RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: A SACRED RIGHT
EDITORIAL

THE AMERICAN DEFENSE OF IRAN'S BAHÁ'Í INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
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Religious Freedom: A Sacred Right

To choose freely—whatever the object of that choice—is among the most fundamental expressions of what it means to be a human being. Its exercise reflects intellectual and spiritual powers enshrined in the very heart of human consciousness. For Bahá'ís (as for countless others), the unfettered investigation of reality is not only a sacred right; it is a sacred obligation.

In the realms of choice, what decisions could be more important than those concerning matters of religious faith? The founders of every great religion have always plunged their followers, in the first instance, into a great arena of choice: whether to accept the new teachings those holy beings bring (and with them, new hopes for the human spirit and for human society) or to adhere to older, inherited teachings and traditions. Unfortunately—and apparently inevitably—making that fundamental choice has always required the highest spiritual courage among those who would opt for the new; all too often they have lost their lives at the hands of those who would deny them this most basic human right.

How regrettable the urge, then, on the part of some to control the thoughts and actions of others rather than welcoming choice as a noble evidence of spiritual life. Unfortunately, the founders of the great religions—and religion itself—have all too often been blamed (and, therefore, discredited) for repressive actions denying choice, when such spiritual slave-mastering has nothing whatsoever to do with either the founders of religions or with their teachings but rather with the perverse appropriation of those teachings by putative leaders who subvert their very nature for reasons other than religious ones.

Faced with ample historical evidence, one could easily choose to view much of human history as little more than the bloody record of a futile human quest to exercise the basic right to think in the face of overwhelming individual and institutional opposition. But to do so would be to ignore what is also readily apparent in history: a steady, if excruciatingly gradual, progress toward the full establishment of freedom of conscience.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the birth of an independent religious community that took the momentous step of centering its own self-understanding, as a religion, on a sweeping universalist principle:
the assertion by Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, of the absolute right and obligation to choose one’s religion for oneself in other than communal terms. In fact, Bahá’u’lláh elevated it to being a primary principle of our age, crowning the independent investigation of truth as the very beginning of spiritual life—the mother principle from which all other principles proceed. He made the search for truth a spiritual obligation. To oppose that right is to defend the obverse: that one must unthinkingly accept the faith of one’s forbears; that one must conform; that one must hide his or her true convictions in matters of belief if they create discomfort in the minds of those who disagree; that one must intellectually submit to the will of another.

Bahá’u’lláh’s ringing proclamation of the freedom of conscience and belief coincides with the spirit of the age and with encouraging events in the world at large, including the continuing emergence of representative democracies and intermittent steps toward universal suffrage and other enfranchisements. Since the 1970s a number of brutal regimes and dictatorships have been replaced with democratic governments around the world. These changes have occurred to such an extent and with such rapidity that social scientists now speak of the closing decades of the twentieth century as the era of the “Third Wave” of democratization.

But we are a far cry from a Golden Age of human freedom in the exercise of personal conscience. What the poet William Blake called “mind-forged manacles” continue to plague humankind. Emergent democracies do not inevitably advocate religious freedom; often they do quite the opposite. Other regimes, which label themselves democratic but are, in fact, dictatorships of one kind or another, engage in horrific suppressions verging on genocide, undertaken expressly to extinguish religious freedom while claiming to be supporting programs of reform.

The continuing oppressive treatment of the Bahá’í community in Iran provides one compelling, increasingly well-known, example. Last year the Islamic government appeared to be embracing the new global wave of democratization: local elections throughout Iran occurred for the first time since the 1979 Revolution; students demonstrated in favor of freedom of the press; the fatwa against Salman Rushdie appeared to have been revoked; and relations with Britain were re-established.

The continuing state-sponsored persecution of the Bahá’í community, however, with its attendant new wave of death sentences, arrests, and harassment, bearing all the marks of a centrally orchestrated campaign intended to further the declared policy of the Iranian government to strangle the Bahá’í community economically, intellectually, and spiritually, calls into question that country’s full commitment to democratization. Meticulously planned and executed, this state-sponsored suppression of religious freedom in Iran is different
only in degree, not in kind, from that which continues to happen in many places throughout the world.

While one might hope that a single mighty and cleansing miracle of liberation will sweep the world, that prospect seems remarkably unlikely. In its absence there are countless smaller changes one can make on behalf of religious freedom. One can vocally support the United Nations, while recognizing that it has yet to achieve its full potential, for it remains the world’s only universal, constituted institution for advocating and legislating universal human rights. One can speak out fearlessly whenever suppression—especially of religious freedom—is encountered. One can continue to educate oneself and others about the pervasive, insidious nature of the wish to control what others think, a wish and a practice from which none of us seemingly is immune. One can acknowledge that the real answer is a universal awakening to new and greater possibilities by every human mind.
Much of human history is the history of the struggle over human rights. Ever since family units emerged, the nature of the prerogatives of the different family members and their rights relative to each other have been debated. The resulting conflicts and dilemmas have been the themes of much of the world’s great literature. The consolidation of family units into larger societal units inevitably produced different classes—based on gender, heredity, economic power, religion, ethnic origin, and other criteria—and led to the problem of the prerogatives and relative rights of classes.

With the dawn of the modern age about five hundred years ago, the focus shifted to the rights of the individual. The dawn of modernity saw the partial collapse of traditional forms of religion and government, resulting in the rise of religious diversity and the question of freedom of religion. Many of the English colonies that formed the future United States were founded by people fleeing religious persecution and seeking a place where they were free to worship. The struggle to establish freedom of religion as a basic human right has continued to this day and was reinforced in 1948 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights included it as a basic human right.

The persecution of Iran’s Bahá’ís is one of the clearest cases in the world of an ongoing violation of the right to freedom of religion. The Bahá’ís are not being persecuted because they oppose the government; they do not. They are not persecuted because they are members of a historically small ethnic group in Iran with a long history of trouble with the majority; they are members of all the country’s ethnic groups. Rather, they are persecuted solely because they believe that God has sent a prophet after Muhammad with a new set of social and ethical teachings that they seek to practice.

World Order has dedicated this issue to the subject of religious freedom, with a focus on the Iranian Bahá’ís. Robert H. Stockman’s “The American Defense of Iran’s Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education” describes one of the extreme forms of persecution that has been practiced against the Bahá’ís of Iran: they have been denied their basic human right of access to education. When Iranian Bahá’í youth were expelled from Iran’s universities, the Iranian Bahá’í community organized the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (also known as the Open University) to train them. In the fall of 1998 the Open University was raided by the authorities. To protect the right of the Bahá’ís to train their young people, academics and others from all around the world, Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í, have written Iran to protest the attempted closing. The remarkable campaign has developed momentum of its own and continues a year after the raids; in August it was reinforced by a joint letter to the Iranian Minister of Education signed by the presidents of Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, and Yale University. This letter and a selection of other significant documents are included.

Religious persecution has many ramifications for the health of those being persecuted. “Health Care in a Persecuted Community,” by Changiz Geula, Marianne Smith Geula, and Dr. John Woodall, explores the
many ways in which persecution has severely degraded the health of the Iranian Bahá'í community, which used to own hospitals and clinics for the treatment of all who needed care. But now Bahá'ís can be denied entrance to Iranian hospitals; Bahá'í physicians sometimes do not have the right to admit patients to hospitals or serve them there; Bahá'ís needing treatment abroad are denied permission to travel; and Bahá'ís are severely impoverished because of job restrictions and thus cannot afford health care. The result is a higher death rate, much greater suffering, and stressed-induced mental illnesses, even without considering the health implications of executions and torture.

Iran's violations of the Bahá'ís' human rights are not being ignored by the world community. The United States government has steadily increased its commitment to maintaining human rights around the world and has established a United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to identify examples of religious persecution abroad, document it, and subject it to public exposure. Wilma M. Ellis's "Religious Freedom Abroad" provides a report of the commission's founding and the efforts made by its predecessor, the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom. Dr. Ellis was the Bahá'í member on the earlier body.

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It is always a pleasure to pass along information about World Order's Editorial Board, both present and past. Dr. Jim Stokes, a member of our Editorial Board since 1984 and a professor of medieval and Renaissance English literature at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point since 1981, has received two honors. In June 1999 he was named the university's first Eugene Katz Distinguished Professor in the humanities, a permanent designation. He was also named the University Scholar for the Year, based on his research and teaching. Dr. Stokes, who in 1996 published a two-volume work, *Somerset: The Dramatic Records from 1225 through 1642*, a part of the University of Toronto Press' Early English Drama Series, has also completed eighteen months as a UW-System Fellow at the Institute for Research in the Humanities at UW-Madison, his fourth such stay there.

We have also learned that the late William Stafford, World Order's consultant in poetry in 1982 and 1983, has been honored by Lewis and Clark College in Oregon, where he was Professor Emeritus in English literature. The William Stafford Room has been dedicated in his honor in the college's Aubrey Watzek Library, which has acquired a collection of more than one hundred first editions and broadsides of Stafford's works. The Stafford Room will contain exhibits on his life and works.

Stafford, a well-known and much respected poet who received numerous literary awards, was named Poet Laureate of the State of Oregon in 1974. In 1970–71 he served as consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress. He published sixty-seven volumes of poetry and prose. During the time he generously shared with World Order he selected and introduced an anthology of poetry, which was published in our Summer 1983 issue.
The American Defense of Iran’s Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education

INTRODUCED AND EDITED BY ROBERT H. STOCKMAN

Historically, few events in the ongoing persecution of the Iranian Bahá’í community have produced a response like that to the Iranian government’s effort to close the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE, also called the Bahá’í Open University). The state-sponsored repression of the BIHE marks the latest chapter in the long history of persecution of Iran’s Bahá’ís that began with the inception of the Bahá’í Faith in 1844 and has continued intermittently ever since.

