

**Bahá'í children in Iran**

The Bahá'í children in Iran are affected in all aspects of their life by the persecution suffered by their parents and the Bahá'í community as a whole. The enclosed Update on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran describes this persecution, which is solely based on religious belief.

Some cases which directly affect the lives of Bahá'í children are as follows:

- Out of 15 Bahá'ís currently in prison, six of them are held under charges of activities directly related to children, youth (adolescents under the age of 18) and the family. (See Update, page 3, paragraph 3g)
- Mr. S. Dhjabihi-Muqaddam, Mr. H. Kashifi Najafabadi and Mr. A.H. Nasirizadih were arrested and imprisoned because they resisted cancelling the monthly "Family Life" meetings. (See Update, page 5, paragraph 3l)
- Mr. M. Haddadan and Mr. K. Ruhi were arrested and imprisoned for conducting Bahá'í children's classes and organizing a children's art exhibition. Mr. Ruhi was released on 16 April 1998 after spending two years in prison. (See Update, page 5, paragraph 3m)
- The home of a Bahá'í family, where a class for youth was being held, was raided, and the owner of the house, Mr. M Ziyai, the teacher, Mrs. S. Ahmadi and twelve students aged fifteen and sixteen were arrested and imprisoned. The students were given suspended sentences of three years imprisonment to be activated should they ever again commit the "crime" of taking part in Bahá'í moral education classes. (See Update, page 5, paragraph 3n)
- Two Bahá'ís teachers in Mashhad were arrested, detained and given summary sentences of three years imprisonment for participating in Bahá'í "Family Life" gatherings aimed at providing education to children and youth, while their students were given suspended sentences. One of the Bahá'ís was released after spending 21 months in prison. Three more Bahá'ís were arrested in Bujnurd and given suspended sentences of five years for participating in Bahá'í "Family Life" gatherings. (See Update, pages 6/7, paragraph 4b)
- Neither Bahá'í marriage nor divorce of Bahá'í parents is legally recognized in Iran, and the right of Bahá'ís to inherit is denied. (See Update, page 9, paragraph 9a)
- Homes and furniture belonging to Bahá'ís have been confiscated and many houses throughout the country have been raided, these raids often occurring late at night. (See Update, page 7, paragraphs 6a and 6b).
- Mr. R. Rawhani, executed on July 1998, was the father of four children, two of whom were under the age of 18. (See Update, page 2, paragraph 3a and page 5, paragraph 3l)

For more information, please see the enclosed update.

24 August 1999

## *Update*

### ***CURRENT SITUATION OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS IN IRAN***

***August 1999***

Since the Islamic Revolutionary regime took power in Iran in 1979, Bahá'ís have been harassed and persecuted solely on account of their religious beliefs. They have repeatedly been offered relief from persecution if they were prepared to recant their Faith.

With approximately 300,000 members, the Bahá'í Faith is Iran's largest religious minority, but it is not recognized as a religion by the Iranian Constitution. The Islamic regime refers to it as a heresy and a conspiracy. As "unprotected infidels," Bahá'ís have no legal rights, although Iran is a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantees freedom of religious belief.

A secret Iranian Government document published by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1993 confirms that Iran's anti-Bahá'í actions reflect deliberate government policy. Produced by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council on 25 February 1991 and approved by the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader, this document sets forth specific guidelines for dealing with "the Bahá'í question" so that Bahá'í "progress and development shall be blocked." It is no less than a blueprint for the slow strangulation of the Bahá'í community.

#### **1. THE BAHÁ'Í RELIGIOUS MINORITY IN IRAN**

The Bahá'í community in Iran poses no threat to the authorities. The principles of the Bahá'í Faith require Bahá'ís to be obedient to their government and to avoid partisan political involvement, subversive activity and all forms of violence. The Bahá'í community in Iran is not aligned with any government, ideology or opposition movement.

The Bahá'ís seek no special privileges. They desire only their rights under the International Bill of Human Rights, of which Iran is a signatory, including the right to life, the right to profess and practice their religion, the right to liberty and security of person, and the right to education and work.

#### **2. RECENT CHANGES IN THE SITUATION**

The most recent change in the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran has occurred in Mashhad, the capital of the Khurasan province. Further to the execution on 21 July 1998 of a Bahá'í prisoner, Mr. Ruhullah Rawhani, and the confirmation of the death sentences of two other Bahá'í prisoners, we have recently and unofficially heard that those sentences have been lifted. We are not yet aware of any new sentences imposed.

