Judgment Enforcement Unit of the Prosecutor's Office of Evin Prison.

In September 2019 Mr. Naddafian was sentenced by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, headed by Mohammad Moghisehai, to one year in prison, including the days already served in detention. This sentence was later confirmed by Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeals.

The construction of figurines and symbols related to Bahá'ís and the holding of meetings related to Bahá'ís are among the examples of crimes for the charges against Mr. Naddafian.

- On 17 June 2022, Ms. Haideh Ram was detained by security forces and transferred to Adilabad Prison in Shiraz to serve her 10-year sentence. As previously reported, Ms. Ram has been convicted of “involvement in propaganda activities against the regime by way of spreading sectarian Baha’i ideology, production and distribution of improper photos online and on social media and action against national security by way of spreading and teaching sectarian Baha’i ideology”.
- It was learned on 15 June 2022 that Ms. Samin Ehsani, a specialist in child education, was arrested and transferred to Evin Prison to serve her sentence. Ms. Ehsani’s case dates back to 2011 when on 1 July 2011, she was sentenced by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran to 5 years in prison under *tazir* law on charges of “propaganda against the regime”, “activities against the national security”, and “membership in the perverse Bahá’í sect”. This sentence was later upheld by the Tehran Court of Appeals.

Her case was finally referred to the Judgment Enforcement Unit of the Evin Court, and notice was sent to Ms. Ehsani’s bailer in the middle of last year.

- It was learned on 15 June 2022 that Mr. Farhad Fahandej is spending the last year of his 10-year sentence in the security hall of Ward 10 of Rajai-Shahr Prison in Karaj. He suffers from chronic poor health including gastrointestinal and heart diseases due to the poor conditions experienced during his long imprisonment.
- It was learned on 24 May 2022 that Mr. Aminollah Zolfaghari, a Bahá’í in Yazd, was taken to Yazd Prison to serve his sentence. Mr. Zolfaghari was originally sentenced by Branch 2 of the Yazd Revolutionary Court to 3 years and 4 months in prison but later reduced on appeal. He was originally charged with “action against national security by way of membership in groups in opposition to the regime and propaganda in the interest of groups in opposition to the regime by membership in the illegal Baha’i group and organization, whose ultimate goal is to disrupt national security, and for participation in illegal organizational gatherings known as Baha’i Feasts, and engaging in propaganda activity targeted at Muslims with the aim of attracting and converting them and luring them towards Baha’ism...”. On appeal, Branch 11 of the Yazd Court of Appeals upheld the charge of “propaganda against the regime” but dismissed the charge of “membership in the group opposing the regime” and reduced the sentences to 8 months imprisonment.
- On 11 May 2022, Mr. Sahba Farnoush, a Bahá’í in Tehran, was sent to Evin Prison, to serve a 2 year prison sentence while suffering from back pain. He presented x-rays and medical examination reports from a doctor which were rejected by the judge, and he was sent to prison to serve his sentence. By way of background: Mr. Farnoush was first arrested on 15 November 2015 by Ministry of Intelligence agents at his home in Tehran and transferred to Evin Prison. During his arrest, the agents broke into his house, searched his home, and

confiscated a number of his personal belongings, including his laptop and mobile phone. On 23 December 2015, he was released from Evin Prison on bail pending trial.

On 14 January 2020, Mr. Farnoush was sentenced by Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, presided over by Judge Iman Afshari, to 10 years in prison on charges of “managing Baha’i administration” (Article 498), and to 5 years in prison on charges of “membership in a group opposing the regime” (Article 499) and to 1 year in prison on charges of “propaganda against the regime by way of propaganda for Baha’ism” (Article 500). Following an appeal, the case was re-examined in the same branch, and Mr. Farnoush was acquitted of “propaganda against the regime by way of propaganda for Baha’ism” and “membership in a group opposing the regime” and sentenced to six years in prison on charges of “managing Baha’i administration”.

His case was referred on appeal to Branch 54 of the Tehran Court of Appeals for retrial in the Supreme Court. On appeal the Supreme Court reduced the sentence of Mr. Sahba Farnoush to two years in prison on charges of “managing Baha’i administration.”