In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, during and after the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian government began a systematic campaign of imprisonment, torture, and execution of selected Bahá’ís that resulted in nearly two hundred deaths. The repressive measures provoked an outcry around the world from national legislatures, diplomatic officials, and organizations concerned with human rights. The sustained political pressure caused the Iranian government to shift its strategy from overt, violent attacks to a covert program, putting the Bahá’í community under constant, steady pressure by denying its members access to almost every privilege associated with modern life: education (even, in some cases, elementary education), government employment, health insurance, pension benefits, insurance, and redress in the courts. Bahá’í marriages cannot be registered and, in the government’s eyes, do not exist legally; Bahá’í cemeteries have been closed, making it difficult to bury the dead.

The Iranian government’s strategy was successful in one way: it decreased external diplomatic and media pressure directed at it. A newspaper article describing the brutal beating and execution of a beloved medical doctor—with the security police demanding that his widow pay for the bullets before they surrendered the body to her for burial—made for better press coverage than an elderly Bahá’í wasting away from cancer because treatment was denied or a bright young Bahá’í being forced to open a small business instead of pursuing the engineering career of which he had dreamed.

The Iranian Bahá’í community responded to the government’s new strategy by mobilizing its internal resources, in spite of the fact that its coordinating institutions had been disbanded. Bahá’ís helped each other financially; Bahá’í physicians provided free care to Bahá’í patients (though their right to admit patients to hospitals was frequently denied); and Bahá’ís helped each other find employment. No doubt the most ambitious and sophisticated response of the Bahá’í community—one with international aspects to it—
was the creation of the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education.

The Bahá’í scriptures strongly emphasize the importance of education. As a result, by the middle of the twentieth century the Iranian Bahá’í community had virtually eliminated illiteracy among its members, while barely half of Iran’s population could read and write. Before the revolution a significant number of Iranian Bahá’ís attended universities and had become an important element within the country’s educated elite. To deny the community’s youth the right to attend universities was to dash some of their most cherished dreams. But the tens of thousands of expatriate Iranian Bahá’ís and their millions of non-Iranian coreligionists worldwide were not willing to sit idly by while the community in the birthplace of the Bahá’í Faith was being denied so basic a human right. Textbooks were sent to Iran, course syllabi were developed, and contacts with sympathetic Western universities willing to help were fostered. With such external assistance, the Iranian Bahá’í community—which included many university professors fired for their Bahá’í affiliation—was in a position to create its own university in homes, businesses, and offices. The Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education began in 1987.

By creating the BIHE, the Iranian Bahá’í community broke no law because Iran has no law stating that such subjects as dental hygiene or engineering cannot be taught informally. The BIHE was not in a position to be accredited, but its graduates could demonstrate the skills they had acquired and thereby find employment. Some came to the West and, by being accepted into graduate schools without a recognized bachelor’s degree, proved that they had learned quite well. Success in the BIHE required considerable self-discipline because students studied, for the most part, on their own, meeting their professor only once during a course. It is remarkable that so many Bahá’ís were able to discipline themselves and succeed in obtaining such a difficult education.

The BIHE focused on ten practical subjects in which students could prove their skills and obtain the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree: applied chemistry, biology, dental science, pharmacological science, civil engineering, computer science, psychology, law, literature, and accounting. Because it did not teach Bahá’í theology or any other courses on religious subjects, it could not be accused of fostering the Bahá’í religion.1 The BIHE’s development was gradual because of the persecution that the Bahá’ís faced. It has never had more than 900 students—who represented a small fraction of the Iranian Bahá’í community’s youth—and but 150 faculty. Its classes met in scores of places, and it had dozens of small libraries.

While the BIHE was developed quietly, it was not a secret. The Iranian government was aware of its existence and of its graduates. It even raided the institution in 1996, confiscating a few records, but it did not otherwise interfere with the university’s growth. The change in approach took place during the fall of 1998. The reason for the decision to raid the institution’s classes and libraries is unclear, but the Iranian Bahá’í community had long been subject to persecution by various groups in Iran bent on gaining power and on assuaging their hatred for Bahá’ís. In the last few years the clash of relatively moderate Islamic forces with more fundamentalist Islamic groups has become more intense than during the previous decade; Iran’s Bahá’ís were made pawns in that clash.

1. It should be added that the Iranian Bahá’í community did offer advanced courses on Bahá’í history and scripture through another organization—the Institute for Higher Bahá’í Studies. Such courses are the natural part of any religious community and are protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
The attack on the BIHE took place over a five-day period, between 29 September and 3 October. It involved raiding five hundred homes and businesses of Bahá'ís in Tehran, Rasht, Borujerd, Babol, Zanjan, Sanandaj, Bábulsar, Khorramabad, Hamadan, Tonekabon, Arak, Birjand, Chálús, and Tabriz. The authorities confiscated anything that could have a connection to the university, including the university's libraries and seventy computers, as well as considerable amounts of personal property not used by the university, including furniture and television sets. The authorities arrested thirty-six faculty and administrators and pressured them to sign a document stating that they would never again assist the BIHE. All refused. Most were eventually released, but four were put on trial and sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to ten years for teaching classes on the Bahá'í religion.

The first major news stories about the raid on the BIHE appeared a month later, when the Washington Post published an editorial condemning the attack and the New York Times, an article about the attack. Here at last the world could see a concrete example of a less murderous approach that Iran was taking to pressure its Bahá'ís but one that, nevertheless, could command widespread sympathy, headlines, and the attention of the international community. Academics immediately began to express concern. But it was the 13 November 1998 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education that brought considerable public attention to the attempted closure of the BIHE and stirred the first systematic efforts to pressure Iran about its actions. Teachers and scholars understand the importance of education and of academic freedom, and they have the ability to apply considerable public pressure. Furthermore, many of them use the internet extensively because it is an excellent medium for disseminating petitions, news, and stories. Hence it was natural that universities would become a main focus of protest against the attack on the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education.

Even though most academics only became aware of the attempted closure in the middle of November—with no more than a month left in the semester—they managed to raise a strong protest before Christmas vacation. Several hundred academics wrote personal letters to the Iranian Ministry of Education and to the Director of UNESCO objecting to the closure. Giving further impetus to the effort were the commemorations in early December of the fiftieth anniversary of the International Declaration of Human Rights—a document guaranteeing the right of access to education. Many religious and human-rights organizations had already planned observances, with local Bahá'ís often being active participants in the planning. In the United States the raid on the BIHE became a focus of numerous events, including observances at the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California at Santa Cruz, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), the Harvard Divinity School, the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis, and the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque. The Berkeley observance included a proclamation by the mayor of the city for "A Day of Solidarity with Bahá'ís in Iran" and articles in the campus newspaper and the San Francisco Chronicle. A similar proclamation was issued by the
The Minnesota commemoration included letters of support from U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone and U.S. Congressman Bill Luther. The New Mexico gathering included a candlelight vigil for Iranian Bahá'ís.

Concurrent efforts to contact university presidents, faculty senates, and student senates were begun as well. Some individuals and some institutions refused to get involved on the grounds that the closure of the BIHE was a religious and political matter, two activities in which they did not wish to involve themselves. Others, however, were persuaded that academic freedom and human rights were the real issues. Many universities have statements of purpose dedicating their institution to lofty human values of the very kind being violated by the raid on the BIHE. Thus they had an ethical justification to speak out. Several faculty senates that had never before passed resolutions regarding the violation of human rights officially protested the attack on the BIHE, often citing language in their own charters or statements of purpose expressing the principles at stake.

The first of the faculty senate resolutions was passed at Oregon State University on 3 December 1998. Subsequently, seven other university faculty senates passed resolutions, including Texas A&M—a university with long historical ties to Iran; the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; and the University of Delaware.

The first student senate resolution was passed by the University of Nebraska at Lincoln on 2 December 1998; three other student senates followed suit, including Michigan State University's Council of Graduate Students.

In 1999 the efforts resumed with renewed vigor after winter vacation. Ultimately, some thirty-nine university presidents or chancellors (the chief administrative officials of individual campuses within large statewide university systems) and fourteen deans (often those in charge of medical and other professional schools) wrote letters protesting the attempted closure of the BIHE. Petitions were circulated on fourteen campuses, garnering thousands of signatures. It is impossible to estimate accurately the number of protest letters mailed by university faculty, but the total may be over a thousand. At least thirty-nine articles appeared in campus newspapers or in newspapers covering campus events. Many letters to the editor were published, including one from a Muslim student in Berkeley who condemned the persecution of Iran's Bahá'ís. In addition, a campus radio station in Poughkeepsie, New York, covered the campaign to protect the BIHE.

Faculty also took their concerns to their professional associations. One Iranian mathematician sent a letter to all members of an e-mail listserver for Iranian mathematicians, urging them to protest. Bahá'ís and others commented about the Open University at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) issued an ‘Urgent Action Alert’ through its Science and Human Rights Action Network. The Committee of Concerned Scientists, Inc., sent letters to President Khatami of Iran and Minister of Education Moin urging “the immediate and unconditional release of the BIHE faculty still detained and the cessation of attacks on the BIHE.” At a physics conference at Rutgers University a panel on “Human Rights and the Social Responsibilities of Scientists” discussed the Open University's situation. Two of the four panelists had already written letters of concern. At a southern Florida conference on modern Iran the matter was raised in discussion, creating an awkward situation for the scholars from Iran who were attending.

Individual Bahá'í faculty and students took the lead in many of the efforts, but they were often helped by university chaplains, campus chapters of Amnesty International, and sym-
pathetic academics. One unexpected result of the effort was the exposure of thousands of faculty and students to the Bahá'í Faith for the first time. Many asked questions about the religion. The BIHE was discussed in at least seven classes; in at least three instances professors invited Bahá'ís to speak about their faith in religion or sociology courses. Even at two evangelical Protestant universities Bahá'í faculty managed to speak out about the BIHE, making fellow faculty aware that their school was more religiously diverse than many had thought.

