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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Bahá'í International Community, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language received from the submitting non-governmental organizations.

Over thirty years of systematic persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran

For over 30 years the Bahá'í community has been suffering constant persecution at the hands of the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This has been amply documented in numerous United Nations reports, by the Secretary General himself, the Special Representatives on Iran, and those Special Procedures that visited the country when they were still allowed to visit (although Iran has supposedly issued a standing invitation to all special procedures, it has been 7 years since a visit has been allowed). The persecution is included in the report of the Special Rapporteur on Iran, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed. Dozens of resolutions have been adopted by the various international fora, all condemning Iran for the violations of the rights of its citizens, and amongst them the members of the Bahá'í religious minority.

For three decades, notwithstanding incontrovertible evidence of the Iranian government's persecution of Bahá'ís, when its representatives are called to account in international forums, they have categorically denied this persecution. Recently, government representatives made the following public statements: Dr. Mohammad Javad Larijani, Secretary-General of the Iranian High Council for Human Rights: "no Baha'i in Iran is prosecuted because he is Bahá'í"¹; Mr. Seyed Mohammad Ali Pourmousavi, Director General for political affairs of the Ministry of Interior: "the totality of the religions and the Sufis and the Bahá'ís are given equal treatment by the law and they enjoy their rights as citizens; they're not discriminated against"²; and Mr. Khosro Hakeemee, Deputy Secretary-General of the Human Rights High Council: "the Bahá'ís community, as far as livelihoods are concerned, they are doing very well. They are very well off."³ Sadly, these types of comments are not only the lot of Bahá'ís. In an interview not long ago, the same Dr. Larijani also asserted that "there are no political prisoners inside the Islamic Republic of Iran".⁴

But the reality of life for the Bahá'ís is quite different from what officials assert. The clarity of the contradiction lies in the secret memorandum signed by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei himself⁵ and which clearly states that "they must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís", or that the government should "Deny them employment if they identify themselves as Bahá'ís."

Some officials such as Mrs. Soheila Hamed, Director of the Office for Treaties (affiliated to the judiciary's department of international affairs), go as far as stating that "we are mostly dealing with criminal activity, and some have engaged in crime and later they have said that they have been prosecuted because of being a member of the Bahá'í community."⁶

One might ask her what criminal activity was committed by Bahá'í pupils or students who were expelled from their school because they had asked not to participate in congregational prayer or because they had not remained silent when teachers made false accusations about their religion in class. In one such case, a Bahá'í high school student in Tonekabon was

¹ Iran's UPR, 15 February 2010.

² Iran's reporting to the Human Rights Committee, 18 October 2011.

³ Idem.

⁴ <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2012/07/larijani-denies-political-prisoners>.

⁵ Persian: http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5_TheISRCCdocument.pdf

English: http://news.bahai.org/documentlibrary/575/5_TheISRCCdocument_en.pdf.

⁶ Iran's reporting to the Human Rights Committee, 18 October 2011.

expelled after he had complained to the principal about the distribution of an anti-Bahá'í flyer during the school's morning ceremony. Education officials told his parents the Intelligence Ministry had ordered his expulsion and the Department of Education could do nothing about it. The incident happened during the period of final examinations and made it impossible for him to take part in the exams. One might also ask who is really the criminal when a young girl selected "Bahaism" (a recently added option in the religion column) on a registration form at a school in Isfahan and was immediately expelled.

How can one qualify as criminal activity the transformation of a barren land given to Bahá'ís in Sanandaj into a beautiful cemetery? How can one defend an order for the land to be confiscated and the buildings and graves destroyed? How can one justify 20-year prison sentences against the seven individuals who attended to the spiritual and social needs of the Bahá'í community, or the imprisonment of Bahá'ís who assisted with providing for the educational needs of youth who are debarred from attending the country's universities because of their religion?

