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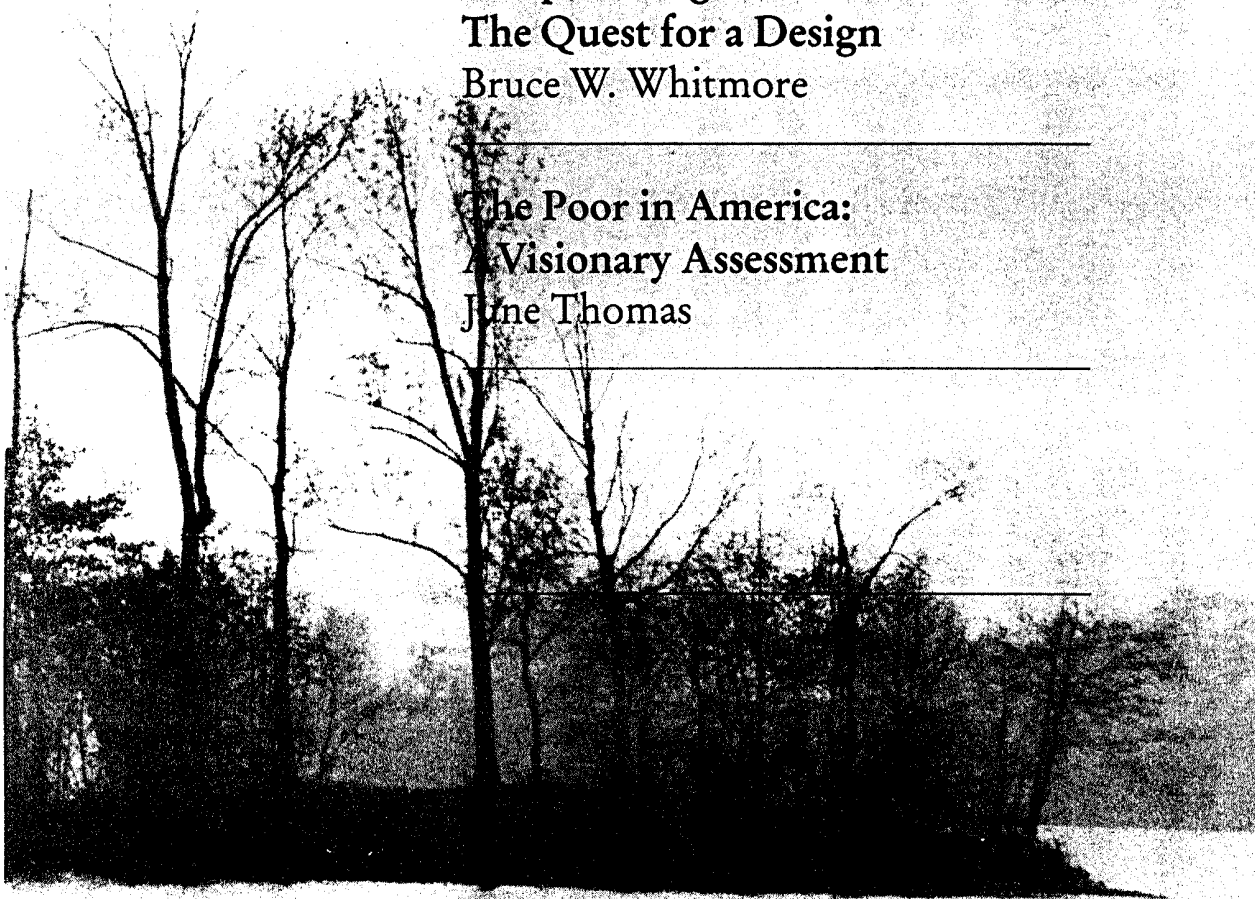
World Order

