

Persecuted for Their Faith

Baha'i faith is the largest non-Muslim religious minority with a population estimated more than 300,000. The Iranian regime has hurt many religious and political groups in Iran, but Baha'i community has borne an especially heavy burden.

Since 1981, the group was targeted by Iran's security services and its religion followers have been deprived of many of their fundamental rights, including access to higher education and the right to work freely. They are barred from holding government jobs. Iranian regime has also made a familiar habit of shutting their businesses and confiscating their properties.

Their marriages are not recognized and their cemeteries and holy places have been desecrated. It is government policy to incite hatred of Baha'i in the official media.

More than 200 Baha'is were executed and thousands more were imprisoned in the 1980s because of their religious beliefs, the followers of the group say. Today, Baha'is continue to be arbitrarily killed. A Baha'i was murdered in 2016 outside his home in Yazd by two young men because of his faith. In another shocking development a report received on 9 January indicated that Ahmad Fanaian, a member of the Baha'i community was found dead, having sustained severe burns to his body. Mr. Fanaian was an elderly and respected man from Semnan Province.

According to Asma Jahangir, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, discrimination against Baha'is is legally sanctioned by a lack of constitutional recognition. "Baha'is continue to be systematically discriminated, targeted, and deprived of the right to a livelihood," Jahangiri said in her March 6 report.

The Baha'i faith is not recognized in the constitution of Iran, which has been ruled by a conservative Muslim establishment since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Baha'i religious community as a whole is effectively an illegal group, albeit in an unofficial fashion. Unlike Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, the Baha'i faith is not recognized in the Iranian Constitution, but Iranian officials regularly deny a policy of persecution. Nevertheless, the existence of such a policy is well established and can be corroborated with reference to repeated calls by the Supreme Leader and other authorities to combat 'false beliefs' in 2011 which have led to an increase in religious persecution.

Imprisoned Baha'is

The Baha'i minority suffers harshly at the hands of the state, which regards it as a 'heretical' sect.

59 Baha'i believers are currently detained in Iran's prisons solely because of their religious beliefs and practices.

Six former leaders of the Iranian Baha'i community, arrested in 2008 on charges of espionage, propaganda and "corruption on earth," are amongst the detainees.

Fariba Kamalabadi, Vahid Tizfahm, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Saeid Rezaie.

On Tuesday, the Center for Human Rights in Iran featured a profile of and excerpts from an interview with Mahvash Sabet, a leader of the persecuted Baha'i religious minority who was released from prison on September 18 after serving a 10-year sentence for practicing her faith. The report described several issues that are familiar features of political imprisonment and the Iranian criminal justice system in general. Prominent among these is a general lack of due process.

Mahvash Sabet explained that she and six other Baha'i leaders had initially faced seven charges, but the state was unable to present any actual evidence of its claims of espionage. Although the Baha'i faith was founded in Iran in the 19th century, its current leadership is based in Israel, and this has led Muslim opponents of the faith to attempt to discredit it by portraying it as being a collective agent of the Jewish state.



Perhaps in part because of this longstanding propaganda, the Iranian judiciary convicted Sabet and her co-defendants of "collaborating with enemy states" anyway, in spite of an absence of evidence and the legal objection that Iran was not officially at war with any country and thus could not have "enemy states." This conviction was overturned, then reinstated, but the sentences for the Baha'i leaders were ultimately reduced from 20 years to 10, due to changes in the Iranian penal code which limited prison terms to the longer of the sentences in cases of multiple, simultaneous convictions. The remaining sentence for which Sabet served her 10 years was "forming an illegal group."

Pressures on Baha'is have been increased and Iranian authorities continue to arrest them on religious grounds. Following are some examples which shed light on the disastrous situation of their rights violations.