2a. Furthermore, there has been a widespread assault on Bahá'í educational activities in Iran, including the arrest of more than 36 faculty members of the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education and confiscation of material. More than 500 Bahá'í homes throughout Iran were also recently raided.

2b. In September 1996 we were informed that Bahá'í students had been barred from the final year of high school, which had been designated a pre-university year. We are now able to report that this discrimination against Bahá'í youth appears to have been lifted, and they are now able to register for the pre-university year at their high school.

### **3. EXECUTIONS, DEATH SENTENCES AND IMPRISONMENT**

Since 1979, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed, and 15 others have disappeared and are presumed dead.

3a. Mr. Ruhullah Rawhani, executed by hanging on 21 July 1998 after having served nine months in solitary confinement, stood accused of converting a woman to the Bahá'í Faith. The woman concerned refuted the accusation, stating that her mother was a Bahá'í and she herself had been raised as a Bahá'í. There is no evidence that Mr. Rawhani was accorded any legal process or access to a lawyer, and no sentence was announced prior to his execution.

3b. In July 1997 two Bahá'ís, Mr. Masha'llah Enayati and Mr. Shahram Reza'i, were killed in unrelated incidents but both because of their religious beliefs.

3c. Mr. Masha'llah Enayati, a 63-year-old Bahá'í resident of Tehran, died on 4 July 1997, after being severely beaten while in custody. During a visit to his native village of Ardistan to attend a Bahá'í meeting, Mr. Enayati was arrested under circumstances which are not clear. He was taken to prison in Isfahan, where he was severely beaten on all parts of the body. It appears that he was held in prison for about a week before being taken to a hospital, where he eventually passed away. Mr. Enayati's death certificate is worded in a most unusual way, suggesting that the doctor himself may have been under threat. Under "cause of death" the doctor entered in his own handwriting, "will be known later."

3d. Mr. Shahram Reza'i, a young Bahá'í serving as a conscript in the Iranian army on a military base near the city of Rasht, was shot in the head by his superior officer on 6 July 1997 and died the following day. The officer concerned, who was responsible for weapons training, maintained that the bullets were fired in error. He was released after a few days, once it was determined that the dead soldier was a Bahá'í. The court excused the officer of paying the blood money normally required in such instances, ordering him to pay just the cost of the three bullets used to kill Mr. Reza'i. Mr. Reza'i is the seventh Bahá'í in Iran engaged in compulsory military service to have been slain by officers or other soldiers.

3e. Arbitrary arrests of Bahá'ís continue, with a marked increase in the number of short-term arrests in various areas of the country. During the past three years more than 200 Bahá'ís have been arrested and detained for periods ranging from 48 hours to six months in cities such as Yazd, Isfahan, Simnan, Babul, Kirmanshah, Mashhad, Shiraz, Tankabun, Ahvaz, Kirman, Karaj, Qa'im Shahr and Tehran.

3f. Since November 1997 there have been fifty-three Bahá'ís arrested and imprisoned, and forty-three released. Mr. Ziaullah Mirzapanah, arrested in October 1998 in relation to the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education, was subsequently released but was re-arrested on 7 March 1999. After having been taken ill in prison and hospitalized, he was then allowed to return to his home on the understanding that the prison authorities could find him whenever necessary. On 19 March 1999, Mr. Arman Damishqi and Mr. Kurush Dhabihí were granted amnesty and released, after some three years' imprisonment for having refused to recant their faith. Recently, Mr. Naser Qadiri has been released after serving 21 months in prison. He was first arrested on 29 July 1997 in Birjand and released in mid-September. He was rearrested on 5 November of the same year, having resisted the pressure placed upon him by the authorities in the region to desist from holding "Family Life" meetings, and was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

3g. The fifteen Bahá'ís being held in prisons because of their religious beliefs, as of August 1999, are as follows:

