

BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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Report of the Baha'i International Community Delegation
to the Thirty-Fourth Annual Session of the United Nations Sub-Commission
on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities; Palais des
Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, 17 August - 11 September 1981

The Sub-Commission is a 26-member body of independent experts, nominated for membership by their own government but elected for a three year term by the parent body, the Commission on Human Rights, which is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. A list of the individual expert members of the Sub-Commission is attached.

The Baha'i International Community delegation to the Sub-Commission was: Mr. Gerald Knight, Alternate Representative to the United Nations from the Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office in New York; Mr. Giovanni Ballerio, Representative to the United Nations in Geneva; and Mme. Mahshid Fatio, Alternate Representative in Geneva.

The Baha'i International Community delegation made extensive contact with members of the Sub-Commission during the first few days of the session, drawing their attention to the worsening plight of the Baha'is in Iran, sharing with them the report on the persecutions contained in the "White Paper" prepared by the Baha'i International Community United Nations Office and emphasizing that the Baha'i persecution was not part of the revolutionary process, but was a continuing and quite separate issue. The Baha'i delegates emphasized that the revolution provides a cover for fanatical elements to pursue their determined campaign to eliminate the Baha'i Faith in the land of its birth.

The reaction of members was extremely favourable and it soon became clear that the Baha'i case would be extensively referred to during the meetings and that there was an excellent chance of a resolution being adopted under the relevant agenda item.

The efforts of the delegation were greatly assisted by actions taken by governments sympathetic to the Baha'i case, in particular Australia and Canada, whose permanent missions in Geneva had submitted official requests to the Secretary-General that the resolutions of their national parliaments should be circulated as official documents of the Sub-Commission at its Thirty-Fourth Session and of the Commission at its Thirty-Eighth Session in 1982.

The Baha'i International Community representatives had close contact with observer delegates from Australia and Canada, as well as from many

other governments, and it became clear that there was a wide measure of support and interest. Information about the persecution was shared with many delegates, as well as with representatives of a number of non-governmental organizations.

Many delegates commented very favourably about the thoroughness of the Baha'i campaign to come to the aid of their oppressed brethren in Iran and said they were extremely impressed by the results obtained. This has led them to inquire more deeply into the 'raison d'être' of the Baha'is and there have been many opportunities to inform delegates of the character of the Faith and the nature of its teachings.

Members of the Sub-Commission and government delegates, from Africa, Asia, North and South America and Europe, were guests of the Baha'i International Community at private dinner parties held in Baha'i homes in Geneva. Two delegates even came uninvited, so intrigued were they to learn more about the Baha'is and enjoy their hospitality.

The warmth of the contacts made and the measure of support which seemed to exist for the Baha'i case was due in no small measure to the excellent contacts made by the relevant National Assemblies with the Sub-Commission members and with their governments.

Members from many countries mentioned being visited by, or receiving material from, Baha'is in their own countries and there is no doubt that this had a positive effect. Worthy of special note were the comments in this connection made by the members from Ghana, Zambia, Bangladesh, India, Norway, Peru, France and the United Kingdom.

So keen were some members of the Sub-Commission to highlight the plight of the Baha'is in Iran that they did not wait for the most appropriate agenda item dealing with gross violations of human rights. Instead they brought the matter up under a narrower and more restricted item dealing with detention or imprisonment. Mr. Ben Whitaker from the United Kingdom was the first to mention the Baha'i case in public. He quoted the "urgent and deplorable" case of the Baha'is in Iran, who were, he said, innocent citizens who are loyal to the Government. Their leaders, he continued, have been executed without cause and proof of the false charges was the fact that they had been offered their lives in exchange for a change of their religious beliefs. He felt it was in the interests of Iran and of human rights for the Sub-Commission to protest publicly against this persecution. Under the same agenda item, three more members, Mr. Foli from Ghana, Mr. Mubanga-Chipoya from Zambia and Mrs. Warzazi from Morocco also quoted the Baha'i situation in Iran. Mr. Foli said the persecution had reached an alarming new stage. He felt that there was convincing evidence of a determined policy of extermination and the Sub-Commission should pronounce itself very clearly on this case.

Mrs. Warzazi referred to the summary arrests and executions in Iran, saying that the pitiless repression cast a shadow over Islam and its values of tolerance, love of justice, respect for the human person, protection of human life, love of liberty and condemnation of excess. She specifically referred to the persecution of the Baha'i religious minority as an example of what was being done in the name of Islam.

Mr. Mubanga-Chipoya said that, although the Baha'i religion was undoubtedly apolitical, the Government of Iran appeared to have singled it out for persecution. He called on the Sub-Commission to examine what could be done.

Later in the session, under an agenda item dealing with gross violations of human rights in any part of the world, the attention of the Sub-Commission was drawn to the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran by eight speakers, namely Mr. Whitaker (United Kingdom), Mr. Bossuyt (Belgium), Mr. Khalifa (Egypt), Mr. Masud (India), Mr. Eide (Norway), Mr. Foli (Ghana), The International League for Human Rights and the Baha'i International Community's U.N. representative.

