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**HAIFA, Israel**  
Officials at the Baha'i World Center in Haifa have accused Iran's fundamentalist Islamic rulers of trying to destroy the Baha'i community in Iran.

"This systematic campaign is intensifying, and the intensity of our appeal and concern has increased," said Donald Barrett, a retired American lawyer who is secretary general of the Baha'i international community.

"Baha'is dread the ringing of a telephone," said Barrett. "Every time the telephone rings, we fear that another Baha'i has been imprisoned or executed in Iran because of his faith."

According to a Baha'i report to the United Nations, at least 170 Baha'is have been among the more than 5,000 Iranians executed since the Islamic Revolution four years ago. Scores more have been

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imprisoned or have disappeared.

The Muslim clergy have accused members of Iran's Baha'i community, which numbers more than 300,000, of being spies for the United States and Israel.

The Baha'i World Center has been in Haifa since 1868, but Iranian authorities often point to the fact that it is in Israel to support their spying charges.

"Because we are here, the fundamental Iranian extremists look at Israel and the fact that Baha'is come here on pilgrimage and try to make a connection," Barrett said.

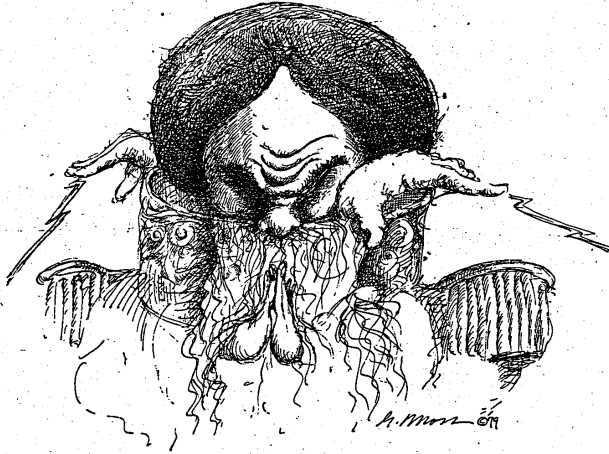
### Reject spying charges

Baha'i leaders reject all spying charges, emphasizing that their faith forbids political activity.

Some Iranian Baha'is charged with espionage signed declarations recanting their faith and were

Daniel Grebler is a writer for Reuters.

# Iran is attempting to wipe out gentle, apolitical Baha'i faith



set free, said Barrett. "This proves that the charges of spying are absolutely false."

The Baha'i faith was founded in Persia during the middle of the last century, based on the liberal religious preaching of Seyid Mohammad Ali, known as the Bab (the gate), who was executed in 1850.

Despite its Persian origin and acceptance of the Koran, the faith is not a sect of Islam. The universalist faith also preaches the tenets of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity.

"Each age has a mediator or a prophet," said Barrett. "Each major religion expresses a particular facet of divine truth."

Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians are recognized by the Iranian constitution. But Baha'is, the largest minority, are not. This is primarily because the Baha'i prophet came after Mohammed, making his teachings heretical in the eyes of strict Muslims.

But the fact that the Bab was a former Shi'ite mullah (priest) and that Baha'is were said to be

prominent supporters of the late shah's rule also helps make the sect officially suspect today. The prophet Baha'ullah (the glory of God), whose coming was foretold by the Bab, was exiled from Persia to Palestine in 1868 and died in Acre in 1892. His followers made nearby Haifa their world center.

### No comment

Until recently, officials here refrained from commenting publicly on the persecution of Iranian Baha'is for fear of drawing attention to their ties with Israel. The center relied primarily on diplomatic appeals to world leaders in the hope that they could influence Tehran.

But an upsurge in attacks on Iranian Baha'is led to a change in policy. "It just didn't seem to matter anymore that a report emanated from Israel," said Barrett.

**Iran's leaders have embarked on a policy of confiscating Baha'i property and businesses, dismissing Baha'is from jobs and ignoring their rights to government pensions.**

Last June 22 Baha'is, including 10 women, were hanged in Shiraz despite appeals from world leaders. The 100,000 U.S. Baha'is persuaded President Reagan to appeal to Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to spare the accused.

Among those executed were a 17-year-old girl and six women in their early 20s.

"There is something very heinous about the hanging of innocent young girls on these trumped-up charges because of religious fanaticism," said Barrett.

At the same time, officials of the faith say Iran's leaders have embarked on a policy of confiscating Baha'i property and businesses, dismissing Baha'is from jobs and ignoring their rights to government pensions.

While some 10,000 Iranian Baha'is have left for Canada, Britain and the United States, emigration does not appear a viable solution.

"We've never considered it," said Barrett. "Iran is their homeland. The Baha'is are loyal Iranians."

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