

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

BY TAHIRIH TAHRIRIHA-DANESH

For the Bahá'ís the world over, the most familiar case of obstruction of human rights is that of the members of the community living in Iran, the birthplace of the Bahá'í Faith. Since the inception of the Bahá'í Era in 1844, the central figures and their followers have faced continuous waves of religious persecution in various forms and levels of intensity. One of the most prominent features of these sixteen decades of religious intolerance is the harassment of Bahá'í students and educators. Amongst the earliest state-sponsored actions of the post-revolution government in Iran, was the expulsion of thousands of members and children of members of the Bahá'í community from educational institutions. The following paper takes a brief look at this phenomenon.

The Islamic Dispensation began after the first encounter of Muhammad with Archangel Gabriel. It happened on the night of the 26th of Ramadan in 610 AD, in a cave on Mount Hirra in what is known today as Saudi Arabia. The next twenty some years of Prophet Muhammad's ministry were filled with victories, wars and sacrifice. It is believed that he passed away in 632 AD and that immediately upon his passing, the Islamic nation faced its first division into two factions of Shiite and Sunni. This was a result of disagreement over the rightful successorship of the community of the "Faithful." The Sunnis began the Caliphate regime starting with Abú Bakr, the father-in-law of Muhammad. The Shiite Muslims went on under the leadership of eleven Imams following the first Imam, "Alí, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet. The twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mihdí, the five-year-old son of Imam Hasan al-Askari is said to be hiding in a hole in Samarra' in Arabia. It is believed that "though invisible, he is living and 'when the earth is full of cruelty he will appear and bring justice.'"²

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

Islam was introduced to Iran in 634 AD. Since then, Shiite Islam and the Muslim clergy or *ulamá* have remained as integral parts of the Iranian community and culture. The thirst for the return of the twelfth Imam has dominated Muslim activities in Iran over the past centuries. Many believe that the twelfth Imam will reappear one thousand years after his disappearance in 260 A.H. (844 AD). Around the 1840's many *ulamá* and their followers began their search for the promised Qá'im in Iran. Among them were the renowned scholar Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í, his student Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashti, and finally Mullá Husayn-i-Bushru'í. The Bahá'ís believe that Mullá Husayn was the first man to have met the Promised Qá'im, Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad, or the Báb, in Shiraz, Iran. The Báb revealed to Mullá Husayn that He was the bearer of a Divine Message from God. The essence of His message was that the time had come to prepare for the establishment of justice on earth. This was to be accomplished through the teachings of one who was to come after Him. The Báb described His own station as the herald to a second Divine Manifestation whom He referred to as *Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest*.³

The Iranian church-state sent various individuals to investigate the claims of the Báb. The most trusted and established amongst them left all worldly possessions and positions to follow His teachings. Similar to the early days of other divinely-revealed religions, the power-seeking clergy and the government felt threatened by the increasing popularity of the new faith, gained in a short period of time. Thus, the political and religious leadership of Iran began their opposition towards the Bábís. The promised Qá'im, along with Mullá Husayn and thousands of followers, were killed at the hand of their fellow countrymen who still awaited the coming of the twelfth Imam, and who were encouraged by the *ulamá* to consider the Báb as an impostor.⁴ With the public execution of the Báb, the *ulamá* and the government had hoped to put an end to the Bábí movement. However, shortly after the death of the Bab, one of his young followers named Mirzá Husayn 'Alí-i-Núrí, a nobleman, claimed to be *Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest*. He later came to be known as Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God. The Bahá'ís around the world believe that He is the promised one of all ages, the hallmark of whose teachings is the belief that "The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race."⁵

The persecution of the followers of the Bábí and later, the Bahá'í community began with the beating of Mullá 'Alí-i-Bastámí,⁶ one of the first followers of the Báb, and has continued until today. Over the years various governmental and non-governmental organizations all over the globe have condemned such crimes against the Bahá'ís. After the establishment of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran saw no improvement.

Soon after this Declaration, the Iranian Bahá'ís suffered one of the most intense waves of persecution under the leadership of Ayatu'llah Falsafi, and the elite in the Iranian government and army in 1955.⁷ This anti-Bahá'í campaign and many others are based on false accusations against the Bahá'í community. These accusations accompany deep-rooted religious prejudice that “is, paradoxically, combined with an almost universal ignorance of the religion’s nature, teachings, and history.”⁸

Over the decades the clergy have encouraged all Muslims to shun the Bahá'ís for they are considered as apostates and “unprotected infidels”⁹. By creating this division they rule the mindset and beliefs of religious Iran against the Bahá'ís. Historically, the clergy are the only ones with exclusive knowledge of the Scripture, as they “forbade the translation of the Qur’án into Persian.”¹⁰ Thus, the clergy occupied the elite position of ruling on various issues including the case of the Bahá'ís.