- On 15 March 2022, authorities searched the home of Mr. Arman Rouhi, a resident of Baharestan, and confiscated the usual mobile phones, computers and books. He was told that he will be summoned at a later date. While searching the house, the agents accused that Mr. Rouhi’s his wife had organized an exhibition for the sale of women’s clothing in their residential car parking lot but disguising it as a tool for teaching the Bahá’í Faith.
- It was learned on 7 May 2022 that Mrs. Sedigheh Aghdasi, a Bahá’í imprisoned in Adelabad Prison in Shiraz, was taken to hospital following a heart attack, but was returned to prison after five days without receiving adequate medical care. Mrs. Aghdasi suffered a heart attack whilst in prison and was transferred to Al-Zahra Heart Hospital on 27 April 2022, suffering from hand pain, back pain, and numbness in her hand. She was kept in the intensive care unit for 5 days, but contrary to the advice of her doctor that she needed to be hospitalized for at least another 5 days due to high blood pressure, she was suddenly discharged from the hospital and returned to prison. Despite the doctors ordering her to have a heart scan, prison officials are preventing her from being sent to a hospital outside the prison. The officials have stated that the reason for the lack of medical attention is the short duration of Mrs. Aghdasi’s imprisonment.

On 7 March 2022, she was arrested to serve her sentence and transferred to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz. She was detained after she was summoned to the Revolutionary Court under the pretext of some explanations and without notifying her of the implementation of her sentence. After appearing in the Revolutionary Court, she was transferred to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz through the back door of the court without the knowledge of her companions.

- On 12 January 2022, Mr. Natoli Derakhshan, a Bahá'í from Sari, was arrested at his home by city intelligence agents and taken to an unknown location. Mr. Derakhshan was among the individuals whose property was seized in Ivel, Mazandaran in 2021.<sup>5</sup>
- It was learned on 22 February 2022 that Branch 2 of the Court of Appeal of Mazandaran Province upheld the initial verdict of one year in prison under *tazir* law against Ms. Shiva Khalili, a Bahá'í in Babol. Previously, on 16 November 2021, Ms. Khalili was arrested following a summons to the Babol Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office and was released on bail a day later. On 13 December 2021, in accordance with Article 500 of Islamic Penal Code she was sentenced by Branch 1 of the Public and Revolutionary Court of Babol to 1 year imprisonment under *tazir* law.<sup>6</sup> In the initial verdict her cell phone was ruled as a "tool of crime" and confiscated.
- On 11 January 2022, Mrs. Saba Sefidi was summoned to appear at Branch 2 of the Evin Prosecutor's Office where she was arrested. On 16 January 2022, she was permitted to phone her family. Mrs. Sefidi was released on 24 February 2022 on bail pending her trial. The exact nature of the charges against her are still unknown despite calls by her family to the authorities.
- On 10 January 2022, Mrs. Samirs Ebrahimi, a Bahá'í in Tehran, was arrested after being summoned to report to Branch 2 of the Evin Courton her arrival. She was released the next day on bail pending trial. Previously, her husband, Mr. Arsalan Yazdani was arrested on 1 September 2021 by security forces in Tehran and on 16 October 2021 was released on bail pending trial.
- It was learned on 1 February 2022 that Ms. Pari Kargarian Marvasti (Yazdan Panah), and Mr. Daniel Baninejad, two Bahá'ís, were arrested by security agents at Ms. Kargarian's home in Marlik, Tehran. At the time of their arrest, the security agents raided the home of Ms. Kargarian and confiscated some personal belongings, including mobile phones, electronics, pictures, books, and works related to the Bahá'í Faith.

During her detention, in a brief telephone call with her family, she informed them that she has contracted COVID-19.

Mr. Daniel Baninejad was released on 7 February 2022 pending trial.

On 12 February 2022, after 12 days in detention, Ms. Kargarian Marvasti was released on bail pending trial.

