

[PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

[Translator's notes appear in square brackets]

[Personal information has been **redacted**.]

25 Aban 1383 [15 November 2004]

Esteemed President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Khatami

For over 161 years, [and up] to this day, the Baha'is of the sacred country of Iran, their ancestral homeland of which they are proud, have been subjected to a plethora of persecutions, killings, pogroms, calamities and various deprivations because of their belief in a new religion, despite [their] being [members of] the largest religious minority in this country. They have endured various pressures, atrocities, and deprivations in the path of their belief in God. Existing evidence shows that they have been afflicted with undeserved discrimination and various injustices in their personal and social affairs, all of which are contrary to religious, legal, and moral standards. And whenever there are any social and political changes in this country, new incitements have been made against this religious minority and their inalienable rights have somehow been trampled upon.

This also happened in 1357 [1979] when the Islamic Revolution took place and its Constitution was ratified. Although there was no clear reference to the rights of the Baha'i community in this document, given that the Constitution considered the regime to have been founded upon the belief in One God as the sole source of government and guidance, the need to surrender to His command, the Day of Resurrection, divine justice, nobility, dignity, and the high value of human beings, rejection of any cruelty, brutality, supremacy-seeking, and standards of fairness and justice, it was our hope that the era of injustice and oppression against the Baha'is would come to an end and justice and fairness would take its place, and that they could go on with their lives under a just government founded on divine teachings. Unfortunately, this was not to be.

Day by day, the pressure on this oppressed community increased in severity and the injustices and deprivation of their rights in various aspects of life expanded, such that their lives, properties, homes and employment became subject to assault. A number of people attacked the homes of the Baha'is in villages and cities and forced them out of their places of rest and residence, such that they had to flee at night and stay in safe houses and live as refugees for long periods of time. After that, the religious courts, under the pretext [that they had abandoned their] property, confiscated and even sold their possessions. Hundreds of the followers of this Faith were condemned to death by execution and their properties were confiscated based on unfounded and baseless allegations.

Hundreds of trustworthy employees were expelled from their jobs without any payment, and some of them were imprisoned and forced to pay back the wages they had earned throughout their years of service. They dismissed workers from factories and offices; they paid them nothing for their years of service, and [deprived them of] severance pay or insurance. They even cut the pensions of elderly and retired individuals, which they had earned as a result of paying into the insurance and retirement funds during their employment. At certain times they expelled the students from schools. The [prevention]

of intelligent students from going to school and participating in scholastic Olympics still continues. They also, for some reason, prevented students from continuing their studies in universities and institutions of higher education. This too, still continues. They desecrated and confiscated the burial places of the dead and took the bodies to unknown places. They confiscated, and in some cases completely destroyed, the sacred and holy Baha'i sites that are the objects of respect among all Baha'is around the world.

In this manner, a wide variety of injustices was inflicted upon the Baha'i community, the evidence and documentation for which is readily available. As this process continued, the Baha'is, based on their religious principles, repeatedly appealed to their sovereign government in writing and in spoken word, and informed the authorities about the attitudes and decisions that were against the verses of the Quran, the luminous religion, the Constitution, and international covenants. They emphasized the point that the Baha'i community of Iran, despite all of these pressures and assaults, would never take any action contrary to the law, is the well-wisher of the government and the people, does not participate in any political faction or party, is dedicated to its religious principles and teachings, and walks in the path of service and love for humanity, and peace and friendship and unity among religions. Unfortunately, no attention was paid and no one took any steps to bring about the freedom and vindication of rights for the followers of the Baha'i Faith.

When we look at these acts from the perspective of the luminous religion and the verses of the sacred Quran, we can see that God has founded the sacred religion of Islam on the basis of brotherhood and equality without regard to belief, colour, ethnicity, and so on, and has recognized only knowledge and piety to be worthy of praise in His sight. Evidence for this can be found in the sacred Verse 13, Sura of Al-Hujurat, which states: "O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware."¹

From the point of view of the sacred religion of Islam, people are free to choose their religion, and everyone can follow their [own] beliefs. No one has the right to impose his religion upon others by force or coercion. The holy verses, "Let there be no compulsion in religion, ..." ², and "You have your way, and I have my Way."³ express this fact. From the perspective of Islam, the people who live under the banner of this religion have a right to the security of their property, life, and honour, and no one has the right to infringe on other people's property, life, and home or besmirch their honour. "Whoever takes a life—unless as a punishment for murder or mischief in the land—it will be as if they killed all of humanity"⁴. Islam is the religion of mercy, peace, and friendship. The verses, "But My mercy encompasses everything"⁵ and "We have sent you, O Prophet, only as a mercy for the whole world"⁶, reflect the mercy of God with respect to all tribes and peoples, and all of humanity, regardless of their race, colour, religion, or belief.

When we review these incidents from the perspective of the Constitution of Iran, [we see that] Articles 14, 19, 20, 22, 23, and Paragraphs 14, 8, and 9 of Article 3, depict for us the Constitution as a document for equality under the law, the safety and security of life, property, employment, and housing, and freedom of belief, choice of employment, right to social security, right of appeal to the law and entitlement to a fair judicial process, participation in administration of the general affairs of

¹ [Quran 49:13] <https://quran.com/49>

² [Quran 2:256] <https://quran.com/2>

³ [Quran 109:6] <https://quran.com/109>

⁴ [Quran 5:32] <https://quran.com/5>

⁵ [Quran 7:156] <https://quran.com/7>

⁶ [Quran 21:107] <https://quran.com/21>

the country, and the right to study and training, and so on, regardless of [our] belonging to any tribe, language, or religion. It states that all citizens and countrymen can partake of these rights without any discrimination.

