

PRESS RELEASE

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center Releases Report: *"A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran"*

(New Haven, Connecticut, January 15, 2007) – The Bahá'í faith has been effectively criminalized by the Islamic Republic of Iran and persecution of Bahá'ís is rising, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) documents in a new report released today.

The report, *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran*, is the result of a comprehensive study by the IHRDC, a New Haven-based non-profit with the mission of documenting the human rights situation in Iran.

"Practicing members of the Bahá'í faith are subjected in the Islamic Republic of Iran to a level of social exclusion and harassment that shocks the conscience. Community leaders have been murdered and sites of irreplaceable religious significance destroyed. Ordinary Bahá'ís are refused access to education and employment opportunities and cannot openly worship. They have become third class citizens in the country in which their faith was born," said Tom Parker, Executive Director of the IHRDC. "It is difficult to imagine a more clear-cut case of religious persecution."

In particular, the report finds rising levels of persecution since the 2005 election of President Ahmadinejad and resurgence of other conservative political figures. The state-owned media has stepped up vilification of the Bahá'í community. In November 2005, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei instructed military agencies to identify and monitor all Bahá'ís living within their areas of responsibility.

Since the introduction of the 1979 Islamic Constitution Bahá'í religious practice has effectively been criminalized inside Iran. The members of three successive Bahá'í national assemblies have been executed on the flimsiest of pretexts, as have numerous local community leaders. Sites of immense religious and cultural significance to the Bahá'í have been destroyed with the connivance of the state authorities. Ordinary Bahá'ís have been subjected to an extraordinary degree of pressure to recant their faith.

A Faith Denied offers evidence of systematic attempts by successive leaders of the Islamic Republic to force Bahá'ís to the margins of Iranian society by denying them education and employment. The report demonstrates how such actions are consistent with the decades of implacable hostility displayed by the clerical establishment prior to the Islamic Revolution and identifies many of these same clerics who today hold positions of political power.

The IHRDC is greatly concerned that under the leadership of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad the Islamic Republic is laying the foundation for a new cycle of anti-Bahá'í persecution.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The IHRDC report *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran* and documentary appendices are available on IHRDC's website at <http://www.iranhrdc.org>. For further information on the Bahá'í report:

Tom Parker, Executive Director
Iran Human Rights Documentation Center
(203) 772-2218
tparker@iranhrdc.org