

# BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

*United Nations Office*

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## **Situation of the Baha'is in Iran – item 4**

Oral statement to the 17th session of the UN Human Rights Council  
15 June 2011  
Geneva

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has made repeated claims about its commitment to human rights. Concerning the Baha'is, Mr. Mohammad Javad Larijani has stated publicly several times that “no Baha'i in Iran is persecuted for his or her beliefs”. Regrettably, the facts prove just the opposite.

One of many striking examples: If Baha'is are not persecuted for their beliefs then why does the government relentlessly deny them access to higher education?

From the time of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 until 2003—almost 25 years—Baha'is could not enter university because the registration form for the national entrance exam required a declaration of religion. Their hopes were raised when, in response to international pressure, the government announced that this would be removed.

But Baha'is who took and passed the exam found that they were falsely declared to be Muslims on their student cards. And when this hurdle was resolved by another governmental twist, a token number who were able to enrol started to be expelled, one by one, some just before their final exams. Why? Because the government had never had any intention of changing its policy prohibiting Baha'is from entering the nation's institutions of higher learning. The evidence of this is plainly revealed in a secret letter issued in 2006, by the Ministry that oversees higher educational institutions, instructing 81 universities to expel any student identified as a Baha'i.

Many of those expelled did not give up, taking their cases to court, but even when they found a fair and sympathetic judge, he had to admit that his hands were tied because of the 1991 memorandum on the Baha'i question, endorsed by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, which stipulates that known Baha'is must be barred from higher education.

Under these circumstances, Baha'i volunteers offered university-level courses for other Baha'is in the privacy of their own homes – a quiet, peaceful initiative called the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education. Over the past 20 years, the government has tried three times to stop this effort. Three weeks ago, intelligence agents raided 40 Baha'i homes and arrested 18 of the volunteers in a concerted effort to crush their initiative – proving beyond any doubt that the government is determined to deny higher education (in any form, from any source) to all known Baha'is in Iran. The government flouts the international covenants to which it is a signatory and violates the laws of its own land and then shamelessly tries to garner support for its stance and to hide the true motive behind its actions under a peremptory statement that the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education is “illegal”. Where is the logic here? How can Iran possibly deny that it persecutes the Baha'is? If ever there were a case of actions speaking louder than words, this surely is it.

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