

[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:] IranWire

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Sealing of 94 Baha'i Shops in Mazandaran; No One Accepts Responsibility

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More than 120 days have passed since the closure of dozens of business premises of Baha'i citizens in Mazandaran Province, and so far, the provincial authorities have not taken any positive or effective action to eliminate this blatant economic discrimination against Baha'is.

Sima, the wife of one of those whose businesses were closed, said, "For four months now, 94 businesses owned by Baha'i in Mazandaran have been closed by the Public Places Supervision Office". [She added] "These two days are part of the Baha'i religious holiday, which is practiced by followers of the Baha'i Faith, wherever they live in the world, and they do not encounter any problem."

However, the prolonged closure of the shops has made all residents, businesses, customers and passers-by aware that the owners of the closed businesses are Baha'is. In fact, the police themselves have propagated the faith of these people and introduced them to the public.

According to the [National] Trade Unions Law, the closure of the business units should [only] take place with prior notification to the shop owners. But during these two days, the agents raided the Baha'i shops and sealed them all, and the shopkeepers were informed of the closure of their businesses through their neighbours.

Many appliances that belonged to the customers and were in the shop for repairs, [as well as] their merchandise, money and bank cheques, have remained in the shops and they are not accessible. Meanwhile, the hygienic and food items in these shops have probably rotted and perished by now.

"We have referred to dozens of different institutions and departments, from the Office of Public Places Supervision to the trade unions, Chamber of Commerce, craft union, trade union, industrial union, and mining union to the Prosecutor's Office, the Governor's and Governor General's Office and the City Council. But everyone has shrugged off the burden of accepting responsibility for this act. We also referred to the provincial radio station, which initially provided the news, but after two or three days, they informed us that the news was red taped news and that the public prosecutor did not allow it to be broadcast."

Then they tried to resolve the issue through the judicial authorities and the public prosecutor.

“[The judicial authorities] told us, “[The] name [of your organization] is not in the Constitution and in the beginning we made a mistake in giving you a business licence. But now we have come to the conclusion that we should revoke all your business licences. Baha’is should [earn] a meagre income, just enough not to die, just like Afghans.”

However, in the meantime, the Public Places Supervision Office has proposed a solution and issued a letter of undertaking to the Baha’is, which, if signed, would [allow] their places of business [to be unsealed]. This undertaking is as follows: “If, for whatever reason, we decide to close our shop, we should inform the Public Places Supervision Office one week in advance. If the authorities agree, we can close our shop, and if we act against their decision, we will be prosecuted according to the laws of the Islamic Republic.”

[Sima said], “My husband refused to sign the undertaking, because all shopkeepers pledged to abide by the rules of the trade union system when they applied for their licences. Here, there is no violation that should [require us to] sign a new undertaking. According to the Trade Unions Regulations, each business unit is allowed to close the business for 15 days in a year without giving any notice. The more important point is, why did they ask only the Baha’i citizens to sign this undertaking and not any other Iranian citizens!?”

Amir, another Baha’i shopkeeper in Mazandaran Province, whose shop was sealed on 11 Aban [1395] [1 November 2016], said, “This is the third time my shop has been closed; two times before, after the religious holidays, they came on 12 Ordibehesht [1 May 2016] and 8 Khordad [28 May 2016] and closed my shop.”

Before these holidays, in Ordibehesht 1394 [April/May 2015], the Public Places Supervision Office asked him to sign the letter of undertaking.

He said, “We did not sign the first undertaking, but when they changed the wording from ‘for getting permission’ to ‘just for information’ we signed the undertaking.”

Prior to the holidays of the month of Aban [October/November], he informed the Public Places Supervision Office, but they still closed his shop.

[He said,] “Zekrollah Rahmanian was one of the Baha’is in Sari who, four months prior to the holiday in Aban [November] informed the Trade Unions Office, and all other relevant authorities, that he had not been able to work for several months, due to his [illness] and hospitalization and that his shop would be closed. But his place of business was sealed on 11 Aban [1 November 2016], regardless of his prior notice. The late Mr. Rahmanian died in the hospital a few days after his shop was sealed, while he was worried about his family’s livelihood.”

According to Amir, so far, no organization nor institution has accepted [responsibility for] the widespread and simultaneous closure of all Baha’i shops in Mazandaran Province.

On 11 Aban [1 November] an SMS was received from the trade unions Basij to a number of the Baha’i shops’ neighbours (merchants), requesting that, if they observed the closure of the Baha’i shop on the 11 and 12 of Aban [1 and 2 November], they immediately take a photo of the shop and inform the trade unions Basij. “When we referred to the trade unions Basij, the only response given to us was, “We did not take any action. Whatever goes wrong, people blame the Basij!”

They tried to contact the government officials—in particular, the governor of Mazandaran. “But unfortunately, the governor did not allow Baha’i shopkeepers to enter his office. Even our spouses have been identified, and they are prevented from entering the governor’s office on the days of the public meeting. This restriction is such that a week after the shops were sealed, when five Baha’i

merchants, named Haghdoust, Zamani, Mirzaie, Golpour, and Nowkhah, went to the governor's public meeting, they were detained on the spot and beaten up by men who were not wearing any police uniform. They were released on bail 10 days later and are currently awaiting trial on charges of 'propaganda against the regime'."

Amir has a small home appliance repair shop at the bottom of a dead-end alley, which is [hidden and] invisible. He said, "The closure of my business is not noticeable to anyone, and they have sealed it under the pretext [that I was] propagating the Baha'i Faith. I did not even have [enough] income [to justify their trying] to close it, [fearing] my economic growth. However, I have not yet received any clear answer from any legal authorities as to why my place of business and my only source of livelihood has been closed for four months".