Marlik is a part of Tehran, which is also known as Marlik Karaj due to its proximity to Karaj.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bic.org/news/iranian-government-seize-bahai-properties-bic-calls-international-support>

<sup>6</sup> *Tazir law* (discretionary punishment): Punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.



- On 27 December 2021, Mr. Jamal Afshar, Mr. Behzad Afshar, Ms. Farideh Farzaneh, Mr. Mehran Afshar, Ms. Azam Afshar, Mr. Kioumars Afshar and Ms. Golnoush Afshar, seven Bahá'ís from Mahshahr, Khuzestan, were arrested by Iranian security agents. Mr. Jamal Afshar and Mr. Behzad Afshar were transferred to the detention center of a security institution in Ahvaz and the five others were released a few hours after their arrest. At the time of arrest, the security agents searched their homes and confiscated a number of their personal belongings. On 28 December 2021, Mr. Mehran Afshar, Ms. Azam Afshar and Ms. Golnoush Afshar were again summoned to a security facility and were released hours later. Mr. Behzad Afshar and Mr. Jamal Afshar were released from Ahvaz Prison on bail pending trial on 14 and 22 January 2022 respectively.
- On 21 November 2021, the authorities in Gorgan raided the home of Mr. Farshid Khudkar and confiscated a number of their personal belongings. He has not been detained for the time being.
- It was learned on 2 January 2022 that Mrs. Manijeh Azamian, a Bahá'í from Babol, was arrested and transferred to Babol Prison to serve her sentence. Mrs. Azamian was previously sentenced to 1 year in prison under *tazir* law by Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Babol, and this sentence was upheld by Branch 2 of the Mazandaran Court of Appeals. She was charged with “propaganda against the regime.” Background: On 13 April 2021, intelligence agents searched the home of Mrs. Azamian and confiscated some of her personal belongings, including cell phones, computer hard drives, flash drives, as well as pictures, books, and works related to the Bahá'í Faith. Prior to her arrest, Mrs. Azamian was interrogated for several hours by the Ministry of Intelligence agents. The intelligence agents called a number of phone numbers on her cell phone and summoned and interrogated some of her non-Bahá'í friends and neighbors regarding their relationship with Mrs. Azamian.
- It was learned on 10 January 2022 that Mr. Ali Ahmadi, a Bahá'í from Qaemshahr, has been returned to Qaemshahr prison amid the outbreak of the COVID-19 while suffering from diabetes, lung problems, and heart disease, and had previously been released on medical leave by order of a medical examiner. Mr. Ahmadi was initially sentenced by the Qaemshahr Revolutionary Court to a total of 11 years in prison under *tazir* law on charges of “Propaganda against the regime and the managing the administration of the Baha'i organization.” At his retrial, the Supreme Court overturned his 11-year prison sentence and sent the case to the parallel court, Branch 28 of the Mazandaran Court of Appeals and Mr. Ahmadi was sentenced to 1 year in prison under *tazir* law.
- On 23 January 2022, Mr. Farham Sabet and Mr. Farzan Masoumi, two Bahá'ís in Shiraz, were sent to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz, to serve their sentence. Background: It was learned in May 2020 that Mr. Masoumi and Mr. Sabet were sentenced by Branch 1 of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court presided over by Judge Seyyed Mahmoud Sadati to 6 years in prison each on charges of “Engaging in propaganda against the regime” and “membership in anti-regime groups.” It was learned in July 2020 that the Court of Appeal of Shiraz had commuted the criminal sentences of Mr. Masoumi and Mr. Sabet from 6 years imprisonment

each to 2 years imprisonment each under *tazir* law. They both then requested a de novo hearing from the Supreme Court, which was rejected.

- On 2 March 2022, Ms. Haleh Gholami (Ghavami) was arrested and transferred to Evin Prison, without being notified of her 2-year sentence in the Court of Appeals. In Evin Prison, she informed the authorities that she is under medical treatment and the judge gave her an extension of time until 5 March 2022. She continues to be unwell and has health problems and the doctors have prescribed her treatment and rest.
- On 13 March 2022, Mrs. Shahnaz Sabet, a Bahá'í in Shiraz, was arrested, and transferred to Adel-Abad Prison in Shiraz to serve her sentence. Her detention has occurred without her hearing being concluded at the Supreme Court and is thus inconsistent with legal due process.