Since the inception of the Bahá'í Faith, but more explicitly after the 1979 Islamic revolution, the Bahá'ís have been accused of spying for various countries such as Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Spain and Israel. The 1979 revolution expanded this list to include charges of ties with Zionism, the Shah’s regime and SAVAK,¹¹ thus portraying the Bahá'í community as an entirely ungodly, dangerous and political sect of infidels. Therefore, Bahá'ís are not mentioned in the Iranian constitution, even though they are the largest religious minority in that land. This act on the part of the government in Iran is a proof of the Islamic Republic’s denial of the most basic human rights of the Iranian Bahá'ís. In an official secret document, the government of Iran summarizes their policies toward the Bahá'ís so “that their progress and development shall be blocked.”¹² This is in direct conflict with the spirit and articles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Furthermore, it demonstrates the fact that “the campaign against the Bahá'ís is centrally directed by the Government.”¹³

Some Basic Islamic and Bahá'í Rights and Obligations

The treatment of the Bahá'í community since its early days by the Muslim clergy can give the impression that Islam validates the oppression of the Bahá'ís and the tenets of the Bahá'í Faith. However, as an example, the Qur’án and the Aqdas, the holy books of Islam and the Bahá'í Faith, have much more in common than in contradiction. Both books, much like other holy books proclaim the oneness of God, the sacredness of human nature and establish various rights for the individual. They outline a number of duties on the part of the individual and society, thus setting the framework within which principles such as equality, justice, freedom and unity are acknowledged and promoted. Among the first

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

words recorded in the Qur'án, and attributed to Muhammad are: "Read in the name of your Lord who createth, Created man from a clot..."¹⁴

This sentence embodies the notion that human beings have both spiritual and material attributes. To satisfy the needs of both dimensions, the Qur'án attributes various rights and responsibilities to the body of believers. These rights include freedom (from slavery) for all men based on the principle of equality, the right to education, the right to belief, and Jihad, the right to defend oneself and one's beliefs. On the other hand the Qur'án prescribes a number of responsibilities to its followers. These are based on the fundamental belief of submission to the Will of God (Islam). These responsibilities include daily prayers, fasting, charity and pilgrimage among others. They are necessary factors in the concept of Muslim community expressed as "brotherhood." Muslims were the first to organize themselves based on "religion, rather than blood."¹⁵ Religious affiliation or membership is then the point of unity for Muslims. This unity implies that by becoming a Muslim, human beings of various backgrounds attain an equal station. Also, in submission and obedience to the Will of God, lies the key to dignity: "We exalt in dignity whom We please; surely your Lord is Wise, Knowing."¹⁶

The Bahá'í Writings also emphasize that God is the creator of human beings,¹⁷ whose nature has spiritual and material attributes.¹⁸ Bahá'ís also have rights and obligations. Such rights and obligations include the right to education, the right to freedom of religion, equal gender and racial rights, the right to participate in the administrative affairs of the community, the right to prayer, fasting, economic development and welfare, and consultation as the means to resolve conflict.

The fundamental difference between the Bahá'í Writings and Islamic teachings is the all-inclusive definition of unity. The unity of humankind in the Bahá'í sense is not a given fact based on race, or religious affiliation. It is based on the oneness of humanbeings as equal in station and yet diverse in the degree to which each endeavors to develop his or her capacities. They are seen as "the fingers of one hand, the members of one body."¹⁹ The entire body of humanity benefit from equal rights. Indeed, all humanbeings:

...at the time when they first become manifest in the world of the body, are equal, and each is sanctified and pure. In this world, however, they will begin to differ one from another, some achieving the highest station, some a middle one, others remaining at the lowest stage of being. Their equal status is at the beginning of their existence; the differentiation followeth their passing away.²⁰

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

What is clear in this statement is that the process of life for a human being contains a series of decisions and actions, which ultimately determine various stations of individuals, not in this life, but in the life to come.

