

**Islamic Republic of Iran:  
non-implementation of accepted UPR recommendations**

as concerns human rights violations against the Bahá'ís  
(January 2013)

The Islamic Republic of Iran has done absolutely nothing to implement the UPR recommendations that its government accepted over two years ago, as concerns members of the Bahá'í religious community. The opposite is true, in fact: since Iran's UPR in 2010, human rights violations against the Bahá'ís have severely intensified.

- In 2002-2003, four Bahá'ís were in prison in Iran. Gradually increasing since 2005, the number of arrests has escalated since Iran's UPR: from 74 arrests in 2009, to **125** in 2010, **164** in 2011 and at least **177** in 2012 (reported as of 30 December). The number of detained and sentenced Bahá'ís in prison has steadily multiplied, as well, reaching **116** in November/December 2012, including the seven former leaders wrongfully convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison.
- During the same period, the authorities greatly increased their efforts to eradicate all the community events, gatherings and group activities that are, for members of the Bahá'í Faith, an integral part of their religious practice.
- Officials harshly intensified the measures applied to deny adherents of this faith the right to work and earn a decent living. More Bahá'í farmland and other property was confiscated, as well.
- Violent attacks on Bahá'í homes, farms, shops, vehicles and cemeteries continued to be perpetrated with total impunity. In parallel, officials, clerics, and media affiliated with the government persisted in inciting hatred against Bahá'ís and their beliefs.
- Bahá'í children and adolescents were not only subjected to intimidation and harassment by teachers and school officials in classrooms, but some were also expelled from their schools when it became known that they are Bahá'ís.
- Students identified as members of this religious community are barred and expelled from universities and vocational training institutes. In 2011, over a year after Iran's UPR, officials again launched a concerted attack to block the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) from providing courses for the Bahá'í students who have been denied access to university.

We document these "facts on the ground" in the following report, under headings that correspond to eight recommendations accepted by Iran under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). We have selected only those recommendations that unquestionably apply to Iranian citizens who are members of the Bahá'í religious community. Each

section below quotes the recommendations as they appear in Iran’s UPR Working Group report.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Recommendations based on ICCPR Article 18

We will begin with three accepted recommendations of a general nature:

**9. Ensure that its legislation and practice conform fully with requirements of article 18 of ICCPR and with its other obligations under international human rights law (Poland)**

**48. Respect the freedom of religion (Germany)**

**103. Guarantee, in compliance with its obligations under ICCPR, the effective independence of the procedures and administration of justice, restricted emergency legislation, adequate protection for human rights defenders and political opposition members, and the effective guarantee of freedom of expression and opinion and freedom of religion and belief (Chile)**

*Iran has taken no measures of any kind to implement these recommendations with regard to members of the Bahá’í religious community. Issues must be addressed in both law and practice, as recalled below.*

Iran’s Constitution establishes Islam as the State religion and stipulates that “Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities”. All relevant legal provisions are interpreted and applied to restrict freedom of religious practice to these four religions, and to legitimize **persecution** against those who practice other faiths. Bahá’ís are not allowed, “in community with others and in public or private”, to manifest their religion “in worship, observance, practice and teaching”, as required by Article 18 of the ICCPR.

Although Iran claims to guarantee justice and respect for the human rights of non-Muslims, its officials avoid applying such guarantees to Bahá’ís by wrongfully accusing them of activities “against Islam and the Islamic Republic” – a charge that strips them of protection under the law. Since Iran’s UPR, the authorities have extended their use of this false allegation to arrest, arbitrarily detain, convict and sentence, solely on religious grounds, many more Bahá’ís than in previous years.

Moreover, Iran’s Constitution does *not* explicitly prohibit **discrimination** based on religion or belief. Bahá’ís in this country have always been subjected to unfair and unequal treatment,

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<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/WG.6/7/L.11. Iran has repeatedly stated that it uses the term “religious minorities” to mean only the three recognized in its own Constitution (Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians), so we do not include recommendations that use this term. We consider accepted recommendations that cite “freedom of religion or belief” and/or Article 18 of the ICCPR, because its definition covers all individuals:

*Article 18, ICCPR*

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

especially since the Islamic Revolution. But during the past few years – and thus **after** Iran’s UPR – officials have implemented discriminatory policies in a much more methodical and comprehensive manner: blocking all access to higher education, business/trade, and many areas of social and cultural life for members of this religious community.