Name	Date of Arrest	Charge	Sentence
Mr. Bihnam Mithaqi	29 April 1989	Zionist Bahá'í activities	Death
Mr. Kayvan Khalajabadi	29 April 1989	Zionist Bahá'í activities	Death
Mr. Musa Talibi	7 June 1994	Teaching the Faith, apostasy	Death
Mr. Dhabihu'llah Mahrami	6 September 1995	Apostasy	Death
Mr. Mansur Haddadan	29 February 1996	Holding children's art exhibition	3 years
Mr. Sirus Dhabihí-Muqaddam	Oct./Nov. 1997	Continuing "Family Life" Meetings	Not known
Mr. Hidayat Kashifi Najafabadi	Oct./Nov. 1997	Continuing "Family Life" Meetings	Not known
Mr. Ata'u'llah Hamid Nasirizadih	Oct./Nov. 1997	Continuing "Family Life" Meetings	10 years
Mrs. Sonia Ahmadi	1 May 1998	Holding of meetings for the youth	3 years
Mr. Manuchehr Ziyai	May 1998	Holding of meetings For the youth	3 years
Mr. Farzad Khajeh	Early October 1998	Participation in the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education	7 years
Dr. Sina Hakiman	Early October 1998	Participation in the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education	10 years
Mr. Habibullah Ferdosian	Early October 1998	Participation in the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education	7 years

Mr. Ziaullah Mirzapanah (under house arrest)	7 March 1999	Participation in the Institute for Higher Bahá'í Studies	3 years
Mr. Manuchehr Khulusi	9 June 1999	Unknown	unknown

The following are details regarding some of these prisoners:

3h. Three of the prisoners currently under sentence of death, Mr. Kayvan Khalajabadi, Mr. Bihnam Mithaqi and Mr. Musa Talibi are being held in Evin prison in Tehran. Although the prisoners have no access to their lawyers, their counsel continues to act on their behalf. It appears that the authorities have reacted negatively towards these efforts. Limitations have been placed on visits to the prisoners held in Tehran. Friends wishing to visit the prisoners must now obtain the permission of the court. The families of the prisoners are permitted to visit once a week. Their wives are now required to present proof of their marriage in order to be able to visit their husbands. This requirement is particularly difficult because Bahá'í marriage certificates are not regarded as valid by the Iranian authorities.

3i. Mr. Kayvan Khalajabadi and Mr. Bihnam Mithaqi have been imprisoned since 1989 on charges arising solely from membership in the Bahá'í Faith. Both were originally sentenced to eight years imprisonment. Upon appeal their sentences were commuted to three years imprisonment plus 50 lashes. Both prisoners again appealed. On 30 April 1991, they were sentenced to death by the Islamic Revolutionary Court. Despite further appeals the sentences were reconfirmed on 24 August 1992 and again on 23 November 1993. On 18 February 1996 the Supreme Court of Iran rejected the appeals, confirmed the death sentences and conveyed this information to the Islamic Revolutionary Court. The prisoners have written to the Office of the Attorney General, asking that the verdicts be rescinded.

3j. Mr. Musa Talibi, arrested on 7 June 1994 and sentenced to death for apostasy on 18 August 1996 by the Islamic Revolutionary Court, branch number 31, is in the Evin Prison in Tehran. He was initially sentenced to ten years in prison for having shared the tenets of his Faith with others. An appellate court reduced that sentence to 18 months. The public prosecutors, protesting that the sentence was too light and that the court had failed to consider the charge of apostasy, appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court referred the case to Islamic Revolutionary Court, branch 31, which set aside the earlier sentence and imposed the death sentence for apostasy. The death sentence was appealed, but on 28 January 1997 the Bahá'í International Community was informed that the Supreme Court of Iran had confirmed the sentence. This news was conveyed to relatives of Mr. Talibi during prison visits. It has been the practice of the Iranian authorities to convey verdicts orally to prisoners and not to give them a copy of the actual text of the court decision.

3k. Mr. Dhabihu'llah Mahrami, also under sentence of death, is being held in a general prison in Yazd. Mr. Mahrami was called before the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Yazd on 6 September 1995, and questioned about his adherence to the Bahá'í Faith. The Court held several meetings with Mr. Mahrami in an effort to persuade him to renounce his beliefs. He refused and was charged with apostasy. On 2 January 1996, he was

sentenced to death. Since his heirs are not Muslims, but Bahá'ís, his properties and assets have been confiscated. Mr. Mahrami's lawyer appealed to the Supreme Court, and it was announced by Iranian officials that the Court rejected the verdict of the Revolutionary Court and referred the case to a civil court. However, on 28 January 1997 the Bahá'í International Community was informed that the Supreme Court of Iran had confirmed the death sentence. As in Mr. Talibi's case, this news was conveyed orally to his relatives.