International laws, and, above all, the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, uphold the equality of human beings and their entitlement to basic rights and freedoms without discrimination based on race, gender, language, or religion: The Preamble and Articles 55, 13, and 76 of the U.N. Charter and Article 2 of the Declaration on Human Rights (approved by the government of Iran in 1324 [1945/1946]).

Article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Articles 18, 19, 24, 25, and 26 (approved by the government of Iran in 1354 [1975/1976]); the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (approved by the government of Iran in 1346 [1967/1968]); the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 111 in Respect of Discrimination in Employment and Occupation (approved by the government of Iran in 1363 [1984/1985])—all pertain to the unjust discrimination against the Baha'i community in Iran.

Also, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, which was approved by the members of the Islamic Conference in A.D. 1990, [established] the legal principles in general for all human beings: 1) right to life, 2) right to human dignity, 3) right to education, 4) right to responsible freedom, and 5) right to equality under the law, and considered disregarding them as a religious sin.

Despite all divine, legal, and social standards, some of which were mentioned in brief, in the beginning of the Islamic Republic of Iran, decisions were made by the leadership circles that astonished and shocked humanity. The cultural authorities of the country, under the guise of a Cultural Revolution, decided to expel the Baha'i students who were studying in universities and institutions of higher education, many of whom were in their final terms, and also to prevent any new applicants from entering higher education solely because they were Baha'is.

Then, in 1369 [1990/1991] the Council of Cultural Revolution issued a proclamation that unequivocally deprived the Baha'i youth of this land of higher education, and closed the door to their efforts to develop and bring to fruition their native talents. This situation lasted for about 20 years, until in Azar 1382 [November/December 2003], when it was officially announced in the Payke Sanjish (the publication affiliated with the Ministry of Science) that, for the first time, the application for the National University Entrance Examination would not ask the applicants to identify their religion; they would only be asked which religious examination they wished to participate in.

Owing to the limitation stated in Article 13 of the Constitution, Baha'i applicants must participate in the Islamic religious exam. After obtaining admission and taking the exam, and the announcement of the results of the first stage, the success of the Baha'i youth was quite remarkable; nearly 800 of them, hundreds of whom achieved top rankings of one to four numbers, qualified to select a major.

However, upon receiving their grade report the Baha'i applicants realized that the report had listed them as being Muslim. The hypocrisy of this decision astounded and astonished the Baha'i community, and unfortunately the joyful and happy news of the absence of a question on religion for applicants to the National University Entrance Exam—which was a harbinger of freedom of belief and an effort to fulfil the principles of human rights and elimination of discrimination in education by the government of the Islamic Republic—was short-lived. Given that the students admitted to the first stage considered that choosing a major based on such a grade report [would be] a form of recanting their belief, they completely gave up their wish to enrol in a university and, in the tradition of the Baha'i community, began to send letters of appeal and engage in other relevant activities.

The department of Sanjish⁷ conveyed in telephone conversations with a few individuals whose appeals it had received that their complaints had been attended to and the religion column had been deleted from their grade report. They told them, “tell your co-religionists to contact us to get their grade books and select a major.” This created another ray of hope in the hearts of the Baha’i youth. The ones who received permission immediately made contact and began to select their majors. However, most unfortunately, when the results were announced, it was revealed that only a few Baha’i applicants had been admitted and were limited to studying only in the English Language major. It appears that the announcement regarding these few students was designed solely to distract international observers, even though solid and unquestionable documents and evidence exist that show that most of the eligible participants in the National Exam should have been accepted into the universities across the country.

Therefore, the question remains in the minds of the members of the Baha’i community in Iran and throughout the world, and all enlightened people and upholders of human rights, as to whether taking such unjust decisions and adherence to such processes—whose obvious aim and goal is to create discrimination and deprivation of the inalienable rights of an oppressed community—is in accordance with justice and fairness. Is it acceptable to deprive and prohibit a group of people, seeking growth through education and acquisition of knowledge and development of their God-given talents, solely because of their religious beliefs?

At any rate, it has now been 25 years since the advent of the Islamic regime. The Baha’is have shown loyalty in the face of every betrayal. The varied assaults and severe and extensive deprivations did not ever lead them to swerve, even so much as a hair, from the straight path of God. They continue as before to hold on to the commands of faith and belief and to the cord of patience and endurance. They expected that the esteemed authorities would have found out, during this long period for removing doubts and suspicions, that the Baha’is believe in the Oneness of God, profess the truth of all religions and Messengers and the immortality of the soul, and affirm the truth of all heavenly books; based on their religious teachings they obey the government and the laws and regulations of the country; they strive to serve the interests of their country through cultural, social, economic, and developmental activities, and do not refrain from any endeavour or sacrifice in the path of establishing human virtues and perfections and attainment of international ideals, particularly world peace and the unity of humankind.

Now, it is our hope that you will take urgent action to ensure the emancipation of the Baha’i community of Iran, reinstate the rights that have been taken away from them, and recognize their human rights as affirmed in the Constitution.

With respect

The Baha’i Community of Iran

⁷ [Sanjish: Educational Assessment and Evaluation Organization]