Background: Mrs. Sabet was first arrested on 1 September 2019 and on 10 May 2020 was sentenced by Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz to 6 years imprisonment on charges of “propaganda against the regime and membership in anti-regime groups”. In addition to her prison sentence, her bank accounts were frozen, without any judicial order for confiscation or account freeze. This includes her deceased father’s pension account, which is the only source of income for the family and her elderly and ailing mother.

In July of 2020, at an appeal trial in absentia, the Court of Appeals of Shiraz reduced the sentence to 2 years in prison. On 12 October 2020, she was arrested to serve her sentence. On 2 May 2021, she was temporarily released from prison on bail after the approval of her request for a retrial by the Supreme Court of Iran and in consideration of her health issues, which the authorities have now ignored.

- On 13 March 2022, Mr. Shahram Najaf-Tomraie, a Bahá'í in Tehran, was arrested and taken to Evin Prison to serve his sentence. Mr. Tomraie was sentenced by the Preliminary Court and the Court of Appeal to 2 years’ imprisonment. At the time, agents of the Intelligence Office advised him to leave Iran, which he refused to do. The case was eventually transferred to the Supreme Court. He was contacted and told that a warrant for his arrest had been issued and that he should report to the prison to serve his sentence. His lawyer went in his stead and, in the end, because his case is still with the Supreme Court, he was granted extra time.

The Supreme Court upheld his sentence in December 2019 but since then he was permitted to remain free in the community until his arrest and imprisonment on 13 March 2022. We are unaware of the reason why the authorities have chosen to activate his sentence at this time.

## **II. Economic Persecution and Confiscation of Property**

*In violation of third cycle UPR recommendation #26.318.*

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.

More recently, the authorities have found a new way to limit the livelihoods of Bahá'ís by confiscating their properties, farmlands and personal homes. A recent ruling by the Constitutional Court has now formalized these confiscations and “legitimized” the actions of the authorities.

On 4 November 2019, the Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution decided to confiscate all properties belonging to Bahá'ís in the Village of Ivel. In its ruling, the court referred to age-old and discredited conspiracy theories regarding the Bahá'ís and their supposed collusion with the Shah (the previous regime) and other international actors and “enemies” of the Islamic Republic. It is worth noting that these properties were in the possession of the Bahá'ís since the mid-1800s.

On 1 August 2020, Branch 54 of the Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution in Tehran rejected the appeal and issued a final and binding order upholding the previous decision of the Special Court for Article 49 of the Constitution, Mazandaran Branch handed down on 4 November 2019, which determined that the ownership of the lands belonging to the Bahá'ís of Ivel to be illegal.

In a final decision on 13 October 2020, Branch 8 of the Court of Appeals of Mazandaran citing the 1 August 2020 decision also ruled that the ownership of lands of the 27 Bahá'ís of Ivel were illegal and there was no error made in law, and as such, endorsed the decision in favor of the *Sitád-i-Ijrá 'íy-i-Farmán-i-Imám* (the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, known as EIKO), to forcibly confiscate and sell the lands owned by the Bahá'ís.<sup>7</sup> Following this order, the case was then closed.

These unjust rulings set a precedent with wide-ranging effects throughout the country with the potential to cause mass displacement of the Bahá'í community through a systematic confiscation of their properties.