3l. Mr. Sirus Dhabihī-Muqaddam, Mr. Hidayat Kashifi Najafabadi and Mr. Ata'u'llah Hamid Nasirizadih were arrested in Mashhad. Although the main reason for their arrest was that they had resisted cancelling the monthly "Family Life" meetings, the pretext used was that they had enrolled into the Bahá'í community a woman whose parents were Muslim. The woman insists that her parents are Bahá'ís, an assertion that the authorities have refused to accept. She has further stated that, even if her parents had been broken by pressure that the authorities may have exerted on them to deny their Faith, this would not change the reality of their being Bahá'ís. They faced trial in Branch 8 of the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad during the month of Bahman (January/February) 1998, as had Mr. Ruhu'llah Rawhani. All four had been sentenced to death, but the verdict of the court in each case had to be submitted to the Supreme Court in Teheran for ratification. The Supreme Court reportedly confirmed the death sentence only in the case of Mr. Rawhani, and, for technical reasons, returned the cases of the other three to Mashhad to be retried, this time by Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court. Whereas in the previous trial the prisoners had no lawyer to defend them, a lapse apparently noted by the Supreme Court, at the retrial a lawyer not approved by the defendants was assigned to them. The accused had vehemently objected to some of the statements of their defence counsel, which appeared to prejudice their case. The prisoners were then told that the verdict of the court would be decided later. Subsequently the prisoners were informed orally that the death sentences had been confirmed in the cases of Messrs. Muqaddam and Najafabadi, and that Mr. Nasirizadih had been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. We have now received unofficial reports that the death sentences on Mr. Sirus Dhabihī-Muqaddam and Mr. Hidayat Kashifi Najafabadi have been lifted. No official confirmation has yet been obtained, nor are we aware of any new sentences imposed.

3m. Mr. Mansur Haddadan and Mr. Kamyar Ruhi were arrested on 29 February 1996, while conducting a Bahá'í children's class, and were sentenced to three years' imprisonment. They were convicted of being active in the Bahá'í community, of gathering for Bahá'í meetings in a private house and of working against the country's security by organizing a children's art exhibit. Mr. Ruhi was released on 16 April 1998, while Mr. Haddadan remains incarcerated in Mashhad.

3n. On 1 May 1998, authorities in Mashhad surrounded and raided the home of a Bahá'í family, where a class for youth was being held. The teacher, Mrs. Sonia Ahmadi, and the owner of the house, Mr. Manuchehr Ziyai, along with twelve students aged fifteen and sixteen, were arrested and detained for one week. They were hastily sentenced without being allowed to engage a lawyer. Mrs. Ahmadi and Mr. Ziyai were sentenced to three years' imprisonment, while the twelve students were released on parole, having been given, despite their age, suspended sentences of three years' imprisonment to be activated should they ever again commit the "crime" of taking part in Bahá'í moral education classes.

3o. Mr. Farzad Khajeh, Dr. Sina Hakiman, Mr. Habibullah Ferdosian and Mr. Ziaullah Mirzapanah have been convicted in connection with their participation in the activities of the Institute for Higher Bahá'í Studies, which is a similar kind of organization to the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), although the latter focuses mainly on academic subjects whereas the Institute of Higher Bahá'í Studies is essentially concerned with the study of matters related directly to the Bahá'í Faith. In the court verdict the Institute is referred to as "secret", and its crime is to attract youth to undertake study of their own Faith. Mr. Mirzapanah, taken ill in prison, has been allowed by the prison authorities to return to his home, on the understanding that they could find him whenever necessary.

3p. Mr. Manuchehr Khulusi, a resident of Khurasan, was arrested on 9 June 1999 while on a visit to Birjand. He was subsequently transferred to Mashhad, the capital of the province, and is held in the Information Organization prison. While it is clear that he was arrested because of his Bahá'í activities, it is not known what the charges brought against him are or when his trial may be expected.

3q. Mr. Ramadan-Ali Dhulfaqari, who had been imprisoned in Rafsanjan, was condemned to death for apostasy. On 6 January 1994, we learned that he had been released from prison. The apostasy charge however, has not been resolved.

#### **4. DENIAL OF THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE AS A PEACEFUL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY**

Since 1983 the Bahá'í community has been denied the right to assemble officially and the right to maintain its administrative institutions, those democratically elected governing bodies which in other countries organize and administer the religious activities of the community. Since the Bahá'í Faith has no clergy, the denial of the right to elect these institutions threatens the very existence of a viable religious community. These sacred institutions perform many of the functions reserved to clergy in other religions and are the foundational element of Bahá'í community life.