Mr. Khalifa said that religious minorities, such as the Baha'is, have taken more than their fair share of official violence. He asked who had the right to probe into the minds of people and judge their ideas, convictions, faith or belief. "What happens at the hands of these mullahs", he said, "is the bizarrest ugly caricature of a wild dream - not Islam".

Mr. Masud, commenting that so many crimes were being perpetrated in Iran in the name of religion, called on the present leadership not to interpret the Islamic religion in the way they were doing. He said that religion had been interpreted in different ways but all stand for faith in God and service to humanity. He said this principle should be applied to the Baha'is who believe in the oneness of God and of religion. They were tried, he said, on false charges. He called on the Sub-Commission to appeal to the Iranian Government to restore normalcy.

Mr. Eide described the Baha'i persecution as meaningless and unacceptable. There is no justification, he said, for these measures against them, measures which, he said, now seemed to be fully documented.

Mr. Foli, in common with Mr. Bossuyt and others, described the Baha'is as a peace-loving community. He said they were being liquidated with abandon in Iran.

The Baha'i International Community made a statement describing the suffering of its community in Iran and appealing to the conscience of the international community to "investigate closely the plight of the Baha'is in Iran and to consider what may be done to alleviate their suffering and to stem the perilous tide of extermination now threatening their very existence".

The International League for Human Rights said that the situation of the Baha'is in Iran was of special concern. Referring to the "excellent testimony of the Baha'i International Community representative", the League's representative said that the authorities in Iran had drastically escalated their campaign of harassment and persecution and the situation of the Baha'is was now urgent.

A draft resolution sponsored by eleven members was adopted on 9 September 1981 by nineteen in favour with none against and five abstentions. The resolution was introduced by Mr. Martinez Baez from Mexico. During the debate which followed, a number of members - Mr. Whitaker, Mr. Eide, Mr. Foli and Mr. Jimeta - spoke in favour of the resolution.

Press interest in the Baha'i persecution in Iran was evident from the beginning of the session as many journalists were interested to know what developments could be expected at the Sub-Commission. The Baha'i International Community delegation learned from one journalist that Mr. Theo van Boven, Director of the Division of Human Rights, had directed the attention of journalists to the Baha'i case at a press briefing the week before the commencement of the session.

Press interest resulted in major coverage. The BBC, in its World Service news bulletins on Saturday 29 August, reported the statement made to the Sub-Commission the day before by the Baha'i International Community and, later the same day, the BBC Persian Service quoted directly and extensively from the statement.

The leading French newspaper "Le Monde" reported the statements made about the Baha'i persecution by three members of the Sub-Commission and the major British weekly newspaper "The Sunday Times" carried an excellent report of the persecutions in its 6 September edition.

News items reporting the adoption of the resolution were distributed by AP, AFP, DPA, UPI and Reuters. NBC Radio broadcast a brief interview in the U.S.A. and reports were carried by, amongst others, Le Monde, The Times, The Guardian and the International Herald Tribune.

List of Members
of the Sub-Commission on Prevention
of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities
Thirty-Fourth Annual Session

African States

Mr. Jonas K.D. Foli	Ghana
Mr. Ibrahim Jimeta	Nigeria
Mr. Ahmed Khalifa	Egypt
Mr. C.L.C. Mubanga-Chipoya	Zambia
Mr. Mohamed Yousif Mudawi	Sudan
Mrs. Halim Embarek Warzazi	Morocco
Mr. Fisseha Yimer	Ethiopia

Asian States

Mr. Abu Sayeed Chowdhury	Bangladesh
Mr. Riyadh Aziz Hadi	Iraq
Mr. Nasser Kaddour	Syrian Arab Republic
Mr. Syed S.A. Masud	India
Mr. S. Sharifuddin Pirzada	Pakistan

Eastern European States

Mr. Dumitru Ceausu	Romania
Mr. Vsevolod N. Sofinsky	USSR
Mr. Ivan Tosevski	Yugoslavia

Latin American States

Mr. Antonio Martinez Baez	Mexico
Mrs. Elizabeth Odio Benito	Costa Rica
Mr. Raul Ferrero	Peru
Mr. Julio Oyhanarte	Argentina
(Alternate, Mr. Gomensoro)	
Mr. Jorge Eduardo Ritter	Panama
(Alternate, Mrs. Perdumo de Sousa)	

Western European and other States

Mr. Marc Bossuyt	Belgium
Mrs. Erica-Irene A. Daes	Greece
Mrs. Nicole Questiaux	France
(Alternate, Mr. Joinet)	
Mr. Benjamin Whitaker	United Kingdom
Mr. Beverly Carter Jr.	United States
Mr. Asbjorn Eide	Norway