Peace and Prejudice

An Open Letter to Iran's Rulers

Temple of Light:
The Quest for a Design
Bruce W. Whitmore

The Poor in America:
A Visionary Assessment
June Thomas



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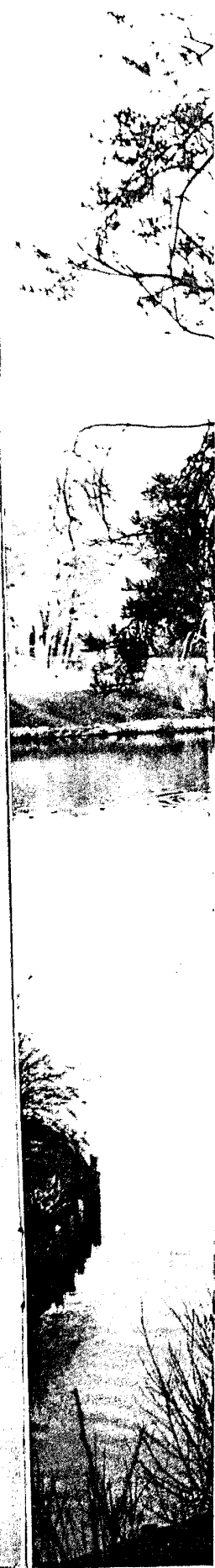
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IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Peace and Prejudice
- 4 Interchange: Letters from and to the Editor
- 9 An Open Letter to Iran's Rulers
by *National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran*
- 19 Temple of Light: The Quest for a Design
by *Bruce W. Whitmore*
- 37 Sensibility
poem by *Deborah L. Bley*
- 37 Upon Flying Puffer Kites for Inge
poem by *Cal E. Rollins*
- 39 The Poor in America: A Visionary Assessment
by *June Thomas*

Inside back cover: Authors & Artists in This Issue





An Open Letter to Iran's Rulers

(TRANSLATED FROM PERSIAN)

ON AUGUST 29, 1983, the Revolutionary Prosecutor General of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Siyyid Husayn Músaví Tabrízí, declared in a press interview that Bahá'í religious organizations were illegal and participation in them was a criminal act. The decree outlawed the National Spiritual Assembly, governing body of the Iranian Bahá'í community, and four hundred local spiritual assemblies, as well as their committees and subsidiary institutions. In conformity with the teachings of their Faith the Bahá'ís of Iran disbanded all their organizations.

The dissolution of organizations that the Bahá'ís call administrative institutions means much more than those who are unfamiliar with the role spiritual assemblies play in a community that has no clergy may imagine. The spiritual assemblies collectively perform the work of priest, teacher, advisor, trustee of funds, and keeper of records. They admit to membership, witness marriages, supervise the religious education of children, settle disputes among individuals, grant religious divorce, encourage good deeds, and censure bad behavior. Thus spiritual assemblies are central to the life of the Bahá'í community.

The document presented here is a letter written by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran in response to the statement of the Prosecutor General outlawing Bahá'í administrative institutions. One will realize the degree of courage it took the members of the National Spiritual Assembly thus to address the Islamic Government when one recalls that seventeen of their predecessors on the National Assembly had been either abducted or executed by the same regime.

The letter, delivered to some two thousand government officials and prominent personages in Iran, eloquently testifies to the heroism of its authors and the peaceful nature of the community they led. It exemplifies also the confidence and pride of those who firmly believe that the One unknowable God has decreed the ultimate triumph of truth and justice.

National Spiritual Assembly of
the Bahá'ís of the United States
November 1, 1983

12 Shahrívar 1362
[September 3, 1983]

RECENTLY the esteemed Prosecutor General of the Islamic Revolution of the Country, in an interview that was published in the newspapers, declared that the continued functioning of the Bahá'í religious and spiritual administration is banned and that membership in it is considered to be a crime. This declaration was made after certain unjustified accusations were leveled against the Bahá'í commu-

nity of Iran and after a number of its members—ostensibly for imaginary and fabricated crimes but in reality merely for the sake of their beliefs—were either executed, or arrested and imprisoned. The majority of those who have been imprisoned have not yet been brought to trial.

The Bahá'í community finds the conduct of the authorities and the judges bewildering and lamentable—as indeed would any fair-minded observer who is unblinded by malice. The authorities are the refuge of the people; the judges in pursuit of their work of examining and ascertaining the truth and facts in legal cases devote years of their lives to studying the law and, when uncertain of a legal point, spend hours poring over copious tomes in order to cross a *t* and dot an *i*. Yet these very people consider themselves to be justified in brazenly bringing false accusations against a band of innocent people, without fear of the Day of Judgment, without even believing the calumnies they utter against their victims, and having exerted not the slightest effort to investigate to any degree the validity of the charges they are making. “Methinks they are not believers in the Day of Judgment” [Háfiz, a fourteenth-century Persian poet].

