

# BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

*United Nations Office*

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## **Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to education**

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Geneva

Mr. Singh,

In your report, you speak about inequality and discrimination against ethnic and linguistic minorities. However, in some countries such as Iran, non-recognized religious minorities are also denied the right to education.

Persecution against Bahá'ís – the largest religious minority in Iran – even extends to children and youth. As you will have noted in documents submitted to your office by the Bahá'í International Community, thousands of highly qualified young people have been unjustly barred from university for over 30 years – only because of their beliefs. Iran's official guide to participating in this year's national university entrance exam stipulates as a requirement: "Belief in Islam or in one of the religions specified in the Constitution": Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. This is explicit religious prejudice as government policy, against all but the members of four of the world's religions.

Not only does the government of Iran deny Baha'is the right to enter university, it also cruelly prevents them from receiving higher education from any other source. This includes an informal initiative set up by Bahá'ís, offering university level courses to young people in their living rooms and kitchens. In May/June last year, government agents searched 40 homes and arrested 19 Bahá'ís engaged in this initiative. Six of them are still in prison today, serving four to five year sentences.

Moreover, throughout Iran, teachers or school administrators regularly insult, abuse and intimidate Bahá'í children and adolescents. Some students have been expelled or forced to change schools when it became known that they are Bahá'ís. In one brutal case, a teacher beat and burned the hand of a seven year old child because she had not participated in congregational prayers. In November 2011, the Ministry of Education called for all Bahá'í students, even those in kindergarten, to be identified.

Mr. Rapporteur, our question is this:

Has denial of higher education and persecution of Bahá'í children in school been raised in your communications with the Islamic Republic of Iran? And if so, what has been their answer to this clear violation of human rights?

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