The campaign to inform people about the Iranian government’s effort to close the BIHE wound down in the late spring of 1999 as campuses across the United States emptied for the summer. But the effort continues, for in the late summer the presidents of the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, and Yale University signed a joint letter of protest. In Iran classes for Bahá'í youth have resumed. Time will tell whether another attempt to close it will be made, whether another effort to defend it will be necessary, or whether its defense was a signal event in the effort to end the persecution of Iran's three hundred thousand Bahá'ís and to win their eventual emancipation.

A selection of articles, letters, and resolutions about the attempted closure of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education follows.

A. EDITORIALS AND ARTICLES FROM MAJOR U.S. NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS

1. The Washington Post
   25 October 1998

   Iran's Crimes at Home

   Since the election of President Khatami more than a year ago, Iran watchers have been hoping for signs of new tolerance in that nation's policies. But if treatment of the most vulnerable minority is any indication, there is little reason to cheer Iran's recent record. Members of the Bahá'í faith, a religion that claims about 6 million adherents worldwide and 300,000 in Iran, have been facing increasingly vicious persecution.

   Since its religious revolution, Iran has made life difficult for all but its dominant Shiite Muslims. Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians at least enjoy certain protections; not so Bahá'ís, who as followers of a religion that emerged in Iran and after Islam—in the mid-19th century—are viewed as particularly noxious apostates. In 1993 a United Nations official uncovered an Iranian government document outlining a policy amounting to the eradication of the Bahá'í community. Iran's government said the document was a fake, but—as the U.S. State Department noted in its annual human rights report—"it appears to be an accurate reflection of current government practice."

   Thus, Bahá'í youth are denied access to universities; Bahá'í marriages are unrecognized,
opening women to charges of prostitution; Baha'i religious properties have been confiscated and desecrated; the community is not allowed to elect leaders; children are considered illegitimate and so cannot inherit property. In the past two decades, some 200 Baha'is have been killed or executed, including a prisoner hung last July allegedly for converting a Muslim woman to the Baha'i faith.

This month the government moved to shut down a Baha'i university created after Baha'i faculty and students were expelled from all other schools of higher learning. Officials ransacked more than 500 homes, most connected in some way with the university. Thirty-six Baha'i educators were arrested. Two more prisoners, jailed simply for participating in religious gatherings, have had their death sentences officially confirmed.

"Executing people for the practice of their religious faith is contrary to the most fundamental human rights principles," the White House said in response. How can such a self-evident principle even need to be restated?

2. THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL
29 OCTOBER 1998

Iran Closes 'University' Run Covertly By the Bahais
by Ethan Bronner

One day late last month, Iranian security officials fanned out across their country and raided some 500 homes and several office buildings owned or rented by members of the Bahai faith, confiscating material and arresting dozens of people.

This was hardly the first time that Bahais, Iran's largest religious minority, felt the sting of attention from the Shiite Muslim Government. As in the past, the White House condemned the action.

But what happened on Sept. 29 was remarkable because it brought to an abrupt end an elaborate act of communal self-preservation. The materials confiscated were neither political nor religious, and those arrested were not fighters or organizers. They were lecturers in subjects like accounting and dentistry; the materials seized were textbooks and laboratory equipment.

The enterprise that was shut down was a stealth university with nearly 1,000 students, scores of volunteer faculty members, basements converted to biology and language laboratories and a network of couriers, foreign advisers and sympathizers.

Started in 1987 in reaction to the virtual banning of Bahais from Iranian universities after the Islamic revolution of 1979, the Bahai Institute of Higher Education operated so quietly over the years that many Bahai officials abroad and many intellectuals within Iran were unaware of it.

Professors at Indiana University provided course materials and curriculum advice, and American Bahais on visits to Iran would carry suitcases stuffed with textbooks bought at the Harvard Coop.

Begun on a tiny scale, the institute grew to include 10 areas of major, including civil engineering, computer science, psychology and English. Courses were by correspondence

but included sessions with lecturers in private homes.

Some 145 students graduated with bachelors' degrees. Some work in Iran and others have continued their studies abroad, their degrees sometimes accepted despite the university’s lack of official recognition.

“We did everything with our own empty hands,” reflected one former faculty member, who like virtually everyone interviewed insisted on anonymity out of fear for his safety and that of relatives in Iran. “It was like a miracle that brought hope to the Bahai youth.”

Accounts of the university’s activities and closing come from two dozen interviews with former faculty members and students, some of them still in Iran, others in North America.

The Government has said nothing about the operation and has not responded to requests for comment.

The Bahai faith, whose adherents number 300,000 in Iran and five million worldwide, began a century and a half ago in Iran. Among its principles are full equality between the sexes, universal education and establishment of a world federal system.

Bahai representatives say that although the university was begun in secret, the Government became aware of it in the early 1990’s and permitted it to continue.

Within the Bahai community and among political scientists who watch Iran, there has been speculation about why the university was closed now, given the more liberal approach advocated by Mohammad Khatami, the Iranian President, since his election in May of last year.

“There has always been very active discrimination against Bahais,” said Shaul Bakh­ash, a professor of history at George Mason University who is a specialist in Iran. “It would be very difficult for even the most well-meaning leader to deal with such a university openly and tolerantly.”

In July a Bahai was hanged on charges of having converted a Muslim, the first execution of a Bahai in Iran since 1992. Two other Bahais have been condemned to death.

Professor Bakhash noted that the Iranian security forces are not controlled by Presi­dent Khatami but by the country’s supreme spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is far more conservative.

One possible explanation for the university’s closing is that Ayatollah Khamenei and his followers want to discredit or defy Mr. Khatami.

A second theory is that President Khatami is permitting the crackdown as a gesture to the traditionalists as he tries to improve relations with the West. A third possibility is that Mr. Khatami, who comes from a clerical background, has no disagreement with tightening up on the Bahais.

Whatever the explanation, for the Bahais the closing is ominous.

“I see this as a reactivation of general pressure on the Bahai community,” said Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, a retired professor of history at Yale University and secretary for external affairs of the Bahais in the United States.

But Bahais say it will not be long before they begin the process of setting up the university again. “Education is such a central goal for us,” said one, “that we must rebuild. It is like a light at the end of a tunnel.”
36 Professors Arrested in Iranian Crackdown on Underground Bahá'í University

by Burton Bollag

The Bahá'í Open University in Iran, which for the past decade has offered classes in private homes and offices across the country, remained closed last week following a series of raids by Iranian authorities in October. Officials of the Bahá'í faith in the United States said that at least 36 faculty members were arrested in the raids, and four were still being held.

According to the Bahá'í officials, 532 homes were raided by security officers under the direction of Iran's Ministry of Information, a government intelligence agency. They confiscated computers and other equipment, as well as literature and files. The faculty members who were arrested were asked to sign a declaration stating that the institution no longer existed. All reportedly refused to do so.

Considered Heretical

The Iranian authorities in Teheran have declined to comment on the raids. Iranian diplomatic representatives in Geneva and at the United Nations also have not responded to requests for comment.

Since Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, the authorities have taken a hostile and often repressive approach to the country's 300,000 Bahá'í followers. Bahá'ís say Iran's latest moves may be part of a power struggle between conservatives and the country's moderate president, Muhammad Khatami, who was elected last year.

Although Iran recognizes the rights of Christians, Jews, and members of other minority religions, the country's Islamic establishment considers the Bahá'í faith, which was founded in Iran in the last century, to be heretical and not a legitimate religion.

In response to limits placed on their educational rights in Iran, members of the Bahá'í in 1987 established the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education, which became known as the Bahá'í Open University.

A secret government memorandum, drawn up by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council in 1991, spelled out plans to marginalize Iran's Bahá'í followers. It called for Bahá'í children to be given a strong Islamic education and said Bahá'ís should be barred from the country's universities. The document was made public in 1993 by the United Nations Special Representative investigating reported human-rights abuses in Iran, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl.

This year, the Bahá'í Open University had an enrollment of more than 900 students, and a staff of some 150 volunteer academics. Among them are many university professors who were ousted from posts in Iran's state-run university system following the Islamic revolution.

Courses at the university, which is essentially an underground institution, are taught via correspondence as well as in private homes. The university also operates several science laboratories, discreetly located in rented spaces in Teheran, and 45 specialized libraries, housed in private residences across the country.

Although not recognized by the Iranian educational authorities, the Bahá'í university offers bachelor's degrees in 10 disciplines: accounting, applied chemistry, biology, civil
engineering, computer science, dental science, law, literature, pharmacology, and psychology.

'Through the Norm'

Nader Saiedi, an associate professor of sociology at Carleton College, is one of many Iranian Bahá'í academics teaching in the United States who have been helping the institution. He has produced Persian-language curricula for use by the Bahá'í Open University, and has provided a steady supply of up-to-date literature. He says the quality of the open university "is above the norm of higher education in Iran."

Because the degrees awarded by the Bahá'í Open University are not officially recognized, graduates generally find work in the private sector. Some have gone on to do graduate work at U.S. institutions.

B. 1998, FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

4. U.S. SENATOR PAUL D. WELLSTONE, MINNESOTA

December 2, 1998

Mr. Bass Zanjani
Bahá'í Association at the University of Minnesota
235F Coffman Union
300 Washington Avenue S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Dear Mr. Zanjani:

First let me thank the Bahá'í Association at the University of Minnesota for hosting this meeting on the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I join with the Bahá'í Association in calling for an end to human rights violations in Iran, including religious persecution of members of the Bahá'í Faith. I join with them in speaking out against the recent mass arrests of Bahá'í educators and the closing of the Open University in Iran.