The mass confiscation of Bahá'í-owned property in Ivel, Mazandaran Province, follows an official Iranian directive which instructs local authorities in another city in the same province to “conduct strict controls” on the Bahá'ís in the city by “monitoring their operations”. The directive, dated 21 September 2020, adopted a “detailed plan” to ensure that the Bahá'í community is “rigorously controlled”, including their “public and private meetings” as well as “their other activities”. The document was issued by the Commission on Ethnicities, Sects and Religions in Sari, which operates under the aegis of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, a body chaired by Iran's president and responsible for security matters.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO) is a parastatal agency controlled by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

<sup>8</sup> The leaked document was first revealed by the League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/iran-leaked-document-reveals-plans-to-intensify-suppression-of-baha>

In addition, the authorities systematically seal Bahá'í-owned shops, giving spurious reasons for doing so, many of which have yet not been allowed to reopen and have been closed now for years. 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)<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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 organizations have been instructed to compile lists of Bahá'ís in every type of employment under their purview.<sup>11</sup>

Below is a more recent example of a worrying pattern that is emerging regarding mass confiscation of Bahá'í-owned properties. A pattern, which if continued can potentially displace a large number of Bahá'í families in Iran.

- On 31 January 2022 the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Semnan handed down a judgment confiscating the properties of six Bahá'ís. The case for confiscation was filed by Mr. Hamid Ahmadi, the Provincial manager of *Sitád-i-Ijrá'iy-i-Farmán-i-Imám* (the parastatal organization “Execution of Imam Khomeini’s Order” (EIKO) at Branch 1 of the Special Court for Constitutional Article 49.<sup>12</sup> At the request of EIKO the court has ordered the confiscation of the registered premises belonging to Mr. Bahador Motearefi, Mr. Mansur Manuchehri, Ms. Atousa MehrchiManshadi, Seyyed Aṭaollah Naşrollah, Ms. Farzaneh Malekzadeh Manavi (Baydaqí), Mr. Shahrokh Taef, six Bahá'ís in the province of Semnan in favor of EIKO. The Semnan properties are ordered under Article 49 of the Iranian Constitution to be transferred to EIKO, which is controlled by Iran’s Supreme Leader. This article of the constitution has been misused to justify the confiscations and requires the government to prove the legitimacy of such seizures under Islamic law.

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<sup>9</sup> *Amaken* (Public Places Supervision Office): Is reportedly responsible for the enforcement of accepted moral codes in places of work and other offices.

<sup>10</sup> 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>>.

<sup>11</sup> 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>>.

<sup>12</sup> The Execution of Imam Khomeini’s Order (EIKO) is a parastatal agency controlled by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

By way of background, Mr. Bahador Matearefi and Mr. Shahrokh Taef were among the individuals whose homes were raided as part of the mass raids carried out on Bahá'í-owned properties across Iran by security forces in November 2020. A large number of property deeds belonging to individual Bahá'ís were taken during these raids—including deeds for the Semnan properties now ordered to be confiscated.

### **III. Denial of the Right to Education**

#### **A. Access to higher education**

*In violation of third cycle UPR recommendations #26.229 and 26.302.*

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.<sup>13</sup> The letter instructed these universities to expel any student that was found to be a Bahá'í at the time of enrollment or during their studies. Even during the academic year, university authorities have summoned students and demanded that they identify their religion. Whenever students have been identified as Bahá'ís, 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 enrollment 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.

The following is an example:

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<sup>13</sup> A scanned copy of this letter and a provisional English translation are available at the following link: <<https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/bahais-must-be-expelled-university>>.

- It was learned on 27 January 2022 that Mr. Kasra Shoaee, a Bahá'í in Zahedan, during the announcement of entrance exam results for advanced studies at the University of Applied Sciences, was confronted with the message "the results will be announced after the general eligibility status is determined". This is the message received by all Bahá'í students which is used to exclude them from entry to university on the basis that they do not meet criteria of membership of one of the four officially approved religions.