## **2. Recommendations concerning imprisonment and judicial issues**

The following recommendations refer to court cases that concern Bahá’ís, including the former leaders who were on trial at the time of Iran’s UPR. The Yárán (“Friends”) was the name given to this group:

**50. Respect freedom of religion, and assure a fair and transparent trial for members of the Baha’i faith, in full compliance with the commitments undertaken as a State party to the implementation of ICCPR and other human rights instruments (Romania)**

**117. Ensure the trials of seven Baha’is are fair and transparent and conducted in accordance with international standards, and that Iran amend all legislation that discriminates against minority groups (Australia)**

**118. Ensure that the trial of the Yarran is conducted in a fair and transparent manner, consistent with Iranian law, natural justice and due legal process (New Zealand)**

### **2.1 The former leadership group**

*Iran made no attempt at any time to ensure that the trial of the seven Bahá’ís was fair, transparent and consistent with due process, whether according to international legal standards or even its own laws and regulations.*

There was no basis in fact to any of the accusations against the former leaders. For over two years, they were detained in Evin prison in Tehran, where they suffered ill-treatment (while in solitary confinement) and were repeatedly denied release on bail.

In 2010, these Bahá’ís were convicted on six charges and sentenced to 20 years in prison. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights raised the case several times in letters to and meetings with the Iranian authorities, expressing deep concern that the judiciary had not met the requirements of due process and fair trial, but to no avail.

While the case was on appeal, the group was illegally transferred to Gohardasht prison, notorious for its appalling conditions. The five men are still there, under close scrutiny in a wing reserved for political prisoners. The two women have since been transferred twice and are back in Evin prison.

Detailed information about the case can be found in a special report available at:

[http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/yaran-special-report/;](http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/yaran-special-report/)

see also: <http://news.bahai.org/story/801>.

## 2.2 Other arbitrary arrests and imprisonments

*In other Bahá'í cases, as well – both before and since the UPR – Iran's intelligence services and its judiciary have failed to act in accordance with due process.*

*Officials cite Iran's own laws and regulations to prove that their legal system is consistent with international standards, but many provisions of national legislation are ignored when intelligence officers arrest and detain Bahá'ís, and also when cases against adherents of this religion are brought to trial.*

**This situation has steadily worsened since Iran's UPR**, with many more arrests than in previous years: **125** in 2010, **164** in 2011 and at least **177** in 2012 (reported as of 30 December). The number of detained and sentenced Bahá'ís in prison has continually increased, as well, reaching **116** in November/December 2012. Moreover, unlike in previous years, that total remained over 100 throughout 2012. A list of the **110** Bahá'ís currently in prison is provided in attachment, with basic details on each case.

Persecution of the Bahá'ís intensified all over the country in 2012. In February, other human rights NGOs reported more severe repression of the Iranian people during the weeks leading up to the parliamentary elections, but multiple violations targeting Bahá'ís continued throughout the year. Intelligence officials heightened their use of violence while raiding homes and arresting members of this religious community, and in parallel nameless attackers continued to strike Bahá'í shops, farms, cemeteries and other property. In addition, like others arrested because their beliefs or opinions differ from those of the regime, many Bahá'ís were subjected to ill-treatment under interrogation.

Large numbers of intelligence agents were mobilized to arrest groups of Bahá'ís this year: 12 or 15 agents raided homes and treated men and women abusively – not only with insults, threats and humiliation, but also with physical violence. For example, the Intelligence Ministry officials who invaded a Bahá'í home in Gohardasht, during a community event on 15 May 2012, were aggressive, disrespectful, and caused damage during the search. One of agents was particularly angry, rude, vulgar, and when two young people objected to this, he physically assaulted them.

Coordinated raids took place from late 2011 through 2012 to arrest groups in:

- Gorgan and Gonbad (Golestan province): In October-November 2012, intelligence officials searched 24 Bahá'í homes in Gorgan and Gonbad, arresting and arbitrarily detaining 25 members of the community.
- East Azerbaijan Province: In August 2012, government agents arrested four Bahá'ís along with 31 other earthquake relief volunteers in this province. Outnumbering the volunteers four to one, the agents violently attacked and beat them, detained and then transferred them to a section of the police department. The original charge against all those arrested was: “involvement in subversive political activities against the regime, through providing assistance to the earthquake victims” (a charge later changed to “distributing contaminated food”).

