

## Religious murder in Iran

**A**S EXECUTIONS of followers of the Bahai faith in Iran (where the persecuted are described as "agents of Zionism") mount, we are reminded again that men seldom do evil so completely as when they do it from religious convictions.

In recent days, 17 Bahais have been murdered by the government of the Ayatollah Khomeini. On a single day, six men were executed by hanging; on another, 10 women, ranging in age from 18 to 54, were put to death by Iranian authorities.

Their crime was adherence to a creed that shuns violence, teaches spiritual unity and affirms the equality of men and women — which is heresy to the Moslem clergy-dominated government of Iran.

The Bahai religion, which evolved from Islam in the mid-19th century, is the only sect bereft of constitutional protection in predomi-

nantly Moslem Iran, and since 1979 at least 160 Bahais have been martyred. Thousands of others have been deprived of their basic human rights, and forced into hiding. Property has been confiscated and graves desecrated in a deliberate campaign sanctioned by the Iranian government to eliminate followers of the religion — Iran's largest religious minority group.

In May, President Reagan asked the Khomeini government to spare the lives of imprisoned Bahais — a plea meant to invite world attention to the plight of the persecuted sect in the hope that a strong international reaction might cause Iranian authorities to end the slaughter.

Iran's brutal answer, the hanging of 17 more prisoners of the faith, suggests that the Khomeini government instead has decided to step up its pogrom.

May the necessary international response of condemnation be swift and strong.



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