4a. Gradually over the last few years the Iranian Bahá'ís have developed makeshift arrangements to worship in small groups, to conduct classes for children, and to take care of other community needs. However, authorities continue to harass the Bahá'í community by disrupting meetings and occasionally arresting teachers of children's or "family life" classes. At present seven persons are in prison for conducting such classes.

4b. The latest events in Khurasan suggest an intensification of efforts to terrorize members of the Faith and to suffocate the spiritual life of the Bahá'í community in the region by further curtailing activities aimed at providing education to Bahá'í children and youth. A recent example of this abuse was the arrest, detention and summary sentence of two teachers in Mashhad, the capital of Khurasan, to three years' imprisonment, while their students were given suspended sentences, to be carried out should the young people again commit the "crime" of participating in such classes. In the middle of September, three more Bahá'ís, Mrs. Nahid Sabeti, Mr. Manouchehr Sharifi and Mr. Hushmand

Sanani, were arrested, this time in Bujnurd, northern Khurasan, for participating in Bahá'í "Family Life" gatherings. After spending six days in prison, they were released, having also been given suspended sentences of five years' imprisonment.

4c. This use of suspended sentences is a new tactic devised by the Ministry of Information (Intelligence) to prevent Bahá'ís from participating in monthly religious gatherings. It is a threatening device, and the Bahá'ís in Iran are fearful that it may be extended to other parts of the country if allowed to go unchallenged. As has been the recent practice of the Government of Iran, no written documentation relating to the arrest or punishment of the Bahá'ís has been provided to them.

## **5. CONFISCATION AND DESTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY PROPERTIES**

Bahá'í cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centres and other assets were seized shortly after the 1979 revolution. No properties have been returned and many have been destroyed.

Seizure of cemeteries throughout Iran has created problems for Bahá'ís, who have difficulties burying their dead and identifying gravesites. They are permitted access only to areas of wasteland, designated by the Government for their use, and are not permitted to mark the graves of their loved ones.

## **6. CONFISCATION OF PROPERTIES BELONGING TO BAHÁ'ÍS**

The property rights of Bahá'ís are generally disregarded. Since 1979, large numbers of private and business properties belonging to Bahá'ís, including homes and farms, have been arbitrarily confiscated.

6a. Three Bahá'í homes in Yazd and one in Arbakan have been recently confiscated because their owners were members of the Bahá'í community. In places like Yazd the confiscation of Bahá'í houses and properties is routinely pursued.

6b. More recently over 500 Bahá'í homes throughout Iran have been raided at the hands of intelligence officers. When queried about the seizure of personal household effects like television sets and pieces of furniture, these officers claimed that they had been authorized by the Attorney-General to take anything they wished.

Seizure of personal properties, together with the denial of access to education and employment, continues to erode the economic base of the Bahá'í community.

## **7. DENIAL OF EMPLOYMENT, PENSIONS AND OTHER BENEFITS**

The confiscation of property is only one of the ways in which the government is systematically weakening the economic base of the Bahá'í community. Many Bahá'ís in Iran have also been deprived of the means to earn a living. In the early 1980s more than

10,000 Bahá'ís were dismissed from positions in government and educational institutions because of their religious beliefs. Many remain unemployed and receive no unemployment benefits. The pensions of Bahá'ís dismissed on religious grounds were terminated; some of the Bahá'ís have even been required to return salaries or pensions paid to them. Bahá'í farmers are denied admission to farmers' cooperatives, which are often the only sources of credit, seeds, pesticide and fertilizer.

Bahá'ís throughout the country have been bullied and intimidated into abandoning their professions. For example, fabricated excuses were used to force one Bahá'í doctor to close his practice. Another Bahá'í doctor was arrested, beaten, slandered, and forced to co-operate with the security guards.

Stores owned by Bahá'ís of Abadih have been closed for more than 12 years now. Although constant complaints have been made, no positive results have been achieved.

## **8. DENIAL OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

An entire generation of Bahá'ís has been systematically barred from higher education in legally recognized public and private institutions of learning in Iran.

Having been denied access to higher education for years, in 1987 the Bahá'ís established their own higher education programme to meet the educational needs of as many of their young people as resources will allow. By 1996 several hundred students were enrolled, and eleven had graduated with the equivalent of a bachelor's degree.