- Eight different localities: At the end of July 2012, agents acted concurrently under orders from the Intelligence Ministry in Yazd to arrest 16 Bahá'ís: five in Isfahan, five in Baharestan, Shahin Shar, Vilashahr and Najafabad (in Isfahan province), one in Arak, one in Kerman, and four in Yazd.
- Tehran: In July 2012, Intelligence Ministry agents conducted raids on Bahá'í homes, arresting nine members of the community and three people who are not Bahá'ís. One of the Bahá'ís was held in solitary confinement for 89 days (incommunicado apart from one phone call to his wife, lasting less than one minute), and he had to be taken to hospital during the first month of his detention.
- Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan Province): In March 2012, 22 Bahá'í residents of Mashhad were in prison. At least nine of them had been arrested by Intelligence Ministry agents at or after a charity exhibition for children and young adolescents, held in February.
- Shiraz (Fars province): From January to March 2012, more than 20 Bahá'ís were arrested in this city. Their homes were thoroughly searched, in some cases for as long as five hours and accompanied by acts of violence.
- Sanandaj (Kordestan Province): In December 2011, 12 homes belonging to 13 Bahá'ís were raided by Intelligence Ministry agents. Two of the families resisted and were treated violently. Some members of the community protested about this, appealing to various officials in the province. The Intelligence Ministry then threatened others that trouble would be created for anyone who complains.
- Isfahan (capital of Isfahan province): groups of Bahá'ís in this city were also targeted by the Intelligence Ministry – 20 members of the community were arbitrarily detained from June to August 2011, and 23 more from September to November 2011.
- Rasht (Gilan province): three Bahá'í women were taken into custody in October 2011 during coordinated raids by intelligence agents on 16 Bahá'í homes in Rasht.

In additional separate cases, individuals and small groups were arrested and detained in 17 cities, towns and villages, in a dozen different provinces: recurrently in Ghaemshahr, Isfahan, Karaj, Mashhad, Semnan and Tehran, but also in Bandar-Abbas, Birjand, Bojnourd, Eslamshahr, Gheshm, Gonbad, Kerman, Najafabad, Nashtarood, Sari, and Tonekabon.

One particularly grievous case in Mashhad concerned a Muslim and his Bahá'í nephew, arbitrarily detained without trial for nearly 22 months, and the Muslim's brother (who is a Bahá'í), who was in solitary confinement for four months and arbitrarily detained for a full year. Their detention followed multiple violations in 2011 against Bahá'ís who were among the owners, managers and employees of the Achilan Door Company. The violations included torture, the threat of summary execution, forced termination of employment with denial of duly-earned benefits, intimidation and other pressure to force the business and its factory to cease all operations.

Very grave cases were also reported in Kerman, where members of the community were arbitrarily detained for five to six months in the highly stressful conditions prevailing in "temporary detention" centres run by Iran's intelligence services. One woman in her 50s was seriously ill, but the authorities ignored her family's requests to take her to clinic or

hospital. Her husband (67 years old) was in solitary confinement for more than two and a half months.

We have also reported many individual cases in Semnan, where Bahá'ís were repeatedly harassed and intimidated by local intelligence officers, summoned for interrogation over and over again, insulted and threatened. This past year, the local authorities rounded up and incarcerated all Bahá'ís previously released on bail or free pending appeal. Three of the women were nursing mothers with babies, who are now incarcerated with their infants.

Iran's judiciary has been laying down similar charges against Bahá'ís throughout the country. In 2011-2012, many were sentenced on charges of “propaganda against the regime”, “propaganda against the regime by way of propaganda for the perverse Bahaist sect”, “activity against national security through spreading the perverse Bahaist sect”, or “gathering and colluding with intent to harm state security, propaganda against the regime and disturbance of public order”. Some of them received additional terms if convicted of membership in Bahá'í administrative institutions. In a number of cases that involved the confiscation of farmland (see section 3.1 below), the court sentenced Bahá'ís to imprisonment for “forcible possession” of their own property. Some members of the community who had organized group activities were even charged with encouraging prostitution or with “corruption”. For example, although an arrest warrant (signed by a judge) stated that a Bahá'í woman had been charged with “propagating Bahaism”, at her trial the charges were specified as: “inviting people to partake in corruption, prostitution, and illicit relationships”. The authorities now use such terms to characterize organizing or participating in Bahá'í community gatherings and events.

In recent years, officials throughout the country have instructed Bahá'ís to sign statements declaring that they would no longer participate in their religious community gatherings and other group activities (including, for example, the gathering held every 19 days by each local Bahá'í community throughout the world). Under threat and duress, some felt compelled to sign these undertakings, but others refused to do so. Participation in community activities is a foundational element of the Bahá'í Faith and an integral aspect of Bahá'í religious practice. When officials try to force Bahá'ís to swear that they will no longer participate in these activities, the government is violating the right to religious practice enshrined in Article 18 of the ICCPR.

### **3. Discriminatory policies**

One accepted recommendation concerns discriminatory policies:

**49. Take all measures necessary to ensure the protection of religious minorities, including implementing the recommendations on adequate housing put forward by the Special Rapporteur after his visit in 2006 (Denmark)**

*[That report referred to discrimination against Bahá'ís; see below.]*

### 3.1 Confiscation of property, evictions, burial rights

The UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing is one of only a few Special Procedures permitted to visit Iran during the past 10 years. His report highlighted violations against Bahá'ís such as forced evictions and abusive confiscations, as follows:

43. In some regions, these expropriations seem to have targeted disproportionately property and land of religious and ethnic minorities, such as Baha'i cemeteries, but also houses. (...)