In 1948, the UN Commission on Human Rights drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is a recommendation by the General Assembly to member states that would exert a moral and political influence on states, rather than to be a legally binding instrument. The plan that was adopted used the Declaration as a springboard for the signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Declaration retains its symbolic force as the parent document, it is more wide-ranging and visionary than the intervening treaties. In some sense, it is the constitution of the entire human rights movement.

In the intervening years, human rights have become a recognized concept in international affairs. The human rights movement is no longer just a noble and lofty goal, but more and more is becoming an effective tool for justice and against tyranny.

This morning I released a letter to President Clinton calling on the President to provide U.S. help to assist the efforts of European nations to bring General Pinochet of Chile to justice. If extradited he would be
tried for his regime's torture, assassination and other human rights abuses against its own citizens and for its crimes against humanity.

The human rights violations of the Pinochet regime in Chile and the Khatami regime in Iran are only two cases among many in countries around the world. Fifty years ago the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a response to the catastrophic events before and during the Second World War. Today the Universal Declaration of Human Rights continues to guide us in our work because we insist, as the Preamble states, that the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Sincerely,
Paul D. Wellstone
United States Senator

5. U.S. CONGRESSMAN BILL LUTHER, MINNESOTA

December 2, 1998

Baha'i Association
University Of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dear Friends:

Thank you for inviting me to your symposium tonight. I am sorry I am unable to join you but unfortunately my schedule does not allow me to do so.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains one of the most important achievements of the United Nations. In the aftermath of the many atrocities that took place during World War II, the Declaration was an essential instrument to establish a set of norms regarding behavior by governments toward their own citizens and foreigners alike. The growth in support for the Declaration over the past fifty years has been invaluable as the document's basic principles have been incorporated into national laws and countries from all cultural traditions.

Despite the document's success in highlighting that fundamental human rights are the foundation of human existence and coexistence, it is unfortunate that today, 50 years after the UN adopted the Declaration, there are still numerous dictatorial regimes throughout the world who have little or no respect for an individual's basic rights as a human being. The absence of human rights is not only a denial of human dignity, it is also the root of the suffering and hatred that breeds political violence and inhibits basic economic and human development.

As a member of the House International Relations Committee, I am honored to be in a position where I may attempt to highlight and expose the abuses of these dictatorial regimes. I would particularly like to highlight the current situation in Iran. I am deeply concerned with the Government of Iran's actions against adherents of the Baha'i faith. Every human being deserves the fundamental human rights of the freedom of religion and freedom of conscience and belief, and I urge the Government of Iran to protect the lives and rights of all its peoples.

Finally, I would like to say that I am pleased...
that I have had the opportunity to work with both the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights and the Center for Victims of Torture who are participating in today’s symposium and I look forward to further addressing human rights issues in the 106th Congress.

Thank you again for inviting me. You have my very best wishes!

Sincerely,
Bill Luther, Congressman
Minnesota’s Sixth Congressional District

C. LETTERS FROM UNIVERSITY CHANCELLORS, PRESIDENTS, AND PROFESSORS

6. HERITAGE COLLEGE, FACULTY MEMBERS

November 1998

Dear friends and colleagues:

We are writing to appeal for your assistance on behalf of the Bahá’í educators recently imprisoned in Iran.

You may know that since 1980, as part of Iran’s secret campaign to slowly strangle its 300,000-member Bahá’í community, Bahá’í students and professors have been systematically excluded from colleges and universities because of their Faith. In response, Bahá’í educators from that country established the Bahá’í Institute of Higher Education. This Bahá’í University served more than 900 students, with a faculty of over 150 instructors; and with classrooms, laboratories and libraries scattered throughout the country in private homes.

This Fall, the government attempted to shut down this grassroots university by arresting its most prominent professors and staff and looting more than 500 homes where the Institute’s activities had been conducted. Text books, exams, academic records, photocopiers and educational equipment were confiscated. Until the government raids, the Institute offered Bachelor’s degrees in ten subject areas: chemistry, biology, dental science, pharmacology, civil engineering, computer science, psychology, law, literature and accounting. Teaching was done primarily by correspondence, with small-group classes held in private homes. All of the Bahá’í faculty members served as volunteers, without pay.

To the long list of proscriptions against the Bahá’í community in Iran, is now added denial of the right to learn. This is clearly a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13), to which Iran is a signatory. Relevant excerpts from these articles are enclosed. These materials are also available through the website: <www.us.bahai.org/openuniv>.

As faculty members ourselves, who value academic freedom and who subscribe to the Heritage College motto, “Knowledge Brings Us Together,” we deplore this attack on higher education and the imprisonment of faculty from the Bahá’í University in Iran.

If, after learning about the closing of the Bahá’í University, you are moved to respond, we humbly request that you send a letter on
college stationery to the Director-General of UNESCO, communicating alarm over the current situation. The address is:

Dr. Federico Mayor  
Director General, UNESCO  
7 place de Fontenoy  
75352 Paris 07 SP  
France

You can also write to the Iranian Minister of Culture and Higher Education:

Dr. Mostafa Moin  
Minister of Culture and Higher Education  
Shahid Beheshti Avenue  
Takhti Sq., corner of Shahid Sabonchi  
Shahid Adaee Building  
Tehran  
The Islamic Republic of Iran

We ask that you pass this information on to others in higher education, including Iranian colleagues in Iran and elsewhere, and urge them to express their disapproval as well. In the past, public pressure has helped to save the lives of religious minorities in Iran.

With deepest appreciation,

Dr. Randie Gottlieb  
EMPIRE Coordinator

Mr. Ed Rousculp, Chair  
Teacher Certification Program

Dr. Jahan Lohrasbi  
Adjunct Professor

7. University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, Faculty Member

December 2, 1998

Dr. Federico Mayor

Director-General, UNESCO  
7 place de Fontenoy  
75352 Paris 07 SP  
France

Dear Dr. Mayor:

I am writing as a faculty member of the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, to express alarm over the recent actions taken by the Iranian government against the Baha’i in Iran. As I am sure you know, the government shut down the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education, arrested at least 36 faculty members, and raided and looted 532 private homes that housed college text books and laboratory equipment. This assault from September 19–October 3, 1998 and death sentences given to Mr. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Mr. Hedayat-Kashefi Najafabadi, previously held in detention, makes the Baha’i community fear for the lives of all its members.

I must conclude that these actions are another step in the Iranian government’s secret campaign of slow strangulation of the Baha’i community. These actions clearly violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. I urge action by the United Nations and its organizations to redress these outrageous attacks on a peace-loving, law-abiding community that encourages the education of all people.

Sincerely,

Jenni Beary, M.A., R.D.  
Director  
Dietetic Internship Nutrition Program

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7. A similar letter was sent to Dr. Mostafa Moin, Minister of Culture and Higher Education, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran.
December 2, 1998

Dear Dr. Moin:

As a university leader, I am writing to convey to you my serious concern about the recent efforts undertaken by the Iranian government and religious leaders to close the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education, also known as the “Open University.” It is my understanding that many faculty members have been arrested for the sole reason that they were educating Iranian Baha'i young people whose access to Iranian universities has for two decades been denied because of the fact that they were Baha'is. The young people who attended the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education must have opportunities to further their study and training. Without solid education, their futures are in doubt.

In December, 1966, Iran, along with nations throughout the world, signed the United Nations' International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Parties to this Covenant “recognize the right of everyone to education” and more specifically that “higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means.” The closure of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, the arrest of so many of its faculty members, and the confiscation of equipment and records certainly constitute a gross violation of the Covenant. These actions violate academic freedom and human decency.

My concerns are for students worldwide and it is my hope that the Iranian government will devote every effort to alleviating the situation among Iranian Baha'is. Please reconsider the recent actions undertaken by the Iranian government and allow the Baha'is to resume their educational careers.

In fairness to all,
Judith L. Kuipers, Ph.D.
Chancellor
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

9. STETSON UNIVERSITY, PRESIDENT

March 15, 1999

Dr. Mostafa Moin
Minister of Culture and Higher Education
Shahid Beheshti Avenue
Takhti Sq., Corner of Shahid Sabonchi
Shadi Adaee Building
Tehran
The Islamic Republic of Iran

Dear Dr. Moin:

The purpose of this letter is to respectfully request that the Islamic Republic of Iran reconsider its decision to close the Baha'i University. My humble request for reconsideration is based upon my experience over the last ten years as President of Stetson University.

Stetson University was founded in 1883 with a mission to educate and a commitment to integrate religious faith and learning. For
more than 100 years, we fulfilled our mission through a partnership with the Baptist Convention, the largest protestant religious body in the United States.

In the early 1990s, we noted that the number of non-Baptist and non-Christian members of our community was increasing. And, some members of our Baptist constituency became concerned about our being "inclusive" in our approach to integrate faith and learning. A confrontation resulted.

Stetson University chose to become an inclusive religious community and to value the presence of people from all religious traditions. Today, all Christian groups are welcome, as well as members of all other religious groups, the Jewish community, the Muslim world, and the Eastern world.

A man of Islamic faith serves on my staff as a Vice President. Members of the Baha’i tradition teach on our faculty. Our university has been richly blessed by their presence.

Thank you for listening. I would be pleased to talk personally with you, if you so desire.

Sincerely yours,

H. Douglas Lee
President

10. DUKExx UNIVERSITY, PRESIDENT

July 26, 1999

Dr. Federico Mayor
Director General, UNESCO
7 Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France

Dr. Mostafa Moin
Minister of Culture and Higher Education
Shahid Beheshti Avenue
Takhti Sq. Corner of Shahid Sabonchi
Shahid Adae Building
Tehran, The Islamic Republic of Iran

Dear Sirs:

I write out of concern for the situation involving the Baha’i Institute of Higher Education. I wish to add my voice to those who have protested the attempt last fall to close the institution that has served more than 900 students who would otherwise not be allowed to receive instruction in Iran because of their religion. The imprisonment of many of the organization’s most prominent professors, who were teaching secular courses on a volunteer basis in private homes, clearly violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despite the passage of time, several of those professors remain in prison, some with death sentences hanging over them. The attack on the institute also violates the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. The 1966 covenant recognized the right of everyone to education and stated more specifically that higher education be made equally accessible to all.

