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## **Treatment of the Followers of the Baha'i Faith in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Commission on Human Rights Sixty-second session Item 9 of the provisional agenda Question of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any part of the world.

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The statement of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief about recent actions taken by the Government of Iran concerning the Baha'is arouses grave apprehension in the international Baha'i community about the fate of Baha'is in Iran.

A confluence of alarming events – following a trail of unrelenting persecution since 1979 –leaves us dreadfully afraid for the lives of our fellow Baha'is. According to the Special Rapporteur's press release, a confidential letter, authorized by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has been sent by the Chairman of the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces in Iran to a number of governmental agencies, instructing recipients to proceed in highly confidential manner to identify, monitor and collect all information about members of the Baha'i Faith. Because of the unprecedented character of the Government's action, we have addressed a request to the Ambassador of Iran for an explanation. One hesitates to think what horrors could be implied by the combined effort of intelligence, military and police agencies.

Such actions come in the midst of a propaganda campaign against the Baha'i Faith in government-controlled national press and radio. *Kayhan*, the official Tehran daily newspaper, has carried more than 30 defamatory articles about the Baha'is and their religion in recent weeks with the clear intention of arousing suspicion, distrust, and hatred for the Iranian Baha'i community. In the 1950s and 1980s, such campaigns in the Iranian press and broadcast media led to acts of violence that included the murder of Baha'i men, women, and children.

The above-mentioned letter and anti-Baha'i propaganda coincide with the re-emergence of the *Hojjatieh* Society, an organization founded in the 1953 with the specific agenda of eradicating the Baha'i Faith. While the Society fell into disfavor and was banned in 1984, it has since re-surfaced as an influential if secretive faction, linked in news articles and weblogs with the current Iranian administration.

Exacerbating these alarming trends, Baha'is across Iran are now experiencing an escalation in acts of personal harassment and violence. In the last two years, over 60 Baha'is have been jailed or imprisoned without charge; personal property and holy sites of deep significance to the Baha'i Faith have been destroyed, a gravesite was razed with tombstones smashed and coffins left exposed. Most recently, a movement appears to have targeted Baha'i households, which have begun receiving notes, CDs, and tracts, all of which are aimed at refuting the claims of the Baha'i Faith.

Iran's efforts to eradicate the Baha'i community are not new. In a 1993 report by UN Special Representative Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, concrete evidence emerged that the government had in fact adopted a secret blueprint for the strangulation of the Baha'i community. The evidence came in the form of a secret memorandum drafted by the Supreme Revolutionary Council in 1991 – approved by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who added his signature to the document. The memorandum aimed at establishing policy regarding "the Baha'i question" and called for restrictions on Baha'is' access to education and livelihood in order to ensure "that their progress and development shall be blocked." Given the current campaign of persecution, it is clear that the policy continues to be in effect today.

In light of the 1991 memorandum, these fearsome trends signal that the Baha'i community in Iran is in imminent danger. We therefore make an urgent plea to all nations and peoples on behalf of our Iranian co-religionists that they not allow a law-abiding, peace-loving people to face the horrific consequences to which blind hate can lead. The ghastly deeds that grew out of similar circumstances in the past cannot be allowed to happen. Not again.

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