82. The impact of discriminatory laws and practices on the housing situation of religious minorities in Iran is especially evident in the legal provisions concerning inheritance rights and in the abusive use of property confiscation. Article 881 of the Civil Code, for example, states that if one of the heirs declares that he converted to Islam he is entitled to the entire inheritance in detriment of the remaining heirs who belong to another faith. These provisions apply even to housing units inhabited by any other heirs, and may lead to homelessness.

83. Property confiscation (...) testimonies and reports indicate that religious minorities may be particularly affected in this regard, including members of the Baha'i faith, which, although not constitutionally recognized, is the largest religious minority in the Islamic Republic of Iran. (...) property confiscation in rural areas was often accompanied by threats and physical violence before and during related forced evictions.

85. (...) Some verdicts which the Special Rapporteur has been able to examine declare that the confiscation of the property of "the evil sect of the Baha'i" is legally and religiously justifiable. The Special Rapporteur is concerned at the clear evidence of discriminatory conduct with respect to Baha'i property, including housing. (...)<sup>2</sup>

*Since Iran's UPR, confiscation and destruction of Bahá'í property has continued. Plainclothes agents and others have also continued to attack Bahá'í homes and cemeteries with total impunity. (For attacks against businesses, see section 3.2.)*

In previous reports, we detailed the confiscations of farmland and the destruction of many Bahá'í homes in 2010, and some attacks against Bahá'ís in 2011 that were directly related to disputes over confiscated land. The most recent confiscations have also involved farmland, in several different provinces. A group of Bahá'í farmers were imprisoned in 2012 because they had continued to cultivate their own land after repeated official attempts to seize their property. All of them come from the village of Kata on the outskirts of Yasuj (in the south-western Iranian province of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad). Their ownership of the land is undeniable: their families have been farming it for generations. Following numerous attacks on their homes in previous years, however, many had left the village to settle in Isfahan. Authorities tried to confiscate their farmland, but some of these Bahá'ís still defended their rights. One 82-year-old man in poor health was sentenced to six days in prison in 2008 after his son had built on land that he owned. He spent one day behind bars, was released for medical treatment, and later died at home.

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<sup>2</sup> E/CN.4/2006/41/Add.2, 21 March 2006

Sometime in 2011, officials told five of the Bahá'í farmers to give up ownership of their land or be jailed. They chose to go to prison and were later released on bail. At their trial, the court convicted them of “forcible possession” of their own property and sentenced them to six months of imprisonment on that charge. Two others, also arrested and detained, were sentenced to pay a fine. A total of 17 Bahá'í families in Kata were officially informed that they must hand over their land, but they have all refused and continue to appeal their cases.

In June 2011, a group of Muslim residents had begun destroying the local Bahá'í cemetery and building on the property. After the Bahá'ís put in a complaint and police had come to investigate, a mob of about 60 people aggressively attacked two members of the community. A few days later, a clergyman, two men, and eight women belonging to the *Basij* volunteer militia entered Kata and began marching through the village at night with some of the Muslim residents, chanting anti-Bahá'í insults and slogans. During the following months, groups of local people escalated this intimidation and harassment, making daily visits to the homes of Bahá'ís to recite anti-Bahá'í slogans. According to one account on an Iranian human rights website, some of those shouting slogans also started to forcibly enter and loot Bahá'í homes, leaving some families without any means.

Throughout Iran, not only have vandals attacked Bahá'í cemeteries with total impunity, destroying graves and causing extensive damage in at least nine different locations since Iran's UPR, but cemeteries are again being confiscated. Nearly 20 years ago, the Bahá'ís in Sanandaj were allocated a hectare of barren land to use as a cemetery: a rocky mountainside with no vegetation. After the first burial in 1993, Bahá'ís dug out the rocks, replaced the soil, planted and watered by hand 250 cypress and fir saplings (contributed by the Office of Agriculture), installed electricity, and built a room where bodies were prepared for burial. At each stage, permits were obtained and properly renewed. Then the Office of Natural Resources suggested that the Bahá'ís plant trees on public land next to the cemetery, expanding the green zone. They were pleased to do so, and the place became a symbol of the community's peaceful presence in the city.