As an educator, I cannot help but deplore any action that makes it impossible for students and professors to pursue the ideals of higher education. I appeal to you to rectify the situation and allow all residents of Iran the access to learning that they long for and deserve.

Yours sincerely,

Nannerl O. Keohane
21 September 1999

Dr. Mostafa Moin
Minister of Culture and Higher Education
Shahid Beheshti Avenue
Takhti Square, Corner of Shahid Sabonchi
Shahid Adaee Building
Tehran
The Islamic Republic of Iran

Dear Dr. Moin:

We write to express our concern regarding the arrest of 36 faculty and administrators of the Bahá’í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) between September 30 and October 3, 1998, and the April 1999 sentencing of 4 BIHE instructors convicted for teaching Bahá’í religious classes. According to reports issued by the White House Press Secretary, the New York Times, and the Washington Post the 1998 arrests included raids on more than 500 homes that served as classrooms for BIHE and the confiscation of textbooks, computers, and teaching materials.

We further understand that those arrested in 1998 were pressured to sign a statement that they would no longer collaborate with BIHE. Since there seems to be no Iranian law that forbids the teaching of academic subjects such as dentistry, accounting, or genetics in private homes, they refused to sign. We understand that the Bahá’í Institute of Higher Education has since resumed its activities for the new academic year, although its functioning is still hampered by the loss of the confiscated equipment.

We are concerned that the arrest of these individuals may be part of a wider action by the Iranian government against the Bahá’ís. We are aware that the Bahá’í community, with approximately 300,000 members, is the largest religious minority in Iran, and that Bahá’ís have been barred from Iranian universities since the 1980s. It is our understanding that in response to the ban, in 1987 the Bahá’í community in Iran founded its own independent, decentralized university system, the Bahá’í Institute of Higher Education.

We would like to point out that the arrest of Bahá’í educators and the exclusion of Bahá’ís from access to higher education in Iran constitute serious violations of internationally accepted human rights standards as listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted without opposition by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948). These include the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, to which Iran is a State Party, the 1998 actions against BIHE constitute violations of the right to the fulfillment of the principles enunciated in the Covenant. This document states that “without discrimination of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political, or other opinion” everyone has the right to receive an education. It is also the right of parents or legal guardians to select schools for the chil-

9. Reprinted by permission.
children other than those established by the public authorities "to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."

We request the unconditional release of the BIHE members that remain in detention and the cessation of further actions against BIHE. We call on the Iranian government to allow the Iranian people, of whatever race, gender, class or creed, to pursue higher education of their own choosing.

Sincerely,

Gerhard Casper, President
Stanford University

Richard C. Levin, President
Yale University

Charles M. Vest, President
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Robert M. Berdahl, Chancellor
University of California, Berkeley

Neil L. Rudenstine, President
Harvard University

D. UNIVERSITY FACULTY SENATE RESOLUTIONS

12. OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY, FACULTY SENATE RESOLUTION 10

December 3, 1998

The Faculty Senate of Oregon State University wishes to express its strong concern over the recent shutdown of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education by the Iranian Government, accompanied by the arrest of some faculty members and the confiscation of academic books, exam records and education equipment in private homes.

This action amounts to denying students who are already excluded from public universities any right to learn, even if it is done in private. It violates both the International Declaration of Human Rights as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to which Iran is a party.

It is the highest aspiration of Oregon State University to free people's minds from ignorance, prejudice, and provincialism and to stimulate a lasting attitude of inquiry. We strongly urge the Iranian Government to implement Article 13 of the above mentioned covenant, which states that "higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity."

10. Oregon State University Faculty Senate Minutes, Motion No. 98-543-01, 3 December 1998.
13. **Texas A&M, Faculty Senate Resolution**

January 20, 1999

Texas A&M University (seal)
THE FACULTY SENATE

Baha'i Resolution

WHEREAS the Faculty Senate of Texas A&M University is committed to the importance of providing for students "an intellectual environment that encourages the development and expansion of the human mind and spirit," which is part of the stated purpose of Texas A&M University as stated in the undergraduate catalog; and

WHEREAS the Faculty Senate of Texas A&M University holds as a fundamental value the right of a student to an education appropriate to the needs of that student; and

WHEREAS the Faculty Senate strongly supports the right of every person, based on capacity, to higher education as stated in Article 26 of the International Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

WHEREAS the Iranian government through its systematic exclusion of young people of the Baha'i faith from colleges and universities in Iran since 1980 and through its recent closure of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education has violated both the International Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate of Texas A&M University strongly condemns the recent shutdown of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education by the Iranian government, the simultaneous arrest of faculty members and the confiscation and destruction of academic books and educational equipment in private homes;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate calls upon the Iranian government to conform to the International Declaration and International Covenant by allowing the reopening of the Baha'i Institute and by allowing all of its qualified citizens the freedom to pursue higher education.

[Passed unanimously by the Faculty Senate, January 20, 1999]
December 3, 1998

STUDENT GOVERNMENT OF GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

RESOLUTION 7
PATRONS: Senators Paymon Hashemi and Sum Mehrnama
CO-PATRONS: Senators Jed Bullock, Garrett Dunne, and Joseph Rospars

WHEREAS “Everyone has the right to education.” And, “Technical and professional education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, Section 1, 1948); and

WHEREAS “higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education” (International Covenant Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13, Section 2c, 1966); and

WHEREAS the Bahá’í youth in Iran are deprived of the right to higher education for no reason other than their religious beliefs; and

WHEREAS these youth are our peers as well as part of the global education community to which all students, faculty and administration of schools belong:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that we, the Student Government of George Mason University urge all members of the George Mason Community to voice outrage against the injustices that our peers in Iran are facing; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we, the Student Government of George Mason University express our greatest concern as to the troubles facing our peers in Iran; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to:

Dr. Federico Mayor, Director-General UNESCO; Dr. Mostafa Moin, Minister of Culture and Higher Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran; President Alan G. Merten; Provost David L. Potter; Vice-Provost Joseph S. Wood; Faculty Senate Chair Esther Elston; Members of the Board of Visitors of George Mason University, all Deans of the University; News Directors of local media; and the Broadside, Expulsion and Mason Gazette Newspapers.

APPROVED ON DECEMBER 3, 1998
KEITH GRAFFIUS
CHAIR
STUDENT SENATE

JOHN W. BUTLER, JR.
PRESIDENT
STUDENT GOVERNMENT
Senate Resolution #311
1998–1999
Baha'i University

WHEREAS, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is an institution which supports the ideals of higher learning, not only on its own campus but throughout the world, and,

WHEREAS, the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska (ASUN) supports not only the ideals of higher learning, but also the preservation of basic human rights for people throughout the world, and,

WHEREAS, the Baha'i Faith is an independent world religion interested in promoting basic human rights as enumerated in the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and,

WHEREAS, the Iranian government has denied Baha'is entrance to public universities since 1980 because of their religion, and,

WHEREAS, the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) was founded in an attempt to provide formal education for Baha'is on a private basis since 1987, and,

WHEREAS, at least 36 faculty members of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) were arrested in Iran between the dates of September 19 and October 3, 1998 for teaching Baha'i University students, and,

WHEREAS, the Iranian government has undertaken systematic efforts to deny religious freedom to its citizens, and,

WHEREAS, these acts are infractions of basic human rights and violations to which ASUN is fundamentally opposed.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska condemns these flagrant violations of fundamental human rights, and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that ASUN encourages the Iranian government to refrain from further attempts to prohibit or otherwise impede the operations of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education.

SUBMITTED BY Senator Schuerman & Senator Slaughter
DATE 11/18/98

EXECUTIVE ACTION Human Rights
DATE 11/18/98

COMMITTEE ACTION Passed
DATE 12/01/98

FLOOR ACTION Passed, voice vote
DATE 12/02/98

PRESIDENTIAL SIGNATURE Sara Russell [signed]
DATE 12/04/98

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24 March 1999

Dr. Federico Mayor
Director General, UNESCO
7 place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France

Dear Dr. Mayor:

On behalf of the graduate students of Michigan State University, we are writing to express our concern about the Iranian government’s recent attempt to close the Baha’i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE).

It was with great consternation that we learned recently of this event. After having already denied the Iranian Baha’is their basic right of religious expression and expelled all Baha’is from Iranian institutions of higher education, the Iranian government has now tried to eliminate the Baha’is’ only option for post-secondary education.

We are concerned that this evidences an acceleration of the Iranian government’s two-decade-old campaign to eradicate the Iranian Baha’i community. We urge you to take action.

We have enclosed a copy of the resolution that the Michigan State University Council of Graduate Students passed to demonstrate its alarm at the situation in Iran and its solidarity with the students and faculty of the Open University.

It is our hope that you will work diligently toward improving access to higher education for Iranian Baha’is.