In late September, more than 36 faculty members of the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) were reported to have been arrested in cities across the country. It is understood that most of these have now been released. The arrests were carried out by officers of the Iranian Government's intelligence agency, the Ministry of Information, and also involved the seizure of textbooks, scientific papers and documentary records, some 70 computers, and items of furniture useful to students, including tables and benches. Those arrested were asked to sign a document declaring that BIHE had ceased to exist as of 29 September and undertaking that they would no longer cooperate with it. The detainees refused to sign any such declaration.

The Bahá'í Faith places a high value on education, and Bahá'ís have always been among the best-educated groups in Iran. Being denied access to higher education for years is demoralizing to Bahá'í youth. This erosion of the educational level of the community is, as authors of the policy envisioned, inevitably leading to the impoverishment of the community.

## **9. DENIAL OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES**

Unlike Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, the Bahá'í Faith is not recognized in the Iranian Constitution; therefore, Bahá'ís fall into the category of "unprotected infidels,"

whose rights can be ignored with impunity. In general, the pressures placed on Bahá'ís by the judicial system have increased.

9a. Neither Bahá'í marriage nor divorce is legally recognized in Iran, and the right of Bahá'ís to inherit is denied. For example, a Bahá'í was recently prevented from receiving her rightful share in the inheritance following the death of her daughter. The Ministry of Justice, Tehran Civil Court, issued a Certification of Inheritance which states that the only heir of the deceased is her husband, a Muslim, "...because the other inheritors are Bahá'ís, and subject to Article No. 881 of the Civil Law." On appeal, the Central Public Court ruled that this woman's objection to the previous verdict "...is unfounded because she has frankly admitted to the court that she is a Bahá'í." Until 1995, attempts to gain probate were permitted if carried out in a special way; however, since 1996, Bahá'ís have been strictly forbidden to seek probate.

9b. The freedom of Bahá'ís to travel outside or inside Iran is often impeded by Iranian authorities and sometimes denied. Although the last year has witnessed an increase in the number of Iranian Bahá'ís given passports, it is too soon to judge whether there has been a change of policy on the part of the Iranian government on this issue.

Such treatment is not confined to Iran itself. Bahá'ís applying to Iranian embassies abroad to renew their passports or to obtain visas to return to Iran have often found officials similarly uncooperative. However, the Iranian embassies in some countries do not require the applicants to state their religious affiliation; in such countries, Bahá'ís are more likely to be able to obtain visas or to renew their Iranian passports. Passport application forms which require applicants to declare their affiliation with a "recognized religion" have been used to pressure Bahá'ís to recant their religious beliefs.

9c. Furthermore, in a number of communities the practice of summoning Bahá'ís to the security offices on various specious pretexts and insulting and belittling them, so as to create fear in their families and weaken their spirits, still continues unabated.

9d. In spite of relentless oppression over the last 20 years, the Iranian Bahá'í community survives and maintains its identity. Its strength and determination, as well as the pressure of world public opinion as expressed in resolutions passed by the United Nations and the parliaments of several countries, have made it possible for the Bahá'í community to continue to exist in a difficult and hostile environment. The Bahá'ís have devised ways of teaching the Faith to their children, of worshipping in small groups in private homes, of providing some education to their youth, and of preserving the spirit of the community even without their religious institutions, which were disbanded by order of the Islamic government.

## **10. NO IMPROVEMENT IN SITUATION SINCE THE ELECTION OF PRESIDENT KHATAMI**

Regrettably, since President Mohammad Khatami took office, there has been no discernible improvement in the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. Recent events in Mashhad indicate that the persecutions of Bahá'ís have indeed intensified. With the execution of

Mr. Ruhullah Rawhani on 21 July 1998, and the arrests and raids made in connection with the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education, no other conclusion can be drawn.

The current circumstances are best understood in the context of the unique nature of the persecution to which Iranian Bahá'ís have been subjected for over a century. The Iranian Bahá'í community has frequently served as a scapegoat, used by various factions struggling for political ascendancy. This has been the case regardless of the changes in political or dynastic regime. Whenever political leaders have felt a need to divert public attention from some economic, social, or political issue, they have found the Bahá'í community an easy target because of the senseless hostility and prejudice inculcated in the public by generations of ecclesiastical propaganda.

It is not the actions of the Bahá'ís but the circumstances of Iranian history that have conspired to make the "Bahá'í case" a litmus test of sincerity for Iranian public figures who represent themselves as voices of reform and progress.