During the past year, however, an order was issued for the cemetery to be confiscated and its buildings and graves destroyed. When the Bahá'ís filed appeals throughout the province, the Intelligence Ministry threatened them and demanded that they withdraw these appeals. When they refused to do so, 13 Bahá'ís were arrested and arbitrarily detained. The authorities also began confiscating the passports of all those who had travelled abroad and the passports of three Bahá'ís who live abroad and were visiting relatives in Sanandaj. In January 2012, the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan called upon the authorities to practice “tolerance and acceptance of other beliefs.” It described the “new wave of pressure and restraints against the Bahá'í community” as “inhumane and illegal actions... in violation of civil and political rights treaties and conventions.”

In some localities, officials are refusing to issue burial permits to members of the community. This has become a recurrent problem in Tabriz (West Azerbaijan province), where local authorities seem determined to impose Muslim burial rights on Bahá'í residents. In at least four cases since September 2011, after family members did not accept to perform burials according to Muslim customs, officials transferred the remains of the deceased to Miandoab and buried the bodies there without informing the relatives or the people in



charge of the Bahá'í cemetery in that town. Those who lodged complaints with local and national authorities were repeatedly told that nothing could be done because the orders had come from “above”. Intelligence Ministry officials even instructed a Bahá'í couple in Tabriz to stop putting flowers on his father's grave and tending the gravestone – because embellishing and tending the graves of Bahá'ís who were executed in the 1980s (after having refused to recant their faith) is considered to be “teaching” their religion, which is illegal. The couple replied that they would not comply with the instruction.

To complete this section, we would add that the right to property is totally disregarded by intelligence agents who search Bahá'í homes and/or workplaces. They seize everything related in any way to the Bahá'í Faith (books, music, photos, documents, etc.), along with computers, printers, and other personal belongings, sometimes also including chequebooks, deeds to property and other documents of value.

### 3.2 Other discriminatory practices

*All the discriminatory practices that target Bahá'ís have continued during the two years since Iran's UPR. Illustrative examples are given below.*

It is of particular concern when the abuse of fundamental rights and freedoms affects children. In public schools during the past year, religious education teachers vilified Bahá'ís and their beliefs, singling out Bahá'í children for exclusion, shunning and intimidation. Muslim clerics were invited to school classrooms to give presentations that insulted the Bahá'í Faith. In Semnan during such lectures, Bahá'í schoolchildren were seated separately from their classmates, and on at least two occasions, Muslim pupils were encouraged to strike the Bahá'ís.

In recent individual cases, Bahá'í pupils and high school students have been expelled from their schools because they had asked not to participate in congregational prayer, or had not remained silent when teachers made false accusations about their religion or beliefs in class, or had complained about anti-Bahá'í flyers distributed at school... or because their parents had objected when a speaker insulted the Bahá'í Faith at a lecture for parents of schoolchildren. Additional cases stemmed from mandatory declarations of religion on registration forms. Besides the four recognized religions, “Bahaism” was recently added as a possible response on the form at one school, but when a young girl selected this option (thus declaring her religion as Bahá'í), she was expelled. She has since been refused re-enrolment.

We have been documenting for many years **denial of access to higher education** for Iranian citizens known to be Bahá'ís. The authorities have made determined efforts to identify the religion of all pupils and students within the school system. Those identified (in school or elsewhere) as members of the Bahá'í religious community are allowed to take the national entrance exam, which is required for all public and private universities and vocational training institutes in this country. But when they try to obtain their results, they receive notice that they have “*Incomplete Files*” and are therefore not permitted to apply for

admission. Many have appealed to educational officials and/or gone to court in such cases, but none have obtained recourse.

There are still some students in Iran who have not been officially identified as Bahá'ís, and a few have been admitted to university. However, all enrolled students later identified as Bahá'ís were expelled. In nearly all cases, they were summoned, given only a verbal notification of their expulsion, and then found that their university accounts online had been blocked. All those who requested written notification of their expulsion (to pursue their cases further) received no reply, and every appeal has been rejected by officials and by the courts. Among the dozen most recent cases, one student in graphic arts at the university of Osveh in Tabriz was expelled on 12 May 2012 after having been identified as a Bahá'í. Another was expelled from Isfahan University in October/November 2012: as he had never before been formally identified as a Bahá'í, he had been able to complete his bachelor's and master's degrees and was engaged in writing his doctoral dissertation at the time of his expulsion.

Further evidence of the government's policy can be found in a publication issued by *Sanjesh*, the national academic evaluation and measurement organization of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. Last year's edition, entitled *A guide to enrolling and participating in the National Entrance Examination for academic year 1391 [2012–2013]*,<sup>3</sup> presented detailed guidelines on the application process for students wishing to enter university in Iran, including criteria for admission. On page 5, a section set out the four eligibility requirements for participation in the national university entrance exam, and the first one was:

- a. "Belief in Islam or in one of the religions specified in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism).

