

Bahá'í International Community Statement  
at the 40th session of the  
United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Geneva - 7 March 1984

Agenda item 12: Question of the violation  
of human rights and fundamental freedoms  
in any part of the world

IP000201

In its statements under other agenda items, both at this session and at previous sessions of the Commission, the Bahá'í International Community has focused upon the universal aspect of the Commission's work - that is to say, the work performed by the Commission in establishing principles, drawing up guidelines and elaborating international instruments that are designed to promote and protect human rights generally and universally. We share to the full the concern of the Commission for all those who suffer discrimination, injustice and oppression, whatever their race, creed, colour, sex, nationality or ethnic origin, and we have felt that we could best contribute to the betterment of the situation of the mass of mankind by presenting ideas and suggestions that were universal in their application and would thus assist the Commission in carrying out the all-important universal aspect of its work.

In making this statement under agenda item 12, we are, however, most unfortunately compelled to be specific and to bring once again to the attention of the Commission the continuing persecution of the Bahá'í religious minority in Iran. Their plight is desperate, they are isolated and totally defenceless, and they cannot speak here for themselves.

The members of the Commission are already aware that, ever since the start of the Islamic Revolution, the 300,000 followers of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran have been the victims of an official campaign of religious persecution which has deprived them of their most fundamental human rights, including the right to life itself. They have been imprisoned, tortured and executed, denied jobs and education and deprived of their homes, possessions and means of livelihood solely on the grounds of their religious beliefs. Their holy places have been desecrated and destroyed, their community properties confiscated and their financial assets seized by the authorities.

Since the Commission debated this issue at its 39th session, the persecutions have continued unabated. Bahá'í men and women, and even teenage girls, have been executed for refusing to recant their faith. Bahá'í administrative activities have been declared illegal in Iran, and although the Bahá'ís have disbanded all their administrative institutions in Iran, hundreds of Bahá'ís who formerly served as members of these institutions have been summarily arrested. At least six hundred Bahá'í men, women and children are currently in prison and many of them are being tortured to try to force them to recant their faith. More details of these incidents can be found in paragraph 41 of the report of the Secretary-General contained in document E/CN.4/1984/28.

Ever since the persecutions began, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently denied that it is engaged in a campaign of religious persecution against the Bahá'ís and has sought to justify its actions by alleging that the Bahá'í Faith is a subversive political organization, actively engaged in international espionage. No shred of credible evidence has ever been produced in support of these fanciful allegations and they have been rejected out of hand by every human rights organ that has so far examined them.

History has taught us, Mr. Chairman, that revolution almost invariably brings in its wake a period of severe repression, characterized by large-scale violations of human rights. This is the state of affairs that exists in Iran today. When viewed against this background, the persecution of the Bahá'í minority might very easily be seen simply as one of the many unfortunate side-effects of the Iranian revolution. But that is most emphatically not the case and we would like to emphasize to the Commission that, fundamentally, the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran has nothing whatsoever to do with the Islamic Revolution. The revolution facilitated the persecution, but it did not inspire it.

The inspiration and motivation for the persecution of the Bahá'ís is religious prejudice, and that prejudice has existed ever since the Bahá'í Faith was founded in Iran in 1844. Because it appeared after Islam, it was categorized by the religious establishment as a dangerous heresy. For over a hundred years, fanatical elements among the fundamentalist Shi'ite clergy have agitated ceaselessly for the suppression of the Bahá'í Faith and, as a result, the Bahá'ís have been the most oppressed minority in Iran.

When the Islamic Revolution took place, it brought to power those very elements of the fundamentalist clergy most fanatically opposed to the Bahá'í Faith - and a religious pogrom was inevitable. A systematic plan was devised which was intended to accomplish the long-standing goal of annihilating the Bahá'í community and obliterating all traces of the Bahá'í Faith in the land of its birth. This plan - broad in its conception, remorseless in its execution - was immediately put into effect and rapidly advanced in all its phases.

What is happening to the Bahá'ís in Iran is therefore something quite different and apart from the equally disturbing violations of human rights being suffered by countless other Iranian citizens. It is different because it is a campaign that is being waged against an entire community solely on the basis of religious affiliation. It is apart because, as we have explained, it is fundamentally unconnected with the revolution. And it is profoundly disturbing because, if allowed to proceed unchecked, it could result in the annihilation of an entire religious community. It has, indeed, been described by many independent observers as a campaign of religious genocide.

The possibility clearly existed that the Government of Iran could pursue its campaign clandestinely, under cover of the post-revolutionary turmoil enveloping Iran, but, thanks to the vigilance of the international community, this has not been allowed to happen. The Commission on Human Rights, for

example, clearly perceived the very particular nature of the campaign being waged against the Bahá'í minority and, in its wisdom, included specific references to the Bahá'ís in its resolutions 1982/27 and 1983/34 dealing with the general human rights situation in Iran.

We would like at this point, Mr. Chairman, to express our profound gratitude to the Commission for the concern it has already demonstrated for the Bahá'í minority in Iran. We are firmly convinced that the intervention of the international community has been instrumental in saving lives and in restraining the Iranian authorities from carrying out a pogrom of truly horrifying dimensions.

At the same time, Mr. Chairman, we continue to be gravely concerned for the fate of our fellow believers in Iran, especially the many hundreds who are currently in prison and who are suffering grievous tortures to try to force them to recant their faith.

The Bahá'ís in Iran are totally defenceless. They have appealed to their government for justice and fair treatment, but all their appeals have been ignored. They are prepared to die rather than renounce their faith - but that is all they are prepared to do. As an article of their faith, the Bahá'ís will not use violence to defend themselves against attack or arrest; they believe it is better to be killed than to kill. They wield no political power and have no political allies because Bahá'ís are obliged as an article of faith to abstain from any participation in politics. They will not oppose or attempt to overthrow their oppressors, because the Bahá'í Faith requires all its followers to show the utmost loyalty and obedience to their government and to shun involvement in any form of subversive activity.

Mr. Chairman, the Bahá'ís in Iran have put their trust in God and hope for relief from their present persecutions through the goodwill, the compassion and the sense of justice of the international community. We therefore

most earnestly appeal to the Commission on Human Rights once again to extend its aid to these innocent and helpless victims of a cruel and senseless persecution.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we would like to refer to the document "Bahaism - its origins and its role" which was distributed to the Commission yesterday at the request of the delegation of Iran. This latest attempt to defame the Bahá'í Faith contains charges which are so exaggerated and contradictory that it is very clear that they are false. However, in case it may be useful, we have prepared a Commentary on the document which we are making available to anyone who is interested.

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