

## Noose from Iran

On June 18 in Shiraz, Iran, 10 women were hanged, purportedly on behalf of a merciful God. They were executed, their survivors say, because they were of the Bahai faith, which makes them infidels in the eyes of Islamic fundamentalists. The 10 women followed, by a day, six others who also perished on the gallows for their faith. It's open season on Bahais.

How easily comes martyrdom for a Bahai in Iran! Since the revolution of February 1979, over 150 Bahais have reportedly been executed by the holy men of the Islamic revolution.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands more are imprisoned. From time to time, one or two will be taken to a courtyard and shot. Their families, if they wish to claim the bodies, might first be required to pay for the bullets that killed them. And every so often, a mob will do the honors, as was the case not long ago when a man and his son were seized and hacked to bits just before they were set afire.

The apparent plan is to do away with the Bahai religion in Iran, where over 300,000 members of this gentle sect still live. Bahai children are banned from schools, pensions are cut off, securities are frozen or confiscated, houses are looted, temples are

razed. All the while, Bahai leaders perish by blade, bullet or rope.

While persecution of Bahais in Iran is nothing new — some 20,000 have died there in the last 100 years, according to Bahai officials — today's oppressions represent a switch from the way things were under the late shah. Bahais now pay for whatever decent treatment they enjoyed during his reign. They are now considered a part of his hated faction.

Bahai leaders in this country hope world public opinion can avert the complete extermination of their coreligionists who will not renounce their faith — the only escape from the gallows for a collared Bahai. Anybody whose indignation still needs fueling should consider some of the basic tenets of this persecuted religion. Bahais do not participate in partisan politics. They believe in the unity of mankind, the unity of all religions, the equality of the sexes and the races, the harmony of science and religion, in universal education and universal peace.

Just a reminder of what was traded for what when the previous administration withdrew support from the shah and opened the door for the Ayatollah Khomeini — "that Gandhi-like figure," as Jimmy Carter's ambassador to Iran called him.

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