This paper is concerned with these decisions and actions in light of human rights and obligations. The above quotation implies that the span of a human lifetime is the period in which the individual has the choice to fulfill his or her rights and obligations in order to develop. The manners in which this is carried out are diverse. But the common element in this process is that of development and progress of individuals *and* communities. The Bahá'í concept of community moves beyond the Muslim notion of "brotherhood" based on religious affiliation. It ultimately covers the globe, and embraces all members of the human race without any exemption based on race, religion, gender, age or class. This is reflected in one of the best-known statements of Bahá'u'lláh: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."²¹

The Foundation of Human Rights from a Bahá'í Perspective

The human rights implications of Bahá'u'lláh's statement are great. By defining the globe as one single country, Bahá'u'lláh defines the framework for civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights of humanity. One of the essential elements for both categories is the right of self-determination.²² In other words, members of the human community have the right to freely pursue their common interests in political, economic, social, cultural and civil development. This right of self-determination is one of the most important because it is closely linked to human dignity and self-realization, which sum up all human rights.²³

Thus, Bahá'u'lláh defines the right of self-determination in its fullest sense. By stating that the earth is as *one* country and the entire body of *mankind* its citizens, He incorporates all (political, cultural, civil, economic, social) of the planet's resources to provide the highest (global) level possible for each individual's and each community's right to self-determination. This directly affects the self-realization of all members of the human race.

Self-realization from a Bahá'í perspective is based on an awareness of the source and purpose of human rights. As noted earlier, "the source of human rights is the endowment of qualities, virtues and powers which God has bestowed upon mankind..."²⁴ at an equal level and at the beginning of life. The purpose of human rights is "to fulfill the possibilities of this divine endowment..."²⁵ through each individual's understanding of their rights and obligations according to a system of law. Such a vision is in harmony with the very

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

purpose of life on earth to prepare the soul for life after death.²⁶ However, a Bahá'í-inspired perspective does not exclude a prosperous and happy life on this earth.

The Bahá'í understanding of human nature as both material and spiritual calls for a perspective on human rights that accommodates the development of both aspects of a human being. This implies a system that is based on both material and spiritual concepts of reality. Freedom, justice and peace, three concepts called for in the first part of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, are examples that embody both material and spiritual realities. The Bahá'í Writings present all three in light of the comprehensive concept of unity. All members of the human society are invited to “cherish and protect that unity of spirit which is their highest mutual obligation.”²⁷ Unity of spirit calls for “a conscious awareness of human relationships.”²⁸ Such consciousness is not only based upon the social aspects of human relationships, but also the spiritual forces that animate them. In other words, human relationships are based upon a spiritual force, that of unity.

Perhaps one of the implications of the declarations and covenants on human rights that are often termed “universal” or “international,” is the need for an international or universal code of law.

Such a need is the direct result of the historical setting in which the United Nations and later the Declaration on Human Rights emerged after “the Nazi atrocities of World War II.”²⁹ The Nazis promoted what was called unity through ethnic cleansing. In action, Nazism demonstrated uniformity and superiority of the Aryan race, and not the unity and oneness of the entire human race. Bahá'u'lláh clarifies the Bahá'í view that “The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race.”³⁰

Unity is viewed as a law that embodies material and spiritual realities. In one way, it is expressed as attraction between elements. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses the example of a flower to explain this law:

The law of attraction has brought together certain elements in the form of this beautiful flower, but when that attraction is withdrawn from this centre the flower will decompose, and, as a flower, cease to exist. So it is with the great body of humanity. The wonderful Law of Attraction, Harmony and Unity, holds together this marvelous Creation.³¹

Based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation, the law of unity or attraction amongst elements can apply to a human body. When this unity is extracted from the

human body, the force of life is removed. After this point of separation between consciousness and the body, or absence of unity between the elements of a human being, the body begins to decompose. If these remains are examined by a physician as to why they do not function, systematic deficiencies such as a beating heart, the need for blood flow and other functional organs throughout the body are identified. The physician sums up such deficiencies in one sentence, that the body lacks the force of life. In other words, the law of unity governing life in the human being is absent.

A similar process applies to the body of humanity, which has suffered much through wars, crimes against humanity, genocide and other atrocities. It has now identified the need for justice, an international code of law, peace, cooperation and other conditions in which the global society can progress. Such needs require a harmonious and coordinated system to ensure proper function. Much like the organs and individual cells of a human body, various organs and individual members of society benefit from reciprocal relationships. The 1947 Bahá'í statement³² expresses these relationships, in light of the law of unity, as rights *and* obligations. The difference between these two types of relationships is that rights and obligations are the result of conscious acts. In reality, through signing the Declaration on Human Rights the global society calls for conscious acts that result in equal rights, freedom, justice and peace for all.