This requirement explicitly states that access to higher education in Iran is restricted to those who believe in Islam or in one of the three other recognized religions – excluding those who believe in the Bahá'í Faith.

Since May 2011, we have been documenting cases that concern educators and students arrested because of their participation in the work of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE). It should be recalled that the only objective of the BIHE is to meet the educational needs of young Bahá'ís who are denied access to university-level studies in Iran. At the time of the concerted attack against faculty and staff in 2011, nearly 300 people were serving the Institute, including international volunteer educators who teach through the Internet. About 1,000 BIHE students were studying at home and in inconspicuous laboratories in privately owned premises.

Added to the 2011 arrests, several more educators and students were arrested in 2012. Members of the community interrogated about the BIHE were subjected to harsh treatment during questioning and:

- All those linked to the work of the Institute were threatened with imprisonment.

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<sup>3</sup> available on the organization's website at [www.sanjesh.org](http://www.sanjesh.org)

- Parents who host classes were warned that their homes would be expropriated if the classes continued.
- Students were not only ordered to stop taking BIHE courses, but also told that they will never be granted access to higher education in Iran as long as they do not abandon their faith and declare that they are Muslims.

Regarding post-graduate work: for well over a decade, qualified Bahá'ís who had completed the equivalent of an undergraduate degree through the BIHE in Iran have been accepted by universities in some Western countries for Masters and PhD programmes. After obtaining graduate degrees, these Bahá'ís return to their country, and nearly all of them teach BIHE courses. Their degrees are not recognized in Iran, so they cannot obtain paid employment in their areas of expertise, but some of them offer their services as independent professionals. Three recent cases concern Bahá'ís, arrested in September 2011, who were teaching BIHE courses and involved in private practice. Graduates in Counselling Psychology, they had completed post-graduate studies in Canada, but Iranian officials told them that their Masters degrees are illegal and thus their work and teaching are also illegal. They were charged with using illegal credentials, fraud, and “promotion of prostitution”, and they are now in prison, serving four to five year sentences.

Finally, we would like to update the cases of the seven BIHE educators who were sentenced last year (also to four or five years in prison) and who had appealed their verdicts: one of them had his sentence suspended and was released in January 2012, but the appeals court confirmed the sentences for the six others, who remain in prison.

Barring Bahá'ís from higher education is only one aspect of the government's efforts to exclude and impoverish them. Iranian officials continue to apply a wide range of discriminatory policies and practices **to deny members of the Bahá'í community the right to work and earn a decent living**. In most cases, officials are implementing the government's instructions (promulgated by the Public Places Supervision Office in 2007) to exclude Bahá'ís from 25 specified trades and any other activities that could provide them with more than a minimum wage.

Since the Islamic Revolution, members of the Bahá'í religious community have been totally banned from work in the public sector. Methods to exclude them from the private sector, as well, include harassment and intimidation, refusal to issue/renew business licences, confiscation of property, sealing of premises, orders for destruction of farmlands and livestock, threats against merchants and professionals to dissuade them from doing business with or awarding contracts to Baha'is, refusal of loans and other banking services, etc. Because so many members of the community have no access to employment, the loss of a job nearly always affects an entire family.

As mentioned earlier, this year the authorities have implemented long-standing discriminatory policies in a much more methodical and comprehensive manner. In 2011-2012, systematic and relentless harassment was directed against those who own shops or other businesses. In several localities, Bahá'í business owners who had not yet been forced to shut down were under constant surveillance and received recurrent phone calls intimidating them and summoning them for interrogation. Moreover, officials did

everything they could to force non-Bahá'í managers to dismiss Bahá'í employees, even in jobs that require few formal qualifications (such as driving a taxi).

The full range of restrictive measures on employment was applied last year in Kerman to exclude Bahá'ís from the 25 professions referred to above (which in this town included real estate agents, goldsmiths, opticians, computer sales and repair, commerce in iron alloys and metals, health and cosmetics products and services, and all work related to food products). Not only were licenses no longer extended or issued, but valid licenses were revoked. Furthermore and as in other cities, officials acted to severely restrict the number of Bahá'ís allowed to work in any one profession or trade (and also the number of Bahá'í-owned shops on any one street), as well as to prevent Muslims from working with members of the Bahá'í community.

Official searches of Bahá'í shops and workplaces greatly increased during the past year. The authorities used various pretexts, seizing any material related to the Bahá'í Faith found in workplaces and calling it evidence of “propaganda against the regime”. Interrogating officials treated the Bahá'ís with disrespect and threatened to revoke their trade or business licenses. Over 70% of Bahá'í owned businesses in Sari and Ghaemshahr and some in Gorgan, Gonbad and Kermanshah – a total of over 50 shops – were searched to find evidence to arrest the Bahá'í owners. Officials even went to the homes of former Bahá'í owners of stores that have been closed for over two years, and searched these homes: the only place left for many of them to run independent businesses. Members of the community with shops or home offices in Isfahan were also systematically targeted for intimidation and abuse. And more premises were recently sealed in Arak and Aligoudarz, where all Bahá'í business owners were under surveillance.