Sincerely,
Council of Graduate Students
Michigan State University

RESOLUTION, 24 March 1999

WHEREAS, the Baha’i Faith is an independent world religion that promotes the principles of unity in diversity, freedom from all forms of prejudice and inequality, and universal access to education, and,

WHEREAS, the Baha’i community is the largest religious minority in Iran comprising over 300,000 citizens, and,

WHEREAS, by the tenets of their faith, Baha’is are peace-loving, non-violent, and obedient to the rulings of their government and therefore have never posed a threat to the people or government of Iran, and,

WHEREAS, the Iranian government has denied Baha’is entrance to public universities since 1980 only by reason of their religion, and,

WHEREAS, the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), or “Open University,” was founded in an attempt to provide formal education for Baha’is on a private basis since 1987, and,

WHEREAS, in 1998, the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education was forcibly closed, its equipment and materials confiscated, and its faculty arrested, and,

WHEREAS, such attempts to close the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education are in direct violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural

12. The Council of Graduate Students, Michigan State University, sent an identical letter to Dr. Mostafa Moin. The letter and the Resolution following are reprinted by permission.
Rights, and the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, all to which Iran is a signatory, and,

WHEREAS, the Michigan State University Council of Graduate Students supports universal human rights, including universal access to higher learning, not only on its own campus but throughout the world,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Michigan State University Council of Graduate Students:

Condemns these flagrant violations of the fundamental human rights of Iranian Baha'is;

Demands that the Iranian government afford Baha'is full legal and human rights, including access to higher education, and refrain from further attempts to prohibit or otherwise impede the operations of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education;

Strongly encourages the students, faculty, and staff of Michigan State University to convey their concern about the persecution of Baha'is in Iran and specifically the closure of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education to the Iranian Minister of Culture and Higher Education and the Director of UNESCO; and

Requests that the University, its Colleges and Departments, after review of the credentialing procedures of graduates of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, consider applications of graduates of the BIHE as it would any applicant from an accredited University to their programs.

G. PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

17. COMMITTEE OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS, INC.

November 9, 1998

Hojjatoleslam val13 Moslemin Sayed Mohammad Khatami President of the Islamic Republic of Iran The Presidency Palestine Avenue Azerbaijan Intersection Tehran Islamic Republic of Iran

Your Excellency:

As an organization of scientists and engineers dedicated to the protection and advancement of the human rights of colleagues around the world, we write to express our concern and distress over the arrest of at least 36 faculty members of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) between 30 September and 3 October, 1998. Noting that some have been released, we nevertheless object to the continued holding of seven BIHE faculty in custody.

The arrest of the faculty and the continued persecution of the Baha'i community flies in the face of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 9 and 18), which specifies that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile and everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. In addition, under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Iran in June 1975, the rights to work and to receive an education must be exercised without dis-
No discrimination of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion. Without a doubt, the Baha'i is the largest religious minority in your country, and its rights should be protected.

Accordingly, we respectfully urge the immediate and unconditional release of the BIHE faculty still detained and the cessation of attacks on the BIHE. Beyond this we call upon the Government of Iran to assure that Baha'i students who have been barred from Iranian universities are permitted to pursue higher education of their own choice.

Sincerely yours,
Joel L. Lebowitz  
Co-chair
Paul H. Plotz  
Co-chair
Walter Reich  
Co-chair
Entry By Troops

With certainty I
looked at the raw logs and thought:
   This green wood
   will not be ready
   for a full year.
O I turned and jostled them regularly
to keep them
exposed to some light.
However,
   I doubted
the efficacy of this effort.
But the sun...
— even when focused on the other side of the world
— the constant sun and its unnoted air
— the very air
   drew and pulled in invisible tides.
I observed no cracks in the grain
but one day,
   though only two seasons had passed,
I put sledge
hammer to wedge
and the easy cracking!? sound
   was so dry
so dry
   it startled all my assumptions.
I had all the ready firewood I could handle.

—Paul Mantle
Religious Freedom Abroad

BY WILMA ELLIS

Religious freedom is a relatively new concept. While the sacred scriptures of major world religions contain passages that proclaim tolerance and, either implicitly or explicitly, require the free assent of the individual to their doctrines, religious leaders and the masses who followed them habitually misunderstood or even intentionally disregarded such teachings. Rulers found it convenient to uphold particular religious establishments and to impose religious uniformity on their subjects. From the turmoil of the Protestant Reformation there emerged the political-religious principle that the ruler had the right to impose his faith on his subjects (cujus regio ejus religio), a principle to which some governments seem to adhere to this day. In societies where religion and state have been and still are organically linked, disbelief or heresy is equated with treason. Intolerance, violent enforcement of religious uniformity, and persecution of religious minorities are among the darkest aspects of world history.

The religious struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries unleashed upon Western Europe a whirlwind of controversy about religious rights. In Stuart England more than anywhere else the issues of freedom of conscience took center stage, and the ideals of such freedom were most clearly expressed. A popular pamphlet published in 1659 declared that “all true religion in men is founded upon the inward consent of their understandings and hearts to the truths revealed, and that the understanding is so free that ‘tis not in the power of men to compel it or restrain it from a consent.... Therefore no man can compel another to be religious, or by force or terror constrain the people to be of the true religion.” Over the next hundred years such ideas gradually influenced advanced thought in England and her American colonies, where Calvinist fundamentalism was rapidly losing ground, and religious diversity made tolerance the only reasonable path to follow.

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In America the ideal of religious freedom was for the first time in history imbedded in a political document: the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which declared that the “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof. . . .” Freedom of religion was linked in the same Amendment with freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of peaceable assembly, and freedom to petition the government for a redress of grievances without which religious freedom cannot survive.

From its origin, the United States stood, or tried to stand, apart from the rest of the world. In her own eyes America was a Promised Land, a refuge for the poor and the oppressed, “the land of the free, and the home of the brave.” Although some Americans believed that their example would influence the course of liberty in the Old World, as it did, in fact, in the French Revolution, until World War I most Americans were not prepared to get embroiled in the problems of distant lands. As soon as victory was won, America attempted to withdraw from the world, repudiating President Wilson’s noble dream of world peace guaranteed by the League of Nations.

Yet Wilson’s dream would not die. The rise of totalitarian dictatorship and involuntary involvement in World War II compelled the United States to become the originator and chief sponsor of the United Nations, an organization of sovereign states, some democratic, others despotic, but always claiming a popular mandate. In this new atmosphere human rights suddenly assumed an international significance they had never had before. Raphael Lemkin, a legal scholar who had lost his entire family in the Holocaust, was the author and the main mover in the adoption of the United Nations’ Genocide Convention. Eleanor Roosevelt was a tireless proponent of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, once it was ratified by a majority of the member nations of the United Nations, became a universal, although unenforceable, standard of conduct of all states. Referring specifically to religion, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in Article 18 that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. 2

The wording of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was used in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adding to it the provision that “No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.” 3

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Unlike the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this Covenant is legally binding on its signatories, which include a vast majority of the United Nations member states.

Having been a main sponsor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United States found itself a somewhat reluctant leader in the promotion of human rights throughout the world, although it did not play that role consistently, often sacrificing principle to political expediency. Nevertheless, advocacy of human rights became an element of American foreign policy under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

Unfortunately, much of the world, including many states that signed and ratified covenants, declarations, and treaties guaranteeing human rights, continues to ignore its obligations. Religious freedom is far from being universally practiced even by democratically governed societies. The rapporteurs appointed by the United Nation’s Human Rights Commission have amply documented violations of religious freedoms in country after country. In this context, in 1996, 1997, and 1998, the Congress of the United States debated the difficult problem of U.S. policy with respect to religious freedom abroad. The debate was especially poignant because with the end of the Cold War oppressed minorities throughout the world claimed not only political but spiritual rights. In one instance such a minority, deprived of its rights and persecuted in a dozen countries, happened to constitute the majority religion in the United States.

As the Congress debated, the then Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, created in 1998 the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, which was composed of twenty representatives of religious institutions, public interest groups, and research and academic institutions. He charged the Committee with the task of surveying the status of religious freedom throughout the world and submitting recommendations to the President and to the Secretary of State for possible actions to be taken by the U.S. government. Secretary Christopher’s successor, Madeleine Albright, met with the Committee at its inauguration and subsequently strongly supported its work.

One of the Committee’s first tasks was to identify, following the findings of the United Nations Human Rights Center, the most common forms of violations of religious rights. These included physical attacks, torture, and killings; imprisonment based on an individual’s adherence to a religion or belief; restrictions on freedom of expression and manifesting one’s belief; closure or destruction of places of worship, limits on religious publications, and control of the right to elect or designate one’s own religious leaders; discrimination in employment, education, housing, and the right to own property; restrictions or prohibitions on membership in a specific religious com-

community, on worship in private or in public, on religiously mandated observances and holy days, and on ties with coreligionists; and forced exile and expulsion of believers, which also denies the right to freedom of movement.

During its two-year term (1998–99), the Committee held a number of public hearings at which representatives of persecuted religious minorities testified about the deprivation of freedom that their communities suffered in a number of countries. Government officials and independent scholars specializing in human rights provided the Committee with further information and analysis. The great mass of documentary evidence and the personal testimony of witnesses revealed the depth of human suffering that denial of religious freedom produces and had a strong emotional impact both on the members of the Committee and on the general public that attended its open sessions.

The Committee's final report to the President and to the Secretary of State made several general recommendations that were encapsulated in its executive summary:

These recommendations are designed to further what ideally should be a shared commitment to promote the fundamental right of freedom of conscience and belief. U.S. government actions to promote religious freedom should be implemented at all levels: in Washington, at U.S. embassies abroad, and in multilateral organizations. The key objective of such actions should be to promote the right of all people to choose freely in matters of worship and to permit manifestations of religion provided that the manifestations do not seriously interfere with public order. The United States should take all reasonable efforts to promote conflict resolution through the constructive involvement of religious communities, thereby ensuring that religion is, whenever appropriate, part of the solution. The Advisory Committee regards religious freedom as one of the most important and fundamental of human rights, and in conjunction with other fundamental human rights, should be promoted as an integral part of U.S. foreign policy. Violations of religious freedom are usually a significant sign that other fundamental human rights also are being violated. The U.S. government should work actively to end religious persecution and violations of the rights of religious liberty.5

The Committee spelled out principles that should guide U.S. policymaking and made a number of specific recommendations. These included the recommendation that the President "should deliver a major address explaining the importance of religious freedom at home and abroad"; that "he should give greater weight and enhance the importance of religious freedom among the issues for consideration in foreign policy decision-making"; that he "should

stress and highlight in our bilateral and multilateral international relations, the high priority of religious freedom among U.S. foreign policy objectives; and that he “should encourage greater dialogue on issues of religious freedom among a broad spectrum of Americans to encourage understanding, tolerance, and activities to end violations of religious freedom.”