A Bahá'í-inspired perspective argues that equality, freedom, justice and peace are closely linked with unity. In light of unity, equality is an awareness of the inherent oneness of the station of all humanity, as creations of one God. Such equality frees humanity from all previous ties of race, religion, class, creed or gender. Accordingly, an understanding of the inherent oneness of mankind results in regarding rights and obligations as two sides of one coin. For the good of one is the good of all and the good of all is the good of one. Thus, rights and obligations become expressions of justice, as their reciprocity supports a just system. In other words, if "The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men,"³³ then the just distribution of rights and obligations would involve all and not only some individuals or institutions of the human community.

Education and Development

Following the very first words revealed to Prophet Muhammad on the dual nature of man's being, Gabriel continued to express what seems to be another human right, the right to education. Gabriel revealed: "Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen, teacheth man that which he knew not."³⁴ A Bahá'í view on education is inspired by similar elements: first, the right or obligation to education, and second, the need for a holistic approach to

education, to satisfy both the material and the spiritual needs of humanity. Thus, education is the ideal path to development, as it encompasses both of the fundamental elements of reality. Furthermore, education helps to transform attitudes and values, a main purpose of life and as the result of interactions between the material and the spiritual.

During recent decades, the sciences have confirmed the principle of the oneness of humanity. Accordingly, all education and development efforts are most effective when the aims and themes of the curriculum are based on the concept of unity and its underlying principle, the oneness of the human race. Such a foundation, the Bahá'ís argue, will ease the tensions felt on a global scale in regards to the illusive contradictions between global and local, or the spiritual and material values in life.³⁵

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to education." According to the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, education must facilitate "the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity." Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the importance of education and development at a higher level: "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom."³⁶ Hence, education plays a central role in development of the inherent capabilities of a human being and ultimately the society at large. In other words, the right to development is embedded in the process of education.

A fundamental aspect of education is the transference of culture from one generation to the next as part of the "full development of the human personality."³⁷ Education, when based on unity and diversity, helps to preserve and promote local cultural identity, and at the same time, enhance global culture. This is achieved through sharing of values and practices cherished by each group. In today's world, and based on the International Bill of Rights, cultural preservation and progress is recognized as part and parcel of human rights and human rights education.

One of the areas of inequality in education is based on gender. No doubt the material development and advancement of women has been slower than that of men. Some attribute this challenge to custom and religion.³⁸ Such categorizations usually imply genetic-based inferiority in women, or the necessity of gender-based social roles. Others view such inequality as a result of violation of the right to education. The Bahá'í Writings clearly state: "The difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education."³⁹ Therefore, education of both male and female members of the society is a pre-requisite to the understanding and practice of equality.

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

Education also promotes the right to economic welfare, desperately needed in various parts of the globe. One of the educational points that is often shared from a Bahá'í perspective is viewing work and earning one's livelihood, as worship. It is through this holistic perception (inspiring the material through the spiritual) that the motivation for progress in economic welfare is heightened. Accordingly, the aim for economic welfare is shaped differently by the Bahá'í Writings. The aim is no longer that of competition or survival of the fittest. Economic welfare must "equip the peoples and institutions of the world with the means to achieve the real purpose of development; that is, the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness."⁴⁰

In short, a Bahá'í-inspired view on human rights stands firm on the need for education. In the words of the Bahá'í International Community, a program of education based on the "recognition of the oneness of humanity, appreciation of unity in diversity, and a sense of citizenship in a world community will be the best guarantee of improved protection of human rights in the years to come."⁴¹

The Right to Education: The Bahá'í Community in Iran

The Bahá'í community and the history of its development has been closely linked with education. Once again, based on the Bahá'í perspective of the oneness and unity of the human race, education was not reserved for Bahá'ís, but for all members of their communities. It has been through education that the basic rights to live, serve humanity and contribute to collective advancement have been cultivated. The history of development and contributions of the Bahá'í community in Iran remains as an outstanding example. During the later years of the 19th Century, at a time when the earliest members of the Bahá'í community were persecuted, Iran suffered from one of the highest rates of illiteracy and economic downfall. This was due to a number of factors. One was that according to the Muslim clergy, girls were not to excel in education.⁴² During that period, the highest level of education was the knowledge of the Qur'án, its traditions and Islamic jurisprudence. Classes or *maktabs* were open to male students alone.