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

*In violation of third cycle UPR recommendations #26.296, 26.297, 26.298, 26.307, and 26.309.*

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)<sup>14</sup> and they are not “people of the Book [Qur'an].”<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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 kilometers away, and take well over an hour to get to. This is because the authorities have barred the use of Tabriz and Sanandaj 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

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<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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://iranbahaipersecution.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://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/permission-build-washing-area-cemetery>>.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

already taken place. Since the Islamic Revolution, there have been constant attacks against Bahá'í cemeteries in different localities throughout Iran. Vandals have attacked Bahá'í cemeteries with total impunity, destroying graves and causing extensive damage.<sup>17</sup>

More recently, in April 2021, the authorities banned Bahá'ís from burying their loved ones on land previously allocated to them in Tehran's Khavaran Cemetery. This land, which was assigned to the Bahá'ís after the previous Bahá'í Cemetery of Tehran was confiscated and destroyed in 1981, has sufficient burial space for several more decades. However, agents from the Security Office of the Behesht-e Zahra Organization, which manages Khavaran, banned the community from using these plots. The only recourse available to the Bahá'ís was to bury their loved ones in the narrow gap between existing graves or to use a mass burial site known to be the burial place of thousands of political prisoners killed in the early years of the Islam revolution, including at least 50 Bahá'ís. However, the Bahá'ís refused to use this site, and, following international pressure, the authorities have for now reversed course and lifted their ban.

## **V. Incitement to Hatred**

*In violation of third cycle UPR recommendations #26.167, 26.310, and 26.314.*

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 institutionalized incitement to hatred.

The materials espousing hatred towards Bahá'ís 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.

Given the numerous methods that are used to disseminate information, it is difficult to provide the exact number of articles, videos, or web pages appearing in government-controlled or government-sponsored media featuring anti-Bahá'í propaganda. Nevertheless, these platforms have been producing hundreds of thousands of pieces of disinformation reaching millions of Iranians. As these figures only represent a fraction of the material, what is certain is that in all cases, the dissemination was sponsored and/or approved by the State. Since August 2016, hundreds of

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<sup>17</sup> 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>.



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.<sup>18</sup>

On 26 March 2018, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei issued, via his website,<sup>19</sup> 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.”

Below is a recent example:

- During the period 15–17 December 2021, in Shiraz, a Visual Arts Festival called Moghadas-Nama sponsored by the Secretariat of the Revolution Posters and the Association of Designers of the Islamic Revolution, held a poster and cartoon design workshop with the aim of spreading hatred against the Bahá'ís and attacking the religious beliefs of the community.

Similarly, between 18–20 January 2022, the second round of a 3-day poster design workshop, to spread misinformation and hatred against the Bahá'ís, was held in Karaj, Alborz Province.

This second workshop appears to be part of an ongoing program of anti-Bahá'í propaganda organized by a Secretariat comprising the Visual Festivals group, called “Moghadas Nama” (pseudo-sacred), the Institute of Sects and Religions of Zahedan called “Mafaz” and the Islamic Propagation Office. Participants of the workshop were encouraged to design posters based on anti-Bahá'í themes. The objective of these state funded institutions is to induce hatred and promote violence against the Bahá'í community based on their religious beliefs. Participants were incentivized by generous prizes and rewards to create graphic artworks such as posters featuring anti-Bahá'í propaganda.

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<sup>18</sup> 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 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.

<sup>19</sup> <<http://www.leader.ir>>.



This is a clear example of the State-sponsored spread of hatred against the followers of a religion by the Iranian government. The institutions holding the festival are supported by a government budget and have dedicated millions of tomans in prizes for the participants. The Bahá'í community lacks access to any forum, neither in the country's official media nor the legal system, to defend themselves.

Hojatoleslam Amir Hosein Kamel Navvab, as chairman of the policy-making council, Seyyed Mohammad Reza Miri as secretary of the poster department, Mehdi Yekkeh-Pesar as chairman of the panel of referees, Mohammad Reza Doust-Mohammadi, Seyyed Mohammad Reza Miri, Alireza Khakpour, and Seyyed Mehdi Hoseini are the organizers of this program and responsible for spreading hatred against the Bahá'ís.

The campaign of hatred against the Bahá'ís by state security and government agencies has precedence. Among these measures is the presentation of numerous anti-Bahá'í books at Tehran Book Exhibitions and Fairs. In recent years, the Tehran Book Exhibition and Fair has become a venue for promoting violence and hate-mongering against the Bahá'ís, with the presence of books targeting various schools of thought. The publishers of these books are mostly dependent on and financed either by the government or religious institutions.