In July 2012, Bahá'í business owners in Aligoudarz, Isfahan, Mashhad and Semnan were summoned to the Public Places Supervision Office. The officials objected to the closure of their business on a Bahá'í holy day, asserting that this constituted “propagation” of the Bahá'í Faith. Several businesses were shut down as a result of this new interpretation. In November 2012, government authorities sealed **all** the Bahá'í shops in and around Hamadan – a total of 32 shops and at least one warehouse – for the same reason.

In and around the city of Semnan, multiple abuses by ministries, departments and offices of the government, and also involving the clergy, have included methodical efforts to prevent Bahá'ís from earning a living. Officials have shut down at least 30 enterprises (factories, shops, workshops, offices, etc.), putting over 110 people out of work. In May 2012, the Intelligence Ministry raided and sealed two factories that had employed 59 employees, most of whom were not Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í International Community recently issued a publication detailing the oppression in Semnan, available at: <http://www.bic.org/news/launch-special-report-documenting-persecution-bahais-semnan-iran>.

In this context, we would also recall that Bahá'ís throughout Iran are denied access to their own, rightfully earned pensions. In cases taken to court during the past ten years, the judgements have always gone against them. Court decisions explicitly stated: “payment of pension to those individuals connected with the baha'i sect is illegal” [or an “unlawful act”].

In the most recent cases (2011-2012): three Bahá'ís received official letters either refusing or discontinuing pensions because of their membership in the Bahá'í “sect”. One letter explained that the recipient and 14 others had been fired due to the legal prohibition against their being hired in the first place (because of membership in “the deviant Bahaist sect”) and thus their claims were of no account. Another letter discontinued the pension of a Bahá'í doctor. His daughter protested, asking if the official knew how many years her father had served the people of Iran, and he acknowledged that this doctor had travelled from house to house and village to village to provide medical treatment. But then the official said: “In accordance with the fatwa issued by the Imam, payments to all Baha'is must be discontinued”.

#### 4. Incitement to hatred and violence

Finally, one accepted UPR recommendation called on the Iranian government to:

**119. Fully respect the rights of the adherents of the Baha'i faith and to judicially prosecute those inciting hatred against them in religious environments, the media and the Internet (Luxembourg)**

This is important because the upsurge in human rights violations against Bahá'ís in Iran during the past seven years was preceded and accompanied by efforts to incite hatred against them.

*Some officials and members of the clergy have publicly continued to engage in incitement to hatred, intolerance and discrimination against the Bahá'í Faith and its adherents. In Iran, they do so with total impunity.*

*National and provincial budgets include allocations for programmes to “confront” the Bahá'í Faith, and there are official organs dedicated to that purpose.*

*Articles and broadcasts on government and State-affiliated media, as well as conferences, publications, exhibitions, etc., sponsored by officials or clergy, persist in vilifying the Bahá'ís and their beliefs, inciting hatred and violence against them.*

Largely unknown outside Iran, a State-sponsored campaign has been demonizing and maligning the Bahá'ís for years, using false accusations, inflammatory language and repugnant imagery. In October 2011, the Bahá'í International Community documented over 400 published instances of incitement to hatred over a 16-month period (that report is available at: <http://news.bahai.org/story/861>).

The same officials and members of the clergy continued to incite hatred against Bahá'ís and their beliefs throughout 2012. For example, a series of six conferences was organized in Semnan in September/October 2012, after a number of residents had protested to authorities about the persecution of Bahá'ís living there and had stated that this persecution was giving the people of their province a bad name. The local office of the Intelligence Ministry organized the events, with principal speakers from the Ministry's headquarters in Tehran, and the participants (who received official invitations in writing)

included managers and directors of government offices, agencies and organizations, and several prominent families. During the presentations, the speakers showed photos of sealed shops and destroyed farms belonging to local Bahá'ís and made many false allegations about the community's activities and economic situation. Photographs of Bahá'ís imprisoned in Semnan were shown, as well, and participants were warned not to be fooled by these people who use kindness and good manners to attract Muslims. Some audience members received pamphlets and CDs attacking the Bahá'í Faith.

