

[PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

[Translator's notes appear in square brackets.]

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

[The excerpt below is from the section of the article that pertains to the Baha'i Faith]

[Adapted from website:] Committee of Human Rights Reporters

[Date:] 20 Mehr 1388 [12 October 2009]

Human Rights and Democracy for Iran

Committee of Human Rights Reporters

Start of Harassment and Threatening of Baha'i Students at the Beginning of the New Academic Year

Hesam Misaghi

Committee of Human Rights Reporters

Article from Magazine

At the start of a new academic year, there have been numerous instances where Baha'i students have not been enrolled in schools, as a result of refusing to sign a written undertaking.

The Baha'i Community News Service reported on one of these cases on 10 Mehr [2 October 2009]. The report refers to a primary school girl who came across the question about religion while filling out a registration form. After learning about the student's religion, school officials make his/her registration conditional on a letter of undertaking stating that he/she should conceal his/her beliefs. In recent years in Iranian schools, with the systematic trend of insulting students and the Baha'i Faith, observations suggest that the compulsory letter of undertaking is to intimidate, silence, and force the surrender of the Baha'i students to teacher insults during the academic year.

In the past academic year, the Baha'i News Service reported that approximately 80 cases of harassment of Baha'i students were reported for the six months between September 2008 and February 2009. These included threatening, expulsion, humiliation and dishonouring the student's belief in front of friends, and so on. It should be noted that these cases are only the ones included on the reports received, as in many cases, parents and students do not even report the incident.

In recent years, systematic government actions have included blasphemy, incitement, intimidation, and even expulsion of Baha'i students, as well as influencing the minds of other students against these students, and evidence shows that there is no school or classroom in our country in which teachers have not spent time prejudicing the minds of students against this religious minority of our country. In the meantime, if a Baha'i child or adolescent is present in a class, he/she will face two options. The first is to choose silence and toleration of all insults and conversations, which in many cases includes attributing ugly and shameless behaviour to Baha'i families. The second option is to get permission to respond to the teacher's comments, in which case no good result will await the student; in most cases,

he/she will face expulsion or at least the threat of expulsion. A number of expelled or threatened students in Iranian schools have written their stories, in which many of them have cited their ordeals.

Hasti Fallah is a Baha'i student who was expelled from school at the pre-university level. From the first year of high school to the year of pre-university, which led to her expulsion, she had always faced many cases of insults and threatening; for example, this Baha'i student writes in a part of her biography: "(In the first year of high school) three or four of our classmates avoided shaking our hands with wet hands, or sometimes if they did, they would go and wash their hands ... In the third year, it had not been long since the start of the academic year, when, during our lesson in the contemporary Iranian history class, the history teacher talked about the Babi and Baha'i sects and the fact that these two sects are made by Israel and... so on."

Another Baha'i student mentions in his/her autobiography the distribution of anti-Baha'i pamphlets at school, resulting in subsequent questions from his/her friends and classmates. Questions from these students and friends, related to matters such as their family's relationship with Britain and Israel and even things like whether you can marry your siblings.

It is extremely worrying to see such cases. On the one hand, the mental health of these students is threatened. By mental health is meant adaptation to one's environment. A person enjoys mental health who can easily adapt to his/her surroundings, develop mental abilities and have no emotional or behavioural disorders. The widespread pressure from school officials and other students has turned the school from a place of education into a place of terror, intimidation and insult for the Baha'i students.

On the other hand, such cases are a clear violation of the second paragraph of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to this article, "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups."

This is not the first time that understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations have not been promoted in the Iranian schools; the use of children as tools to achieve the interests and policies of the government has been observed many times. From forcing children to chant death slogans against governments such as the United States and Israel, to cases such as prejudicing the minds of students against religious minorities such as the Baha'is, all are clear violations of this article.

In addition, Articles 12, 13, and 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, officially recognize the freedom of belief, religion, conscience and thought for all children of the world. Article 28 of the Convention also states that the parties "recognize the right of the child to education", and Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly states, "Children belonging to religious, ethnic or linguistic minorities in countries where these minorities exist have the right to enjoy and use their language, culture and religion together with other acquaintances, collectively or individually." It should be noted that the representative of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 5 September 1991, and the Islamic Consultative Assembly approved its provisions in March 1994. However, the observations prove that the officials of the regime are content only with signing and approval, and do not accept any obligation to implement domestic and international laws.