However, one of the basic tenets of the Bahá'í Writings is the equality of rights and educational opportunities for men and women, and this aroused much opposition amongst the clergy and the regime. Such opposition led to the strangulation of Tahirih, the Qurratu'l'Ayn, one of the foremost learned women of Iran in the late 1800's⁴³ and continued well into the 1900's when masses of Bahá'ís were killed, Bahá'í teachers or students in public schools were persecuted and Bahá'í schools were closed down.⁴⁴ This is the climate in which Bahá'ís began to promote equal rights to education, and developed a number of schools for boys

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

and girls. Parallel to the persecution and exclusion of Bahá'ís from all parts of society, and inspired by the importance of education, by 1973 the Bahá'ís were the first to have “achieved a literacy rate of 100 per cent among women under the age of 40, despite the national literacy rate of 15 per cent.”⁴⁵

Such a high rate of literacy caused many Bahá'í women and men to lead the development of the Iranian society and the world at large. Zhínús Ní'mat Mahmúdí was the first female physicist in Iran. Manúchíhr Hakím's contributions were received by the most outstanding circles and publications in the world of medicine. General 'Alaí's management skills made Iran Air one of the most successful airlines in the region. Buzurg 'Alavíyán was one of the foremost Iranian engineers. Bahá'í-inspired education and dedication made these and other professionals, leading assets of the country. Their contributions to the Iranian society stand as proofs of their loyalty to and a genuine belief in the cause of advancement of the world of humanity.⁴⁶

After the 1979 revolution, hundreds of Bahá'ís were killed and imprisoned, and thousands were expelled from all official positions and their private and public properties were confiscated or destroyed. This campaign against the Bahá'ís also included the expulsion of masses of Bahá'í professionals and teachers from employment, as well as Bahá'í students from schools and universities.

No official document has yet been released by the government of Iran to explain the specific reason for the attacks. However, the 1991 “Iranian government document on the Bahá'í question”⁴⁷ summarizes the essential components of the policies, which underlie this action of the government of Iran:

Educational and cultural status:

1. They can be enrolled in schools provided they have not identified themselves as Bahá'ís.
2. Preferably, they should be enrolled in schools, which have a strong and imposing religious ideology.
3. 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.
4. Their political (espionage) activities must be dealt with according to appropriate Government laws and policies, and their religious and propaganda activities should be answered by giving them religious and cultural responses, as well as propaganda.

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

5. Propaganda institutions (such as the Islamic Propaganda Organization) must establish an independent section to counter the propaganda and religious activities of the Bahá'ís.
6. A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country.

It is clear that the systematic expulsion of Bahá'í students and teachers was a direct result of such policies. What stands unclear is the nature of “political (espionage) activities” of the Bahá'í community at large. The government of Iran has not provided the international community with any evidence on the so-called political activities of the Bahá'í community.

“As many observers have long pointed out, the Bahá'ís of Iran pose no threat to the Government. Their religious principles call on them to obey the law, to refrain from involvement in partisan politics and to practice non-violence. They seek wholeheartedly to join with their countrymen in an atmosphere of religious freedom to help in the construction of a more just and prosperous Iranian nation.”⁴⁸

During the later years, the authorities in Iran have neglected legal procedures and have failed to provide any form of written verdict to the victims of persecutions. The execution of Ruhollah Rohani in July of 1998 was an example of such shortcomings on the part of the local and national authorities.⁴⁹ What is of interest to the international community and the Bahá'ís around the world is the plan that, as stated above in article 6, is “devised to confront and destroy” the cultural roots of the Bahá'í community “outside the country.”

Article 26 of the Declaration on Human Rights states that “Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”⁵⁰ The expulsion of Bahá'í students from universities according to article 3 of the above-mentioned plan of the Islamic government in Iran, followed by the attacks on the Open University⁵¹, stand as testimony to the systematic violation of rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran. That the practical implications of the Islamic Republic's understanding of *merit* are based on *religion* requires that the Bahá'í youth can obtain education only if their identity as Bahá'ís is repressed. Thus, Article 18 of the Declaration on Human Rights is also violated. Now that the Islamic government plans to destroy the cultural roots of the Bahá'ís outside Iran, it means that the political agenda of the Islamic government of Iran remains above the civil and cultural rights of the Bahá'ís world-over. Members of the Bahá'í community include citizens of more than one hundred and seventy nations. Therefore, the persecution of the Bahá'ís is truly the concern of the world community.

