

U.S. Condemns Iran's Persecution of Bahai Religious Prisoner

Zabihullah Mahrami died in prison December 15

The United States has condemned Iran for its religious persecution of Zabihullah Mahrami and a 10-year imprisonment that ended with his death at the age of 59 on December 15. Mahrami was a member of Iran's persecuted Bahai religious minority.

"The government of Iran is engaged in the systematic oppression of its citizens, including the persecution of individuals for religious, political and other reasons," State Department Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli said in a December 23 statement. "Members of the country's religious minorities -- including Sunni Muslims, Sufis, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians -- are frequently imprisoned, harassed, and intimidated based on their religious beliefs."

Mahrami, a former civil servant who lost his job in a purge of Bahai following the 1979 Iranian revolution, was arrested in 1995 on charges of apostasy, or abandoning Islam. He was sentenced to death for his religious beliefs in 1996. Following an international outcry, his sentence was commuted to life in prison.

Since that time, he had been incarcerated at a government prison in Yazd where, according to Ereli's statement, he was forced to perform arduous physical labor and was subjected to death threats.

According to Bahai representatives outside Iran, Mahrami is one of hundreds of Bahais who have been killed or imprisoned since the Iranian revolution in the 1970s.

The Bahai faith is an offshoot of Islam dating from the mid-nineteenth century when the son of a patrician Tehran family turned his back on his wealth and privilege and declared that he was a new messenger from God. The man, now known as Bahá'u'lláh, preached a message of universal peace and justice.

Currently the Bahai faith claims 5 million adherents around the globe. According to Ereli's statement, however, Bahais in Iran are systematically denied the right to assemble and worship freely and cannot maintain administrative institutions.

Following is the text of Ereli's statement:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
December 23, 2005

STATEMENT BY ADAM ERELI, DEPUTY SPOKESMAN

Iran: Death of Zabihullah Mahrami

\\hrserver1\projects\Baha'i Project\Government Documents\US Admin\State Department\Press Release_State Department_12-23-2005.doc

BP000520

The United States condemns the persecution and imprisonment of Zabihullah Mahrami for his belief in the Bahá'í Faith. After ten years in prison, Mr. Mahrami died on December 15. We offer our condolences to his family and loved ones. During his imprisonment, he received death threats and was forced to perform arduous physical labor.

Unfortunately, Mr. Mahrami's incarceration is not unique. The Government of Iran is engaged in the systematic oppression of its citizens, including the persecution of individuals for religious, political and other reasons. Members of the country's religious minorities-including Sunni Muslims, Sufis, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians-are frequently imprisoned, harassed, and intimidated based on their religious beliefs. Bahá'ís are systematically denied the right to assemble, maintain administrative institutions, or worship freely. Political dissidents are targeted, as has been the case with Akbar Ganji, an investigative journalist and human rights advocate who was charged with "acting against national security" in connection with his participation at a conference in Berlin. He has been in prison for five years.

The United States calls on the government of Iran to allow freedom of religion for all Iranians, and to ensure the right to freedom of speech and expression for all its citizens, without fear of discrimination, intimidation or imprisonment.

Created: 23 Dec 2005 Updated: 23 Dec 2005

This page printed from: <http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/Archive/2005/Dec/27-622911.html?chanlid=humanrights>