- Reports indicate that five Baha'i men and women were tried on October 4, 2017, at the Tehran Revolutionary Court presided over by Judge Moghiseh on charges of acting against national security. They were each sentenced to five years of prison. These five citizens have been identified as Helia Moshtagh, Yavar Haghghat Mohlebani, Navid Aghdasi, Nova Manjazez Qamsari and Negar Bagheri Tari.
- On Tuesday June 13, two Baha'i residents of Isfahan, Noushin Salekian and Farideh Abdi, were summoned to the 1st Branch of Shahin Shahr Court, where they were arrested and transferred to Dolat Abad Prison in Isfahan. These two women were charged with "acting against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the government". On Monday, Maryam Dehghan Yazdeli, Mozhdeh Zohouri, Farah Tabianian and Houshmand Dehghan Yazdeli, four Baha'is residing in the province of Golestan were also arrested by security forces in their homes. Three other Baha'i

women were also jailed in Golestan. They are Sheida Ghodousi, Pouneh Sanayi and Nazi Tahghighi who went to the Intelligence Agency in this province to serve their prison terms.

- On July 11, 2017, Shiva Rohani, a Baha'i woman living in Gorgan was transferred to Amir Abad Prison in this city to serve her 18-month prison term. During the first days of July, 12 Baha'is residing in Gorgan were either arrested after security forces stormed their homes or were summoned by the Judiciary or security system to prison. Rofia Pakzadan, Parivash Shojaie, Mozhdeh Zohouri, Farahnaz Tabiyanian, Maryam Dehghan Yazdeli, and Houshmand Dehghan Yazdeli were arrested by the SSF.



- Azita Rafizadeh, mother of a 6-year-old boy, and her husband are presently incarcerated for teaching in the Bahai Institute for Higher Education.

Baha'is denied education

Baha'i students have been formally denied access to higher education since 1981.

According to the third article of the resolution approved in 1991 by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, "at universities, both at the entrance and during education, if it is established that they are Baha'is they are to be deprived of education." This policy, approved by Iran's supreme leader, remains in effect today.

Just days after President Hassan Rouhani declared on September 22 that religious minorities in the Islamic Republic have the same rights as Shiite Muslims, at least 120 Baha'i citizens who participated in the 2017 General University Admission Test were denied entry to university due to their religion.

Traditionally, this blockage of enrollment has been done without formal explanations of the reason behind it. University administrators have tended to refer instead to an unspecified deficiency in the student's file. Some of the expelled students are told that they would be able to complete their education if they would write and sign letters disavowing their faith.



- At least 48 young women earning bachelors or master's degrees have been deprived of education for adhering to the Bahai faith and expelled from their universities.

- Vafa Hoveidaie, a physics student at Amir Kabir University, was expelled from this university on May 28, 2017, in his second semester because he follows the Baha'i faith.

Baha'i-owned businesses shut down

One of the common tools the Islamic Republic authorities use is harassing Baha'is and closing up their shops and businesses without any warning or justification.

This April, they did this to 90 Baha'i shop owners in Noshahr, a picturesque port and tourist destination on the Caspian Sea. Apparently, the closure of these businesses was based on an illegal decision by the Mazandaran Commission of Cultures and Religions.

After a number of Baha'i residents followed up the issue with the Judiciary to have their shops re-opened, they were not given any answers and five of them were arrested.

In another development the businesses of 11 Baha'i citizens in Urmia have been shut down since July 19. Nine Baha'is in Khorramshahr were also threatened with the closure of their businesses. From July 9 to July 13, the businesses of eleven Baha'is in Ahwaz were also shut down.



Inhuman measures against Baha'i citizens

- Bahai's are not allowed to bury their dead in places of their choice. After the passing away of Ms. Pouran Enayati in Tabriz, her family were not granted any license to bury her and she was arbitrarily buried in a remote cemetery near Miandoab.
- In early July, the State Security Forces banned the funeral of a Baha'i man residing in Bukan. According to an informed source, security forces prevented Nurollah Ghorbanzadeh's funeral ceremony and forcefully dispersed the crowds.
- Hana Aghighian, a Bahai woman, was arrested in March 2016. She was forced by her interrogators to go under the table where she was kicked in the side and other parts of her body.

Baha'is are one of the most oppressed sectors in Iran under the Islamic Republic regime in Iran merely for their beliefs despite worldwide censure.