The Committee made a series of specific recommendations to the State Department on the need for increased attention on the part of U.S. embassies to issues of religious freedom, to educating Foreign Service officers and sensitizing them to such issues, to improving the reporting of violations of religious freedom anywhere in the world, and to the need for adequate funding for the newly created Office on International Religious Freedom within the Department of State. The Committee also made recommendations on the treatment of refugees, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, economic assistance programs, the United States Agency for International Development, and the United States Information Agency.

While the Committee was engaged in its work, the Congress without a single dissenting voice adopted, and the President signed into law in 1998, the International Religious Freedom Act that created, among other things, an Office of International Religious Freedom within the State Department (a measure that had been recommended by the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad and had already been implemented) and an independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. The Commission—consisting of nine voting members, three appointed by the President and six by Congress, and a nonvoting member, the Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom, appointed by the President—will continue and expand the work of the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, reporting and making recommendations to the President, the Congress, and the Secretary of State.

The appointment of the State Department's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad and the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which created the Office for International Religious Freedom within the Department of State and an independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, testify to the growing realization by the American public that religious liberty is an indispensable human right, recognized as such by international law, deserving of broad international support and of becoming a significant element of American foreign policy.

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The Dancers

Meditation on an Evening Visit to the House of Abbud

Wreathed in expectation,
Spirits alight
Glide up the silent stair.

Shoes cast by the door,
Knees caress carpets
Foreheads kiss frigid stones
Eyes embrace faces, bless bedsteads
Wonder, revere and move on.

Robed in evanescence,
Awe-struck moths flit from room to room
Float past each other, each threshold
Toward a flame unseen
In the cold and darkened spaces.

Purify, prepare to visit
One dusky room,
Sanctuary of straw mats
Oracle to the universe,
Where the Greatest Singer
Reconceived creation.

Here in the hush
Of humble straw and wood,
Where slightest sound is sacrilege,
A call to prayer scrapes the silence.
Amplified from a minaret, raucous and worldly,
It calls us heedless, insufficient, unworthy.
But in such strident notes,
Moth-like lovers hear
A paean of overtones:
  promise kept
  seed taking root
  birth nearing term

Stirred, they rise and circle,
Flutter amid myriad fires, countless splendours,
To fall again, hearts pressed to the floor.

Taking leave
Wings too weak,
They creep backward into the light,
Lest it blind them.

—Susan McLaren

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Health Care in a Persecuted Community: The Iranian Bahá'ís

BY CHANGIZ GEULA, MARIANNE SMITH GEULA, AND JOHN WOODALL

Introduction

The social unrest that began in Iran in 1978 and led to the Islamic Revolution in 1979 was accompanied by attacks on the persons and property of members of the Bahá'í Faith, the largest religious minority in that country. Initial incidents of mob violence against the Bahá'ís were transformed in the ensuing months and years into a systematic and orchestrated campaign to eradicate the Bahá'í community from the country of its origin. This campaign has taken the form of the execution of more than two hundred of the most prominent leaders of the Bahá'í community by order of the Revolutionary Courts; the confiscation and destruction of numerous Bahá'í properties, including several of the most sacred Bahá'í holy places; the summary dismissal of Bahá'ís from government employment, including those in the departments of education and health; and the denial of higher education to Bahá'í youth. Various international agencies and the Bahá'í International Community have reported on the nature of the attacks on the Bahá'ís, which "appear to be geared to destroying them as a community." What have not been systematically monitored, tracked, and documented are the human-rights abuses or the effects such abuses have had on Bahá'í refugees and on Bahá'ís still in Iran. While it is not yet possible to provide a comprehensive survey of such human-rights abuses, it is possible to make an initial attempt by examining the effects of persecution on health care in the Iranian Bahá'í community.

Health Care in the Iranian Bahá'í Community

Seeking adequate health care is a tenet of the Bahá'í teachings. The sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith set a high standard for individual hygiene and health. Bahá'ís are enjoined "to observe the utmost cleanliness" and to be "the very essence of cleanliness amongst mankind." The use of mind-altering substances such as drugs and alcohol that can inflict "harm upon the body" are forbidden. Bahá'ís are further encouraged, in very strong language, to refrain from smoking
tobacco and are counseled that "in every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man's inner reality." The Bahá’í writings also contain strong statements concerning the care for one's self: "one must not turn aside from the advice of a competent doctor. It is imperative to consult one even if the patient himself be a well-known and eminent physician." 3

Hence, in addition to efforts directed at furthering one's spiritual and moral well-being, a Bahá’í must have recourse to competent physicians as an aspect of one's religious life. Difficulties encountered in acquiring adequate health care would have religious, social, and legal implications for Bahá'ís. But have the Iranian Bahá’ís had access to competent medical care?

According to evidence gathered so far, physicians, other health-care professionals, and hospitals and clinics do not deny, nor have they in the past denied, health care to Bahá’ís based on their religion. 4 Unlike other areas of life in which the government has intervened to deny Bahá’ís access to public services, there does not appear to be a similar and systematic effort in regard to health care. However, the denial of human rights, such as the rights to fair employment and education, has created serious obstacles to the health and well-being of the Bahá’ís of Iran. 5

The only known circumstances under which access to health care has been denied to Bahá’ís because of their religion have been those in which government officials were directly involved. For example, there are reports, confirmed by multiple sources, of Bahá’ís in detention being denied access to basic and emergency medical care. 6 Government officials also interrogated and severely rebuked a Muslim physician who provided free medical care to a Bahá’í. 7

Moreover, government officials have used torture to violate the human rights of Bahá’ís in Iran and to compromise their health. 8 Officials have used violent coercive measures to extract information from Bahá’ís and, often, to induce them to recant their faith. Signs of torture have been clearly apparent on the bodies of a significant number of executed Bahá’ís. 9 Many released prisoners have also reported having been tortured while in custody. 10 Available information indicates that the methods of torture in such instances have included beatings and lashings with a whip, drilling holes into the body, placing burning matches under the nails, and applying a hot iron to the body. A released prisoner is reported to have said that the one commodity desired the most by prisoners was salt, which

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4. Interviews 1, 2, and 3. There are no sources that deal directly with health-care issues confronting the Bahá’í community of Iran. A great deal of the information contained in this article is based on extensive interviews (over ten) with individual Bahá’ís who live in Iran, who are recent immigrants to another country, or who have traveled to Iran in the past few years. For the sake of confidentiality, references to interviews are given by number only. Additional information was gleaned from official reports issued by Bahá’í institutions, the United Nations, and government agencies. Because this research project is in its initial stages, the present article must be regarded as a preliminary report. The process of gathering information through interviews and other sources is continuing, and the authors hope that the evidence produced will form the basis of a comprehensive database that will make possible more in-depth reports on the health care of the Iranian Bahá’ís.

5. UN Doc. A/810 (Universal Declaration of Human Rights); UN General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III) (1948), Arts. 23, 26.

6. Interviews 2, 4, 5.


9. See Nash, Iran’s Secret Pogrom 17, and Sears, Cry from the Heart 102–04.

10. Interviews 4, 5.
is used for disinfecting torture wounds, greatly reducing the chances of infection.¹¹ The torture of imprisoned Bahá’ís thus constitutes a serious health crisis the effects of which linger long after the individual has been released.

**Financial Strangulation and Its Effects on Health Care**

One of the avenues pursued in the systematic campaign of persecution against the Bahá’ís of Iran has been their financial strangulation. Denial of access to a means of livelihood has been a major tool of the Islamic Republic’s effort to deny the Bahá’í community the right to exist. This has had profound effects on the type of health care that the Iranian Bahá’ís can afford.

Iran’s health-care system is stratified into two tiers. One consists of private hospitals and associated facilities staffed by health-care professionals. These are by far the best hospitals, equipped with state-of-the-art medical instruments. The physicians associated with such hospitals, many of whom also practice privately, are among the best educated and most competent in the country. Most have studied in the West and are familiar with recent medical advances. The private facilities and highly educated physicians deliver high-quality care. However, such care comes at a price. It is extremely expensive and in most instances can only be afforded by the rich. The well-to-do thus have no problem obtaining high-quality medical care; this appears to be true of Bahá’ís who have means.¹²

The second tier of health care in Iran consists of state-run hospitals serviced by state-employed professionals. The hospitals and clinics in this category are run down and are relatively unsanitary, providing poor and slow service. At these clinics patients usually form long lines in the street waiting for service. The training of the staff is inferior to that of professionals in private facilities. Medical supplies are constantly in short supply, and patients often have to provide their own syringes, intravenous injection bags, sutures, and so on. This system of health care, which is considerably less expensive than that in the private system, provides medical services to nearly all of the segment of the population that receives care through health insurance.¹³

Further financial difficulties were created for the Iranian Bahá’ís by the government takeover of two Bahá’í companies. The first, *Shirkát-i Umaná* (Company of Trustees), was a nonprofit company that held all Bahá’í-owned properties in the country, including “Bahá’í holy places and religious sites, cemeteries, local [Bahá’í] community centres, and welfare institutions.”¹⁴ Shortly after the Revolution, the government confiscated all of the furnishings and assets of *Shirkát-i Umaná*. The employees were gathered in one location, individually interrogated, and summarily dismissed from their jobs. According to an independent report “the sobering meaning of this act is that all income producing property plus buildings and land used solely for Bahá’í religious purposes are being taken over by the Islamic government.”¹⁵ The second company to be confiscated was *Shirkát-i Nawmahállán* (Children’s Company), a financial institution. This one act “swept away the life savings of its 15,000 Bahá’í shareholders and investors,” including many trusts established for children.¹⁶

¹¹. Interview 4.
¹². Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8.
¹³. Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8.
An additional financial setback for a significant portion of the Iranian Bahá’í community was the dismissal of Bahá’ís in 1980 from government positions, initiated at the Department of Education and soon generalized to all branches of government, including the Department of Health and the military. As a result, many thousands of Bahá’ís were suddenly left without the means to earn a living. In addition to the loss of income, such dismissals entailed the loss of all fringe benefits, such as pensions. The ban on the employment of Bahá’ís in government offices and agencies is strictly enforced to this day.

