

# Iran executing Baha'is who don't recant faith

By The Associated Press

After being questioned and threatened for hours, assured they could save their lives and gain national respect if they would renounce their "misguided" faith, the 10 unyielding women were hanged.

They included two teenage girls, five others in their 20s and three older women — wives, mothers, daughters, sisters — members of one of the world's most tolerant, peace-loving religions, the Baha'i faith.

Their executions in the city of Shiraz in southern Iran June 18, as recounted by American Baha'i leaders, was only one episode in a grisly, three-year succession of deaths and abuse against Iran's largest religious minority.

"The objective is the elimination of the Baha'i community," says Firuz Kazemsadeh, a Yale University expert on the Middle East and chief executive of the Baha'i national assembly in the United States.

It's a systematic, grinding process, he says, of arrests, confiscations of property and assets, dismissals from jobs, expulsion of children from school and recurrent executions designed to intimidate and spread fear.

The technique so far has not involved "mass murder," he said in a telephone interview, but when family members and friends keep being killed rather than forsake their faith,

"how long can human nerve endure?"

Only two days before the women were slaughtered, six Baha'i men, ranging in age from 23 to 60, were hanged in the same city, and on June 24, another young man. In these cases, as in the steady toll of others, Baha'i officials said, the victims are offered release if they recant their faith.

"They're told they can be freed, have their homes back and their jobs," said Robert Blum of the Baha'i temple and headquarters in Wilmette, Ill. "That's the offer — your life versus your faith. Many are offered more than they had before."

But few have given in, he added.

The accumulating deaths, persecution and pressure are being compared to the early Nazi persecution of the Jews. But in that case, Jews were classified racially and had no chance to recant to save themselves.

Mr. Kazemsadeh likens the situation of Iran's Baha'is to that of the early Christians under the Roman Empire, when many of them died rather than renounce their faith in order to live.

"It's a matter of transcendence, of values greater than life itself," he said.

In the last three years under the Iranian regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, there have been 142 hangings, firing-squad executions or assassinations recorded of Baha'is.



BALTIMORE, MD.  
MORNING SUN  
D. 177,189—S. 373,165  
BALTIMORE METROPOLITAN AREA

JUL 30 1983

BP000248