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

Some of the more moderate clergy also voiced their opposition to the ongoing and illogical persecution of the Bahá'í community. The Iran Press Service on the Worldwide Web reported the following on Áyatu'lláh Mehdi Haeri-Khorshidi, during a demonstration outside the Iranian Embassy in Germany: "He also denounced the government for not recognizing the right of the Iranian Bahá'í to worshipping freely their faith. 'Why should hundreds of thousands of fellow Iranians be denied all basic rights, including that of a decent, open life, just because they follow another religion?'"⁵² The article went on to affirm that the Bahá'í Faith is:

...not recognized by the Ayatollahs as an official religion like Judaism, Christianity [*sic*] or the Zoroastrians, the Bahá'ís are ruthlessly suppressed under the present Islamic rule, their temple burned down and destroyed, their situation being similar of that of the Jews [*sic*] in Hitler's Germany. Tens of Bahá'ís have been executed or hanged, some of them as recently as a month ago...⁵³

Many individuals, government representatives and international organizations have launched a number of campaigns to put an end to the wrongs committed against the Bahá'ís in Iran. But the discriminations continue in one way or another. At the Asian Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Iran, representatives of the Bahá'í International Community were not permitted to take part in the conference. "The Bahai delegates were given the run-around by Iran authorities," stated Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights "I took a strong stand on this. It undermines all the values of the conference."⁵⁴

Conclusion

This paper explores a number of issues regarding the human rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The fundamental spiritual teachings of Islam are in harmony with those of the Bahá'í Faith and do not provide the grounds for persecution of any religious minority. The persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran began soon after the inception of the Bahá'í dispensation in 1844. The church-state system of Iran is directly responsible for the systematic and centrally based persecution of the Bahá'ís in that country since then.

The foundation of a Bahá'í-inspired perspective on human rights is that of unity, with an aim to develop spiritual and material capabilities latent in human nature. Such development is seen as the goal of human life and education is one of the most effective means towards the achievement of this goal. Both the

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

Qur'án and the Sacred Scripture of the Bahá'í Faith endorse a right to education. Therefore, preventing Bahá'ís from obtaining education is one of the most effective ways to ensure *that their progress and development shall be blocked*.

The members and friends of the worldwide Bahá'í community have launched many campaigns to openly share the tenets of the Bahá'í Faith, its activities, history and concerns. The hope of all those who appreciate the nature of the message and aims of the Bahá'í Faith is to put an end to all crimes and atrocities against humanity, including those committed against the Bahá'í community in Iran.

Footnotes

- 1 Root, M. L. (1981). Tahirih, The Pure. Los Angeles, CA: Kalimat Press. p. 18.
- 2 Rassekh, N. (1998). The Báb—The Gate. Unpublished Paper.
- 3 For a discussion see: The Báb (1978). Selections from the Writings of the Bab. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- 4 Historical records of the events in Nineteenth Century Persia left by Western scholars such as Edward G. Browne, Comte de Gobineau and A.L.M. Nicholas testify to the atrocities committed by the government and ulamá to eradicate the infant community.
- 5 Bahá'u'lláh (1988). Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, p. 215.
- 6 abil-i-A'zam [Muhammad-i-Zarandí], trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (1975). The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narratives of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 60.
- 7 For a discussion on the history of the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran see: Martin, J. D. (1993). The Case of the Bahá'í Minority in Iran. In Bahá'í International Community. The Bahá'í World 1992-93. Haifa, Israel: World Centre Publications.
- 8 *ibid.* p. 247.
- 9 See Bahá'í International Community (2000). Update on the Situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. In Bahá'í International Community. The Bahá'í World 1999-2000. Haifa, Israel: World Centre Publications.
- 10 Root. p. 19.
- 11 The intelligence agency in Iran during the Pahlavi regime.
- 12 Golpayegani, S. M. (1991). The Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council. www.bahai.org/article-1-8-3-20.html.
- 13 Bahá'í International Community (1993). Iran's Secret Blue Print For The Destruction Of The Bahá'í Community. www.bahai.org/article-1-8-3-14.html.
- 14 Pickthall, M. M., trans. (1930). The Meaning of the Glorious Koran. New York, NY: Knopf. p. 96: 1-2.
- 15 Rassekh.
- 16 Shakir, H., trans. (1983). The Koran. www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/k/koran/koran-idx?type=DIV0&byte=190943. The Cattle 6: 83.

