

BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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QUESTION OF MISSING AND DISAPPEARED PERSONS

Oral statement presented to the Commission on Human Rights
at its thirty-seventh session; Geneva, Switzerland

- Agenda item 10(b) -

Mr. Chairman:

The Bahá'í International Community is grateful to the Commission for this opportunity to make a brief statement on the disappearance of a number of prominent Bahá'ís in Iran.

Three were kidnapped between May 1979 and January 1980. Eleven others, including all nine members of the national administrative council of the Bahá'ís in Iran, were summarily arrested by Revolutionary Guardsmen at a private home in Tehran on 21 August 1980. The members of the families of these Bahá'ís have made every effort to locate their loved ones and have taken every possible opportunity to make inquiries of the authorities. The appeals of the families have so far gone unheeded, and it is because of the acute anxiety of the families involved that we have decided to take this opportunity to raise this matter in this distinguished international forum. Through you, Mr. Chairman, we now repeat our appeal to the government of Iran, which, we feel sure, has it within its power to locate these disappeared persons.

The details of this situation, including all the approaches to officials, have now been filed with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

We have also presented to the Working Group, at its request, extensive information on the background to this situation, but we would like, with your permission, Mr. Chairman, to give the Commission a very brief summary of this background.

Since the start of the recent revolution, prominent Bahá'ís in many parts of Iran have been arrested (and, in some cases, executed) as part of a continuing and systematic campaign to demoralize, paralyze, and ultimately eradicate the Iranian Bahá'í community.

Although Iran's 300,000 Bahá'ís are indigenous Iranians and constitute the largest religious minority in the country, they are denied recognition under the new Constitution (which recognizes the smaller Christian, Jewish, and

Zoroastrian minorities) and are thus placed outside the protection of the law. Those who wish to perpetrate attacks on Bahá'ís and their property may therefore do so with almost complete certainty that they will go unpunished.

Since the inception of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran in 1844, the Bahá'ís have been the most frequently persecuted group in that country. In the mid-nineteenth century, over 20,000 early believers were the victims of massacres, and the Iranian Bahá'í community has subsequently suffered continued persecution at the hands of successive governments. During the Pahlavi régime (1921-1979), when outbreaks of physical violence against Bahá'ís were fairly sporadic, a large volume of discriminatory legislation was enacted which deprived the Bahá'ís, both individually and as a community, of many basic rights and freedoms.

During and since the revolution, the Bahá'ís in Iran have been the repeated victims of violent attacks. Individuals have been beaten, terrorized, and savagely murdered. Properties have been confiscated, desecrated, and in some cases destroyed. The businesses of individual Bahá'ís have been confiscated and their bank accounts frozen.

The enemies of the Bahá'í Faith have conducted a campaign of vilification against the Bahá'í community, designed to identify the Bahá'ís as supporters of the ex-Shah, agents of SAVAK, opponents of Islam, spies for Israel, moral degenerates, and enemies of the Iranian government and people. The charges brought against the executed Bahá'ís included some or all of these accusations.

Such charges are totally without foundation. The Iranian Bahá'ís -- in common with their fellow believers the world over -- are obliged, as an article of their faith, to show loyalty and obedience to the government of the country in which they live, whatever its form or policies, and to abstain from participation in politics or involvement in any subversive activity. They are committed to the highest standards of morality and rectitude in their public and private lives. In addition, Bahá'ís believe in the essential oneness of all the great religions, including Islam, consider these faiths as divine in origin, and honor and revere their founders. These facts have repeatedly been presented to the Iranian authorities, together with evidence that the Iranian Bahá'ís have steadfastly upheld these fundamental principles of their Faith -- but all such representations, and all appeals for justice and fair treatment for the Bahá'ís, have gone unheeded.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 February 1981