

STATEMENT MADE BY THE
BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

TO THE

SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION
AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

AT ITS THIRTY-THIRD SESSION

- 18 August - 12 September 1980 -

The Bahá'í International Community would like to bring to the attention of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the grave matter of violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms being experienced by our affiliate, the Bahá'í community of Iran, in disregard of the fundamental right of everyone to "freedom of thought, conscience and religion," established in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Bahá'í community of Iran is a religious minority of over 300,000 members. It is the largest religious minority in Iran. Since they are all indigenous Iranians, the Bahá'ís of Iran are not a foreign element, but are a part of the Iranian nation, to which they have always been loyal. Being non-political, law-abiding, and opposed to all violence, they constitute no threat to anyone; yet they have been the most frequently persecuted group in that nation.

Unfortunately recent events represent an escalation of this pattern of attacks against the lives and properties of Bahá'ís and their communities. During the last year and a half, Bahá'ís have been harassed, dismissed from their jobs, denied back pay and pensions; they have been terrorized, individuals and families beaten, and in some instances driven to the mosques and forced to recant their faith; and their homes, shops, and businesses have been looted, burned down, or otherwise destroyed. Bahá'í homes have continually been invaded by armed groups, and the family members subjected to long and harsh interrogations. The Iranian Bahá'í community has had its holy places, centers, and businesses confiscated, even destroyed, and its cemeteries have been seized and desecrated.

Such acts are clearly in violation of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a human rights instrument signed and ratified by Iran, which insists that the right to freedom of religion includes "freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom either individually or in community with others and in public or in private to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching," and further, "that no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice." These acts also disregard Article 27 of the same covenant, which asserts that persons belonging to a religious minority "shall not be denied the right in community with other members of their group . . . to profess and practice their own religion."

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The plight of the Bahá'í community of Iran was described in detail in a report published on 12 September 1979 by the Human Rights Commission of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland. This communication documents the administrative, financial, social, and personal strangulation of the Bahá'ís of Iran, and concludes that "this is the most serious time in the history of the Bahá'í community of Iran," and "unless immediate steps are taken through appropriate channels that there is a real and present danger to a group of faithful disciples of the religion of Bahá'u'lláh." What the future holds for the Bahá'ís of Iran, the same report then forecasts, is action that could include "the freezing of personal and privately owned Bahá'í assets or even their confiscation," followed by a more serious step forbidding any Bahá'í gathering, thus forcing the Bahá'ís "to go underground or emigrate from Iran under the threat of arrest or worse."

It is the worsening of the Bahá'í situation in Iran -- evidenced by the arrest, on 21 August, of all nine members of the National Administrative Council of the Bahá'ís of Iran and of two prominent Bahá'ís, accused, according to the media,* of being involved in subversive activities to overthrow the Iranian Government -- that has finally led the Bahá'í International Community to bring this matter before the Sub-Commission. On Sunday, 13 July 1980, two Bahá'ís in Tabriz, Mr. Yadu'lláh Astání and Dr. Faramarz Samandari, members of the Bahá'í Administrative Council of Tabriz, were executed, the latter without even a trial. This followed upon a series of summary arrests, without official charges, of a number of prominent Bahá'ís in Tabriz, Yazd, Shiraz, and Tehran. Bahá'ís have since been arrested -- also specifically because they were Bahá'ís -- in Hamadan, Birjand, Islamabad, and Abadih. Sixty-two are now in prison; three have been kidnapped, and their whereabouts are unknown. The charges against Mr. Astání and Dr. Samandari -- of conspiring against the sovereignty of Iran, its government and religion, and of prostitution and immorality -- lead us to fear that other Bahá'ís now arrested may be similarly charged.

Such accusations are without any foundation. Bahá'ís, both individually and collectively, are enjoined to obey the laws of their respective states and the authority of the duly constituted governments under which they live, are not allowed to participate in partisan politics or to accept any political post, and are committed to the highest standards of morality and rectitude in their public and private lives. Further, Bahá'ís believe in the essential oneness of all great religions, including Islam, consider those faiths as divine in origin, and honor and revere their Founders. Therefore, charges such as those brought against Mr. Astání and Dr. Samandari, as well as against the recently arrested members of the National Administrative Council of the Bahá'ís of Iran and two others, could well be brought against any Bahá'í in Iran, and place in grave danger the whole Bahá'í community. In fact, such a pattern of arrests becomes more ominous when one hears in addition of the existence of a plan to eliminate the Bahá'í community of Iran.

This lack of protection of the rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran -- protection of their lives and their properties -- becomes more apparent every day, and it could threaten the survival of the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents in Iran. The confiscation of Bahá'í holy places and historic sites -- such as the houses of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, in Tehran and Takur, and the demolition of the House of Bahá'u'lláh in Darkuba -- reached its climax in October 1979 with the seizing and destruction of the House of the Báb, the most

*Including Le Monde, 29 August, and The Times, 30 August.

holy spot for the Bahá'ís of Iran, and one of the holiest places for the Bahá'í International Community, the place where, on 23 May 1844, the Bahá'í Faith had its beginning. Two Bahá'í companies, Shirkat-i-Nawnahálán and Umaná, and a Bahá'í hospital, Mitháqíyyih, have been confiscated. Nawnahálán, a commercial company of sixty years' standing, in which over 15,000 Bahá'ís have shares and investments, has been occupied, its assets frozen. This action, in addition to the seizure of the Umaná Company, which holds on behalf of the Bahá'í community of Iran, all the properties of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran, including the holy places and cemeteries, has brought great spiritual and material concern for the Bahá'ís in Iran and abroad, and appears intended to suppress the functioning of the Bahá'í community in Iran.

Indeed, the omission of the Bahá'í community of Iran from the religious minorities mentioned in the present Iranian Constitution -- Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian -- which are afforded protection of their human rights under the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has indeed made the situation of the Bahá'í minority very precarious. It has opened the way to intensified denunciations, summary arrests, and trials against the Bahá'ís, with almost complete assurance of impunity. This lack of protection for the rights of a religious minority is, of course, in direct contravention of the human rights standards set by the United Nations in those human rights instruments which have become a record of the ever-broadening consciousness and understanding of governments and peoples.

In view of the apprehension of imminent detentions and executions and the extreme urgency of this matter, the Bahá'í International Community is grateful for this opportunity to bring the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran to the attention of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. It does this, however, only after consistent and unsuccessful attempts of the Bahá'í community of Iran to seek appropriate action by the government of Iran to protect the lives and properties of the Bahá'ís and their communities. We appeal, therefore, to the Sub-Commission to express its long-standing concern for the rights of minorities, by taking whatever action it feels appropriate in this serious matter of violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, a situation which, if unchecked, could result in the elimination of the Bahá'í religious minority in Iran.

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Statement presented on 4 September 1980