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

- 17 Bahá'u'lláh (1983). Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 70.
- 18 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1979). Paris Talks. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 60.
- 19 Bahá'u'lláh (1992). The Kitab-i-Aqdas. London: Bahá'í World Centre. p. 40.
- 20 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1978). Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. London: Bahá'í World Centre. p. 171.
- 21 Bahá'u'lláh. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. p. 250.
- 22 Self-determination appears in the first article of United Nations (1966). *United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*; and, United Nations (1966). *United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Both in Ishay, M. R., ed. (1997) The Human Rights Reader: Major Political Essays, Speeches, and Documents From the Bible to the Present. New York, NY: Rutledge. pp. 424-440.
- 23 Matas, D. (1994). No More: The Battle Against Human Rights Violations. Toronto, Canada: Dundurn Press Limited. p. 181.
- 24 Bahá'í International Community (February 1947) *A Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights*. Presented to the first session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Lake Success, NY. (Bahá'í International Community Document #47-0200).
- 25 *ibid*.
- 26 For further discussion see Hornby, H. B. (1994). Lights of Guidance. New Delhi, India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 360.
- 27 Bahá'í International Community. *A Bahá'í Declaration on Human Rights and Obligations*.
- 28 For further discussion see Danesh, H. B. (1998). *CRES 520: The Concept of Unity*. Unpublished course materials. Wienacht, Switzerland: Landegg International University.
- 29 Matas. p. 163.
- 30 Bahá'u'lláh. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. p. 215.
- 31 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Paris Talks. p. 139.
- 32 Bahá'í International Community. *A Bahá'í Declaration on Human Rights and Obligations*.
- 33 Bahá'u'lláh (1988). Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 67.
- 34 Pickthall. p. 96: 1-2.
- 35 For a discussion on human rights education see Bahá'í International Community (March 1997). *United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education*. Written statement to the 53rd session of the UN Commission on Human rights (Agenda Item 9), Geneva, Switzerland. (Bahá'í International Community Document #97-0401).
- 36 Bahá'u'lláh. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. p. 33.
- 37 United Nations. *United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Article 13.
- 38 Penn, M. L. (1999). Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights: A Global Perspective. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. p. 161.
- 39 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982). Promulgation of Universal Peace. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 135.
- 40 Bahá'í International Community (1998). Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development. London: The Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 20.
- 41 Bahá'í International Community. *United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education*.

The Right to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran

- 42 Root. p. 19.
- 43 For a discussion on the life and works of Tahirih see Muhammad Husayni, N. (2000). Hadrat-i-Tahirih. Dundas, Canada: Association for Bahá'í Studies in Persian.
- 44 For a list of some of the attacks against the Bahá'ís see Zohoori, E. (1994). *A Chronology of The Persecutions of the Babis and Bahá'ís in Iran*. In Zohoori, E. Names and Numbers: A Bahá'í History Reference Guide. Jamaica: University Printers.
- 45 (June 1987) *Shining Example in Cradle of Faith*. Bahá'í News, no. 580. Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. p.10.
- 46 Individuals named here amongst those Bahá'ís who were put to death in various ways during the early years of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For further information see Bahá'í World Centre (1986). The Bahá'í World, vol. XVIII. Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre.
- 47 For further discussion see the Bahá'í World Web site at www.bahai.org.
- 48 Bahá'í International Community (1998). *A Litmus Test for Iran*. www.bahai.org/article-1-8-3-16.html.
- 49 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (23 July 1998). *Statement by the Press Secretary*. usnsa-oea@usbnc.org.
- 50 Ishay, M. R. (1997). *The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights*. In Ishay. The Human Rights Reader: Major Political Essays, Speeches, and Documents From the Bible to the Present. pp. 407-412.
- 51 After the expulsion of Bahá'í students and teachers from institutions of higher learning, the community organized itself to educate its youth. This resulted in what came to be known as the Open University.
- 52 Iran Press Service (1998). www.iran-press-service.com.
- 53 *ibid*.
- 54 See: www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/meast/02/23/un.iran.racism.ap/index.html.