The honorable Prosecutor has again introduced the baseless and fictitious story that Bahá'ís engage in espionage, but without producing so much as one document in support of the accusation, without presenting proof in any form, and without any explanation as to what is the mission in this country of this extraordinary number of “spies”: what sort of information they obtain and from what sources? Whither do they relay it, and for what purpose? What kind of “spy” is an eighty-five year old man from Yazd who has never set foot outside his village? Why do these alleged “spies” not hide themselves, conceal their religious beliefs and exert every effort to penetrate, by every stratagem, the Government’s information centers and offices? Why has no Bahá'í “spy” been arrested anywhere else in the world? How could students, housewives, innocent young girls, and old men and women, such as those blameless Bahá'ís who have recently been delivered to the gallows in Iran, or who have become targets for the darts of prejudice and enmity, be “spies”? How could the Bahá'í farmers of the villages of Afús Chígán, the Fort of Malak (near Işfahán), and those of the village of Núk in Bírjand, be “spies”? What secret intelligence documents have been found in their possession? What espionage equipment has come to hand? What “spying” activities were engaged in by the primary school children who have been expelled from their schools?

And how strange! The honorable Prosecutor perhaps does not know, or does not care to know, that spying is an element of politics, while noninterference in politics is an established principle of the Bahá'í Faith. On the contrary, Bahá'ís love their country and never permit themselves to be traitors. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the successor of the Founder of the Bahá'í Cause, says: “Any abasement is bearable except betraying one’s own country, and any sin is forgivable other than dishonoring the government and inflicting harm upon the nation.”

All the other accusations made against the Bahá'ís by the honorable Prosecutor of the Revolution are similarly groundless. He brands the Bahá'í community with accusations of subversion and corruption. For example, on the basis of a manifestly forged interview, the falsity of which has been dealt with in a detailed statement, he accuses the Bahá'í community of hoarding, an act which its members would consider highly reprehensible. The Prosecutor alleges that the Bahá'í administration sanctioned the insensible act of hoarding, yet he subtly overlooks the fact that with the proceeds that might be realized from the sale of unusable automobile

spare parts whose total value is some seventy million túmáns—the value of the stock of any medium-size store for spare parts—it would be impossible to overthrow a powerful government whose daily expenditures amount to hundreds of millions of túmáns. If the Prosecutor chooses to label the Bahá'í administration as a network of espionage, let him at least consider it intelligent enough not to plan the overthrow of such a strong regime by hoarding a few spare parts! Yes, such allegations of corruption and subversion are similar to those hurled against us at the time of the Episcopalian case in Işfahán when this oppressed community was accused of collaboration with foreign agents, as a result of which seven innocent Bahá'ís of Yazd were executed. Following this the falsity of the charges was made known and the Prosecutor announced the episode to be the outcome of a forgery.

Bahá'ís are accused of collecting contributions and transferring sums of money to foreign countries. How strange! If Muslims, in accordance with their sacred and respected spiritual beliefs, send millions of túmáns to Karbilá, Najaf and Jerusalem, or to other Muslim holy places outside Iran, to be spent on the maintenance and upkeep of the Islamic sacred shrines, it is considered very praiseworthy; but if a Bahá'í—even during the time in which the transfer of foreign currency was allowed—sends a negligible amount for his international community to be used for the repair and maintenance of the holy places of his Faith, it is considered that he has committed an unforgivable sin and it is counted as proof that he has done so in order to strengthen other countries.

Accusations of this nature are many, but all are easy to investigate. If just and impartial people and God-fearing judges will only do so, the falsity of these spurious accusations will be revealed in case after case. The Bahá'í community emphatically requests that such accusations be investigated openly in the presence of juries composed of judges and international observers so that, once and for all, the accusations may be discredited and their repetition prevented.

The basic principles and beliefs of the Bahá'ís have been repeatedly proclaimed and set forth in writing during the past five years. Apparently these communications, either by deliberate design or by mischance, have not received any attention; otherwise, accusations such as those described above would not have been repeated by one of the highest and most responsible authorities. This in itself is a proof that the numerous communications referred to were not accorded the attention of the leaders; therefore, we mention them again.

