

BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

United Nations Office

Situation of the Baha'is in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Oral Statement of the Baha'i International Community to the 61st Session of the Commission on Human Rights
14 March 2005
Geneva

For three years, the Baha'i International Community has been saying that the gross, flagrant, repeated violations of human rights in Iran – including the abuses that target Baha'is in that country – warrant the re-establishment of a monitoring mechanism. For three years, this Commission has not been capable of presenting a resolution on Iran, while the situation there has gradually but steadily deteriorated. And now, over the past few months, we have had the impression of shifting back in time, some 20 years or more, as we have witnessed a resumption of violent attacks on the Baha'i community in Iran.

The most serious outbreak occurred in Yazd, where several Baha'is were assaulted in their homes and beaten, a Baha'i's shop was set on fire and burned, and others were harassed and threatened, following a series of arrests and short-term detentions. The Baha'i cemetery in Yazd was wantonly destroyed, with cars driven over the graves, tombstones smashed and the remains of the interred left exposed.

In Tehran in March, Iranian intelligence agents entered the homes of several Baha'is and spent hours ransacking their houses before carting away their possessions and taking them into custody. Five Baha'is have been imprisoned just this past month. Two were finally released on bail, but family and community members have not been able to locate those in detention. Two others, who had previously been briefly detained for nothing more than distributing copies of a courteous open letter to President Khatami, have now been sentenced to prison for this so-called offence. Six more Baha'i families recently had their homes and land confiscated, depriving them of their only means of livelihood.

The Iranian authorities say they have resolved one issue: access to higher education. But all they did, in fact, was raise false hope. In August last year, Baha'i students were allowed to take the national entrance exam, making them believe that they might at last attend university, for the first time in over 20 years. But a month later, in September, the authorities crushed their hope again – blocking admission for nearly 800 Baha'i students who had passed the exam.

Iranian officials sometimes claim that they are trying to stop such abuses. More often, however, the authorities will not address the matter at all, as they refuse to recognize the Baha'i Faith as a religion and the Baha'i community as a religious minority. Refusing to address an issue does *not* make it go away. On the contrary, tensions in this country are rising. Harassment and arrests of Baha'is are increasing, outbreaks of violence have recurred.

Indeed, human rights violations in Iran have again become so grave that, in our view, they warrant a clear signal from the international community and a decision to re-establish international monitoring – now.

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