

# Persecution of Baha'is continues despite global protests

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CONCERNED — Persecution of Baha'is in Iran continues to be a serious problem, says Donald M. Barrett, Baha'i secretary-general, shown here at Baha'i world headquarters in Haifa, Israel. — Tribune photo by Robert Di Veroli

By Robert Di Veroli  
*Tribune Religion Writer*

HAIFA, Israel — A high-ranking official of the Baha'i Faith says protests by foreign governments and leaders have helped slow down, but have not stopped, the persecution of Baha'is in Iran.

"We think this has been successful in focusing attention on the situation and slowing down the executions. It hasn't stopped it, but it's slowed it down," said Donald M. Barrett, American-born secretary-general of the Baha'i Faith, whose world headquarters are located in this northern Israeli seacoast city.

"We have appealed to the governments of the world and have been quite successful in getting support from them and prominent world figures," Barrett said.

He said that Australia, West Germany, Italy, the British House of Commons, the United States Senate and House of Representatives as well as President Reagan and others have appealed to the Khomeini government to cease its harassment of Baha'is in Iran.

"He (Reagan) has become one of many world leaders who have condemned the situation and called for basic human rights for Baha'is in Iran," Barrett said.

But he added that the persecution of the estimated 300,000 Baha'is in Iran continues.

He said that since it took

## 'It's getting worse and worse'

power in 1979, the Khomeini government has destroyed the Baha'i House of the Bab — the Bab was the forerunner of Baha'i prophet Baha'u'llah — and other Baha'i property, desecrated Baha'i cemeteries, expelled 25,000 to 30,000 Baha'i children from Iranian schools and fired Baha'i employees as part of a campaign to exterminate Baha'ism in Iran.

He said about 10,000 Baha'is fled the country to Europe, Asia, Canada, the United States and other countries before Baha'i emigration was prohibited about a year ago.

"It's getting worse and worse," he said.

He said the persecution of Baha'is in Iran has its origins in theology and culture.

Barrett said the fundamentalist Shiite clergy associated with the Khomeini revolution condemn Baha'is, an offshoot of Islam, as heretics for believing in the Baha'u'llah after Mohammed and view them with suspicion for endorsing universal education, women's rights, the work ethic, world government and other modern ideas and movements that many Shiites reject, Barrett said.

Barrett said Baha'is accept Mohammed as a prophet, but as only one among many including Jesus, Moses, Abraham, the Buddha, the Baha'u'llah and others yet to come. He said

the absence of a Baha'i clergy also nettles the majority Shiite Muslim leaders in Iran.

"The fact that there can be a thriving community of 300,000 Iranians — they're all Iranians, by the way, not outsiders — who are successful and distinguished in many ways is a silent challenge to the majority establishment and they can't stand it," Barrett said.

He said the persecution of Baha'is in Iran is only "the latest wave in a series of persecutions" that began in 1844 when Siyyid Ali Muhammad, a Persian known as the Bab, proclaimed the coming of a prophet who would herald a new age of universal brotherhood and peace.

Barrett said that within 30 years, the Bab and 20,000 of his followers were executed by Islamic fundamentalists. The new prophet, Mirza Husayn Ali — known as Baha'u'llah — revealed himself in 1863 in Bagdad, but five years later he, his family and a band of followers were sent to Akko, just north of here, under Turkish house arrest.

Baha'u'llah died there in 1892, his remains interred

among the olive groves and hedges in the gardens of Bahji, a mansion near Akko. The Bab's remains are interred under the golden-domed Baha'i shrine, a Haifa landmark.

Barrett said 149 Baha'is have been killed as part of the Khomeini revolution and as "the result of the religious fanaticism of the clergy in Iran."

Since Barrett spoke, 16 more Baha'is, including three teenage girls, were hanged June 16 in Shiraz, Iran, despite an appeal for clemency by President Reagan. Ten were women. According to Baha'i reports, the 10 were pressured to give up their religion and accept Islam.

Barrett, an American citizen, attorney and 1951 UCLA graduate, had little to say about the case of Dr. Daniel C. Jordan, the Escondido man whose body was found in October 1982, in Stamford, Conn., the apparent victim of a single stab wound in the neck.

Jordan, 50, was dean of education at National University and cochairman of

the nine-member Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is in the United States.

Barrett said his office knows nothing more about the Jordan case than the police have revealed.

"We have no further information in addition to that made known by police authorities shortly after his death," Barrett said. He said any suggestion that Jordan might have been the victim of an Iranian hit squad is "pure speculation."

Barrett said Khomeini government charges that Iranian Baha'is are agents of the CIA, part of a Zionist plot or that they sided with the former shah are groundless because Baha'is are forbidden to take part in partisan politics.

He said Baha'is are encouraged to vote, but not as members of a political party. Barrett, for example, is an American citizen who voted in the 1980 election as an independent.

The rationale is that party politics "is not the answer to today's problems," Barrett said.

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