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH confesses the unity of God and the justice of the divine Essence. It recognizes that Almighty God is an exalted, unknowable and concealed entity, sanctified from ascent and descent, from egress and regress, and from assuming a physical body. The Bahá'í Faith, which professes the existence of the invisible God, the One, the Single, the Eternal, the Peerless, bows before the loftiness of His Threshold, believes in all divine Manifestations, considers all the Prophets from Adam to the Seal of the Prophets as true divine Messengers Who are the Manifestations of Truth in the world of creation, accepts Their Books as having come from God, believes in the continuation of the divine outpourings, emphatically believes in reward and punishment, and, uniquely among existing revealed religions outside Islam, accepts the Prophet Muḥammad as a true Prophet and the Qur'án as the Word of God.

The Bahá'í Faith embodies independent principles and laws. It has its own Holy Book. It prescribes pilgrimage and worship. A Bahá'í performs obligatory prayers

and observes a fast. He gives, according to his beliefs, tithes and contributions. He is required to be of upright conduct, to manifest a praiseworthy character, to love all mankind, to be of service to the world of humanity and to sacrifice his own interests for the good and well-being of his kind. He is forbidden to commit unbecoming deeds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "A Bahá'í is known by the attributes manifested by him, not by his name: he is recognized by his character, not by his person."

Shoghi Rabbání, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause, says: "... a person who is not adorned with the ornaments of virtue, sanctity, and morality, is not a true Bahá'í, even though he may call himself one and be known as such."

He also says: "The friends of God . . . are required to be virtuous, well-wishers, forbearing, sanctified, detached from all except God and free from worldly concerns. They are called upon to manifest divine attributes and characteristics."

The teachings and laws of the Bahá'í religion testify to this truth. Fortunately, the books and writings which have been plundered in abundance from the homes of Bahá'ís and are available to the authorities, bear witness to the truth of these assertions. Bahá'ís, in keeping with their spiritual beliefs, stay clear of politics; they do not support or reject any party, group, or nation; they do not champion or attack any ideology or any specific political philosophy; they shrink from and abhor political agitation. The Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause says, "The followers of Bahá'u'lláh under whatever state or government they may reside should conduct themselves with truthfulness, fidelity, trustworthiness and absolute virtue. . . . They neither thirst for fame nor clamor for leadership. They neither indulge in flattery, nor practice hypocrisy, nor are they impelled by selfish ambition or the desire to accumulate wealth. They are not anxious to attain high ranks and positions, nor are they the bond-slaves of titles and honors. They abhor every form of ostentation and are far removed from the use of such methods as would entail violence or coercion. They have detached themselves from all else save God and have fixed their hearts upon the unfailing promises of their Lord. . . . They have become forgetful of their own selves and have dedicated themselves to that which will serve the interests of humanity. . . . They unhesitatingly refuse such functions and posts as are political in nature, but wholeheartedly accept those that are purely administrative in character. For the cardinal aim of the people of Bahá is to promote the interests of the whole nation. . . ."

"Such is the way of the followers of Bahá, such is the attitude of the spiritually minded, and whatsoever else is but manifest error."

Also, Bahá'ís, in accordance with their exalted teachings, are duty bound to be obedient to their government. Elucidating this subject, Shoghi Rabbání says: "The people of Bahá are required to obey their respective governments, and to demonstrate their truthfulness and good will towards the authorities. . . . Bahá'ís, in every land and without any exception, should . . . be obedient and bow to the clear instructions and the declared decrees issued by the authorities. They must faithfully carry out such directives."

Bahá'í organizations have no aim except the good of all nations and do not take any steps that are against the public good. Contrary to the conception it may create in the mind because of the similarity in name, it does not resemble the current organizations of political parties; it does not interfere in political affairs; and it is the safeguard against the involvement of Bahá'ís in subversive political activities. Its high ideals are "to improve the characters of men; to extend the scope of knowledge; to abolish ignorance and prejudice; to strengthen the foundations of true reli-

gion in all hearts; to encourage self-reliance, and discourage false imitation; . . . to uphold truthfulness, audacity, frankness, and courage; to promote craftsmanship and agriculture; . . . to educate, on a compulsory basis, children of both sexes; to insist on integrity in business transactions; to lay stress on the observance of honesty and piety; . . . to acquire mastery and skill in the modern sciences and arts; to promote the interests of the public; . . . to obey outwardly and inwardly and with true loyalty the regulations enacted by state and government; . . . to honor, to extol and to follow the example of those who have distinguished themselves in science and learning. . . ." And again, ". . . to help the needy from every creed or sect, and to collaborate with the people of the country in all welfare services."