Ultimately, it suffices to say that when the late Professor Abdelfattah Amor of Tunisia asked the following questions to the Iranian delegation at the Human Rights Committee,⁷ no one in the delegation answered any of those questions, or even alluded to them:

- Could the delegation today, before this Committee, state that Bahá'í students do have the right to gain access to university and that they are not expelled from it?
- The Bahá'ís, like other citizens, do they have the right to engage in their social, cultural and commercial lives?
- Would the delegation condemn the attacks which have taken place on a number of occasions on Bahá'í cemeteries?

The authorities have not limited themselves to the violations listed above. They have steadily changed their methods in order to reach their ultimate and immutable goal: to eradicate the Bahá'í community as a viable entity in Iran.

To put recent events in context, it should be recalled that, in the wake of the extreme brutality they suffered immediately following the Islamic revolution, the Bahá'ís experienced a certain measure of relief from the late 1980s until late 2004. Five Bahá'ís were in Iranian prisons in 2001, four in 2002-2003, and only two were arrested in 2004. Then the persecution began to intensify again. From late 2004 to today, there have been over 600 arrests. During 2011, the number of Bahá'ís in prison rose steadily for six months – from 57 in January to 103 in June – and then remained high, reaching 116 in August this year. In addition, since 2005, intelligence officers have summoned well over 1000 more for interrogation without officially arresting them: 196 such cases were reported in 2007 and many hundreds since then.

Members of the community have been arrested throughout the country. Recently, however, more have been detained in sections reportedly controlled by the Intelligence Ministry – where detainees are sometimes kept in solitary confinement, suffer ill-treatment, and are interrogated for months without charge. Most were detained for weeks or months before being released on bail. Bail has been very high, requiring families to hand over deeds to property, business or work licences. In nearly all cases, their homes and/or workplaces were searched and personal belongings confiscated. Recently officials who raid and search Bahá'í homes have heightened their use of violence.

⁷ 18 October 2011.

Moreover, the upsurge in human rights violations against Bahá'ís in Iran over the past six years was both preceded and accompanied by efforts to incite hatred, distrust, intolerance and even violence against them. Some officials have openly encouraged the persecution, and some clerics have preached sermons against the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents. In June 2011, the Bahá'í International Community submitted reports documenting recent instances of incitement to hatred and intolerance against the Bahá'ís in Iran contained in over 360 articles, 58 seminars, six TV programmes, three radio series and five official exhibitions. In all cases, the disseminations were sponsored and/or approved by the State. The documented extracts present a wide range of totally false allegations. In some cases, lies and misrepresentations distort history, grossly malign Bahá'í moral principles and vilify both the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents, using malicious or vile language and innuendo. In other cases, Bahá'ís are falsely accused of espionage, conspiracy, instigating sedition and other illegal, anti-regime activities that threaten national security.

This is quite contrary to the statements made by Iranian officials, and in stark contradiction with the provisions of the resolution⁸ Iran co-sponsors (as an OIC member) which:

- Expresses deep concern at the continued serious instances of derogatory stereotyping, negative profiling and stigmatization of persons based on their religion or belief, ... , in particular when condoned by Governments;
- Condemns, in this context, any advocacy of religious hatred against individuals that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, and urges States to take effective measures, ..., to address and combat such incidents;
- Condemns any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, whether it involves the use of print, audio-visual or electronic media or any other means.

The Iranian Bahá'ís have been responding to all these forms of oppression with constructive resilience, neither succumbing in resignation nor taking on the characteristics of the oppressor, but rather cultivating inner strength and principled action by focusing on spiritual and social development. They counter inhumanity with patience, deception with truthfulness, and cruelty with good will, and keep turning their attention to long-term, beneficial, productive action. They want and will stay in Iran to fulfill their social and spiritual responsibilities, and are endeavouring to contribute to the advancement of their homeland and our common humanity.

⁸ Resolution 19/25 of the Human Rights Council adopted on 23 March 2012.