Similarly, in Khorramdasht, non-Bahá'í business owners were invited to attend a sermon by two clerics at the local mosque, and attendance was required. The purpose was to incite Muslims to shun Bahá'ís. A hand-out was distributed with copies of fatwas stating: "All members of the perverse Bahaist sect are condemned as blasphemous and ritually unclean"; "any form of association with them is religiously prohibited"; and "It is incumbent upon the believers to counteract the machinations and perversity of this misguided sect". The hand-out created an impression that the Bahá'í Faith promotes immorality, decrees unequal treatment between men and women and between rich and poor, and deceives both Bahá'ís and uninformed individuals with "mottos such as the 'unity of mankind'."

Widespread incitement to hatred has encouraged and condoned violence against Bahá'ís. The worst cases involved physical assault. Bahá'í homes, vehicles, farms, shops and workplaces have been badly damaged or defaced with graffiti; some were destroyed. Half a dozen communities have been affected for years.<sup>4</sup> All incidents were reported, but the police always reply that they can do nothing. Those who attack Bahá'ís do so with impunity.

Members of the community also receive threatening telephone calls, text messages and anonymous letters, based on the malicious accusations in the media. The government blocks Bahá'í websites, and Bahá'ís are prohibited from using any means of communication with the public, so they have no means of providing fellow Iranians with accurate information about their beliefs. As it is forbidden for them to associate with Muslims, they cannot offer assistance to their friends and neighbours or even express good will without being accused of acting "against the regime".

## 5. Conclusion

Reporting to UN human rights mechanisms often entails grouping violations by mandate (or accepted UPR recommendations, as in this report), which may not adequately reflect the situation on the ground. This is particularly true when individuals or groups are subjected to recurrent, relentless, multiple abuses. In 2011-2012, multiple violations struck Bahá'ís in Abadeh, Aligudarz, Bukan, Isfahan, Ivel, Khorramabad, Laljin, Mashhad, Parsabad, Rafsanjan, Ravansar, Semnan and Shiraz. The persecution was intense and mobilized a wide range of actors in some of these cities, including police, the courts, clergy, local bureaucrats and plainclothes agents, in addition to intelligence officials.

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<sup>4</sup> In particular Ghaemshahr, Isfahan, Karaj, Mashhad, Rafsanjan and Semnan, but recurrent pressure has been applied to Bahá'ís in at least 10 other localities: Abadeh, Aligudarz, Bukan, Khorramabad, Laljin, Parsabad, Sari, Ravansar, and Asfin and Gaziran in the suburbs of Arak.

It is also clear, however, that there is now a greater awareness of how intolerable the situation of Iran's Bahá'ís has become in recent years. Both inside and outside the UN, international condemnation of the Iranian government's dismal human rights record – and specifically its oppression of the Bahá'í community – has greatly increased. And the violations have been deplored by prominent people in countries throughout the world: Nobel Peace Prize winners, parliamentarians, religious leaders, theologians, academics, business and trade union representatives, lawyers, judges, writers, artists, filmmakers....<sup>5</sup>

The report to this year's UN General Assembly by the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran extensively addressed abuses against this country's Bahá'í, Christian, and Dervish communities, noting that: "Members of both recognized and unrecognized religions have reported various levels of intimidation, arrest, detention and interrogation that focus on their religious beliefs." By a vote of 86 to 32 with 65 abstentions in December 2012, the General Assembly deplored Iran's "serious on-going and recurring" human rights violations. Among a long list of abuses, the resolution noted the use of torture and targeting of human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers and minorities, including members of the Bahá'í Faith. The length and specificity of this year's resolution reflected the international community's deep concern about ever-increasing violence against all individuals who hold viewpoints different from those of Iran's authoritarian regime.

UPR Info, an NGO working to promote and strengthen the UPR, recently published its *Mid-term Implementation Assessment* (MIA) on Iran, available at: <http://www.upr-info.org/followup/assessments/session20/iran/MIA-Iran.pdf>. References to human rights violations against the Bahá'ís are so numerous and extensive in this MIA,<sup>6</sup> they can serve to fully document the statement made by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (in October 2011) that Iran's persecution of Bahá'ís is among the most "extreme manifestations of religious intolerance and persecution" in the world today.

This report has shown that **the Iranian government has taken no measures of any kind to implement the UPR recommendations that it accepted, pertaining to the Bahá'ís.**

On the contrary: we are well past the mid-term mark in Iran's UPR follow-up, but **the situation of the Bahá'ís is now significantly worse than in 2010.**

Despite all its claims, Iran has shown no sign that it intends to cooperate with this (or any other) UN human rights mechanism.

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<sup>5</sup> see <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/iran-update/international-reaction.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Not including the introduction, the text of Iran's MIA totals 90 pages, and references to the Bahá'ís appear on 30 of these pages, see pp. 14-17, 19-20, 23-29, 31-32, 41, 43-46, 48, 64, 69, 72, 78, 86, 88-89, 91 and 93.