In brief, whatever the clergy in other religions undertake individually and by virtue of their appointment to their positions, the Bahá'í administration performs collectively and through an elective process.

THE STATEMENTS made by the esteemed Prosecutor of the Revolution do not seem to have legal basis, because in order to circumscribe individuals and deprive them of the rights which have not been denied them by the Constitution, it is necessary to enact special legislation, provided that legislation is not contradictory to the Constitution. It was hoped that the past recent years would have witnessed, on the one hand, the administration of divine justice—a principle promoted by the true religion of Islam and prescribed by all monotheistic religions—and, on the other, and coupled with an impartial investigation of the truths of the Bahá'í Faith, the abolition or at least mitigation of discrimination, restrictions and pressures suffered by Bahá'ís over the past 135 years. Alas, on the contrary, because of long-standing misunderstandings and prejudices, the difficulties increased immensely and the portals of calamity were thrown wide open in the faces of the long-suffering and sorely oppressed Bahá'ís of Iran who were, to an even greater degree, deprived of their birthrights through the systematic machinations of Government officials who are supposed to be the refuge of the public, and of some imposters in the garb of divines, who engaged in official or unofficial spreading of mischievous and harmful accusations and calumnies, and issued, in the name of religious and judicial authorities, unlawful decrees and verdicts.

Many are the pure and innocent lives that have been snuffed out; many the distinguished heads that have adorned the hangman's noose; and many the precious breasts that have become the targets of firing squads. Vast amounts of money and great quantities of personal property have been plundered or confiscated. Many technical experts and learned people have been tortured and condemned to long-term imprisonment and are still languishing in dark dungeons, deprived of the opportunity of placing their expertise at the service of the Government and the nation. Numerous are the self-sacrificing employees of the Government who spent their lives in faithful service but who were dismissed from work and afflicted with poverty and need because of hatred and prejudice. Even the owners of private firms and institutions were prevented from engaging Bahá'ís. Many privately owned Bahá'í establishments have been confiscated. Many tradesmen have been denied the right to continue working by cancellation of their business licenses. Bahá'í youth have been denied access to education in many schools and in all universities and institutions of higher education. Bahá'í university students abroad are deprived of receiving money for their education, and others who wish to pursue their studies outside Iran have been denied exit permits. Bahá'ís, including the very sick

whose only hope for cure was to receive medical treatment in specialized medical centers in foreign lands, have been prevented from leaving the country. Bahá'í cemeteries have been confiscated and bodies rudely disinterred. Numerous have been the days when a body has remained unburied while the bereaved family pleaded to have a permit issued and a burial place assigned so that the body might be decently buried. As of today, thousands of Bahá'ís have been divested of their homes and forced to live as exiles. Many have been driven from their villages and dwelling places and are living as wanderers and stranded refugees in other parts of Iran with no other haven and refuge but the Court of the All-Merciful God and the loving-kindness of their friends and relatives.

It is a pity that the mass media, newspapers, and magazines, either do not want or are not allowed to publish any news about the Bahá'í community of Iran or to elaborate upon what is happening. If they were free to do so and were unbiased in reporting the daily news, volumes would have been compiled describing the inhumane cruelty to and oppression of the innocent. For example, if they were allowed to do so, they would have written that in Shíráz seven courageous men and ten valiant women—seven of whom were girls in the prime of their lives—audaciously rejected the suggestion of the religious judge that they recant their faith or, at least, dissemble their belief, and preferred death to the concealment of their faith. The women, after hours of waiting with dried lips, shrouded themselves in their chádurs, kissed the noose of their gallows, and with intense love offered up their souls for the One Who proferreth life. The observers of this cruel scene might well ask forgiveness for the murderers at Karbilá, since they, despite their countless atrocities, did not put women to the sword nor harass the sick and infirm. Alas, tongues are prevented from making utterance and pens are broken and the hidden cause of these brutalities is not made manifest to teach the world a lesson. The Prosecutor alleges that they were spies. Gracious God! Where in history can one point to a spy who readily surrendered his life in order to prove the truth of his belief?

Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this letter to recount the atrocities inflicted upon the guiltless Bahá'ís of Iran or to answer, one by one, the accusations leveled against them. But let us ask all just and fair-minded people only one question: If, according to the much-publicized statements of the Prosecutor, Bahá'ís are not arrested and executed because of their belief, and are not even imprisoned on that account, how is it that, when a group of them is arrested and each is charged with the same "crime" of "spying," if one of them recants his belief, he is immediately freed, a photograph of him and a description of his defection are victoriously featured in the newspapers, and respect and glory are heaped upon him? What kind of spying, subversion, illegal accumulation of goods, aggression or conspiracy or other "crime" can it be that is capable of being blotted out upon the recantation of one's beliefs? Is this not a clear proof of the absurdity of the accusations?

In spite of all this, the Bahá'í community of Iran, whose principles have been described earlier in this statement, announces the suspension of the Bahá'í organizations throughout Iran, in order to establish its good intentions and in conformity with its basic tenets concerning complete obedience to the instructions of the Government. Henceforth, until the time when, God willing, the misunderstandings are eliminated and the realities are at last made manifest to the authorities, the National Assembly and all local spiritual assemblies and their committees are disbanded, and no one may any longer be designated a member of the Bahá'í administration.

THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY of Iran hopes that this step will be considered a sign of its complete obedience to the Government in power. It further hopes that the authorities—including the esteemed Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolution who says that there is no opposition to and no enmity towards individual Bahá'ís, who has acknowledged the existence of a large Bahá'í community and has, in his interview, guaranteed its members the right to live and be free in their acts of worship—will reciprocate by proving their good intentions and the truth of their assurances by issuing orders that pledge, henceforth:

1. To bring to an end the persecutions, arrests, torture, and imprisonment of Bahá'ís for imaginary crimes and on baseless pretexts, because God knows—and so do the authorities—that the only “crime” of which these innocent ones are guilty is that of their beliefs, and not the unsubstantiated accusations brought against them;
2. To guarantee the safety of their lives, their personal property and belongings, and their honor;
3. To accord them freedom to choose their residence and occupation and the right of association based on the provisions of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic;
4. To restore all the rights which have been taken away from them in accordance with the groundless assertions of the Prosecutor of the Country;
5. To restore to Bahá'í employees the rights denied them by returning them to their jobs and by paying them their due wages;
6. To release from prison all innocent prisoners;
7. To lift the restrictions imposed on the properties of those Bahá'ís who, in their own country, have been deprived of their belongings;
8. To permit Bahá'í students who wish to continue their studies abroad to benefit from the same facilities that are provided to others;
9. To permit those Bahá'í youth who have been prevented from continuing their studies in the country to resume their education;
10. To permit those Bahá'í students stranded abroad who have been deprived of foreign exchange facilities to receive their allowances as other Iranian students do;
11. To restore Bahá'í cemeteries and to permit Bahá'ís to bury their dead in accordance with Bahá'í burial ceremonies;
12. To guarantee the freedom of Bahá'ís to perform their religious rites; to conduct funerals and burials including the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead; to solemnize Bahá'í marriages and divorces, and to carry out all acts of worship and laws and ordinances affecting personal status; because although Bahá'ís are entirely obedient and subordinate to the Government in the administration of the affairs which are in the jurisdiction of the Bahá'í organizations, in matters of conscience and belief, and in accordance with their spiritual principles, they prefer martyrdom to recantation or the abandoning of the divine ordinances prescribed by their faith;
13. To desist henceforth from arresting and imprisoning anyone because of his previous membership in Bahá'í organizations.

Finally, although the order issued by the Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolution was unjust and unfair, we have accepted it. We beseech God to remove the dross of prejudice from the hearts of the authorities so that aided and enlightened by His confirmations they will be inspired to recognize the true nature of the affairs of the

Bahá'í community and come to the unalterable conviction that the infliction of atrocities and cruelties upon a pious band of wronged ones, and the shedding of their pure blood, will stain the good name and injure the prestige of any nation or government, for what will, in truth, endure are the records of good deeds, and of acts of justice and fairness, and the names of the doers of good. These will history preserve in its bosom for posterity.

Respectfully,

(signed)

National Spiritual Assembly of
the Bahá'ís of Iran