An obvious effect of the financial strangulation of the Bahá’í community is an inability by many of its members to afford the higher-quality health care available through private hospitals, clinics, and physicians. In many instances Bahá’ís cannot even afford the cheaper and lower-quality care provided by state hospitals and clinics. For example, Bahá’ís in a seminomadic tribe were forced to take refuge outside a large urban area after their homes and properties were forcibly taken from them. These refugees continue to suffer great financial difficulties with their only help coming from their coreligionists. Their maintaining a reasonable standard of hygiene and health is also fraught with many obstacles. They are entirely dependent for their health care on volunteer Bahá’í physicians and other health-care professionals. In fact, Bahá’í physicians who are still able to practice provide the major source of health care for many Bahá’ís throughout Iran who would otherwise be left without any care at all.

**Health Insurance**

One way in which individuals in any community find relief from the heavy burden of health-care costs is through insurance. In Iran there are several ways in which health insurance can be obtained. Bahá’ís, however, are excluded from most of these.

A major avenue for obtaining insurance is through government jobs, which automatically include insurance as a benefit. This insurance extends to the spouse and the family of the employee as well. Although such insurance does not buy high-quality health care, it does enable its recipients to obtain some measure of care. Since Bahá’ís are barred from holding jobs in any government agency in Iran, from schools to post offices, from government-run health-care agencies to the military, such care is not extended to them.

A second avenue for obtaining health insurance is through employment in private companies and businesses, which are required by law to provide insurance for their employees. However, many Bahá’ís experience difficulties in obtaining employment in private enterprises. Discrimination against Bahá’ís by some employers is likely to contribute to this difficulty. Those employers willing to hire qualified Bahá’ís are, nevertheless, usually reluctant to do so, largely out of fear of government reprisals. One Bahá’í seeking employment was told at an interview by a private company executive that hiring would not be possible because of the fear that the government would withdraw its contracts with the company should it discover a Bahá’í employee.

Such government contracts are vital to the life of many companies, and apparently the government uses these lucrative contracts to influence negatively the hiring of Bahá’ís. Another Bahá’í, after being dis-

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18. Interview 5.
19. Interviews 4, 5.
20. Interviews 2, 5, 8.
21. Interviews 5, 8.
22. Interviews 1, 2, 3, 8.
23. Interview 8.
missed from a government position, had several interviews at private companies. All interviews would proceed quite positively until the interviewer found out that the interviewee was a Bahá’í, at which time the interview would be cut short, and the Bahá’í would be denied the job. Another Bahá’í, an accountant, had gone through several cycles of being hired by private firms and advancing to managerial positions, only to lose the job. The reason was that the government would discover that the accountant was a Bahá’í and would pressure the company to replace the Bahá’í with a Muslim employee.

Recently, private insurance companies have emerged in Iran from which individuals and families can purchase health insurance. As can be expected, however, this type of insurance is quite expensive and beyond the means of many. In summary, of the several types of health insurance available in Iran, Bahá’ís are denied access to most and are confronted with many obstacles in obtaining others.

**The Fate of Bahá’í Health-Care Facilities and Professionals**

The takeover and dismantling of the network of health-care facilities owned by Shirkát-i Umaná, a nonprofit Bahá’í company administered by Iranian Bahá’ís, created a major obstacle to the delivery of medical services to that community. The most prominent of these facilities was the Mitháqiyyih Hospital in Tehran, a relatively modern facility that served a large number of patients. Two clinics associated with the hospital served the remote villages of Tákur and Katá. In Tehran the hospital had three dependencies: a home for the aged, which was the first of its kind in Iran; a nursing school; and a school that granted associate degrees for operating-room technicians. In addition to the general population, the Mitháqiyyih Hospital and its dependencies served a large number of Bahá’ís, particularly those who could not otherwise afford adequate hospital care. In 1980, shortly after the Islamic Revolution, the government confiscated the Mitháqiyyih Hospital and all of its dependencies. Many elderly Bahá’ís were evicted from the home for the aged, and low-income Bahá’ís no longer had access to many of the hospital’s dependencies. These facilities are now administered by the government and are delivering poor service or, at best, mediocre care.

Bahá’í physicians and health-care professionals have been a specific target of persecution. In an attempt to deprive the Bahá’í community of its leaders, the revolutionary government has executed more than two hundred prominent Bahá’ís. Many of these were physicians. A prominent Bahá’í physician, Professor Manuchehr Hakim, was assassinated in his office on 12 January 1981. The following day Dr. Hakim’s house was sealed off by government officials, and all of its contents were removed. Dr. Hakim received his degree from the Medical College of France and won professorial rank in the French university system. Upon his return to Iran, he established a Chair of Anatomy at the University of Tehran. His research was well-known, and his writings were cited in standard European books on anatomy, such as *Le Rouvier*. Dr. Hakim was the Director of the Mitháqiyyih Hospital since its inception, serving in this capacity for thirty years. He was decorated by the French government with the Legion d’honneur in 1976 for his humanitarian services. Not long before he was assassinated, Dr. Hakim was subjected to an
extensive interrogation by government officials. He later reported that one of the pieces of information the interrogators sought was a list of Bahá'í physicians throughout Iran. This indicates, however indirectly, that the government harbored plans for the systematic persecution of Bahá'í physicians throughout Iran.

In 1980, by order of government officials, a campaign to purge government offices and state-run agencies of Bahá'í employees resulted in a large number of Bahá'í physicians and other health-care professionals being dismissed from their jobs. Subsequently, many of these physicians and health workers have been unable to engage in medical practice and have been forced to take on other means of earning a livelihood, including menial labor. Although a number of Bahá'í physicians have been able to continue in private practice, they are confronted with many difficulties. First, the system of hospital admissions requires that the admitting doctor own shares in the hospital in which the admission is to take place. Such shares are quite expensive and beyond the means of many Bahá'í doctors who share the financial difficulties confronting their coreligionists. Second, in a number of instances, the Bahá'í doctors' licenses to practice have been revoked without due process or legitimate cause. Although in most such instances the license is eventually restored, the time that elapses before such restoration (sometimes up to two years) causes much personal suffering, a disruption of professional development, and financial hardship.

An obvious effect of the takeover and destruction of Bahá'í administered health-care facilities and the difficulties encountered by Bahá'í physicians has been the loss of health care provided by these agents to the Bahá'ís. This has been felt most acutely by the poorer segment of the Iranian Bahá'í community.

**Confiscation of Bahá’í Burial Grounds**

Other violations of the rights of Bahá'ís have also had consequences for their health. For example, Bahá'ís encounter obstacles in burying their dead. Before the Revolution, Bahá'ís in each city had their own cemetery, which, in most cases, was equipped with a funeral home where the bodies of the dead were washed and prepared for burial. When it seized all Bahá'í-owned properties, the government took over the Bahá'í cemeteries in many cities. In most instances the graves were then destroyed, and the area was cleared for new structures such as schools and parking facilities. In the period immediately following these takeovers, Bahá'ís experienced great difficulties in burying their loved ones, for they were not allowed to use the cemeteries belonging to other groups (burial grounds in Iran are segregated by religion), and officials refused to assign them new burial grounds. During this period many Bahá'ís were forced to bury their dead under quite unsanitary conditions. Reports indicate that some had to inter bodies in small gardens in their back-
yards. One family even buried a dead child beneath the floor tiles of their apartment. After numerous requests and much pleading, local governments designated burial grounds for Bahá'ís, but these grounds were usually outside of the city, often in arid areas where water was unavailable or not provided. Family members or visitors often bring water from the city to the cemeteries. In Tehran Bahá'í graves cannot be identified by gravestones, necessitating the use of numbers or other identification marks. Plants and flowers are virtually impossible to grow because of the lack of water. Recently the Bahá'ís of Tehran obtained permission to build a room in their cemetery to be used for preparing the dead for burial. Water is still not available and is sometimes piped in from a neighboring source.

**Effects on Health of the Denial of Higher Education**

Members of any community forced to endure persecutions will inevitably suffer from psychological pain and mental anguish. One aspect of the campaign of persecution against the Bahá'ís that is of particular relevance in a survey of the impact of persecution on emotional and physical health is the denial of higher education. The persecution suffered by Iranian Bahá'ís has raised mental-health concerns for segments of that community, particularly female youth.

The scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith are unequivocal on the necessity and importance of education: "Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone." Indeed, the Bahá'í writings indicate that the "primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward." Medicine has been particularly lauded for its value to humankind. The Bahá'í community has thus placed a great deal of emphasis on the education of its members, and large numbers of them have sought education in medicine and related fields.

However, discrimination has prevented Bahá'ís in Iran from equal access to education. Isolated incidents of discrimination against Bahá'í students in elementary and high schools consisted of frequent questioning and rebuking of students in the presence of their peers. Some of these incidents were followed by the Bahá'í students being dismissed from school, with school officials alleging that the students were the cause of such incidents. This type of discrimination culminated in a more systematic attempt to keep Bahá'í students out of school by incorporating a religion column in the school registration form. A student would not be admitted for enrollment if the word Bahá'í was entered into the column. This practice, however, does not appear to have been applied universally and has been abandoned. Nevertheless, discrimination against and dismissal of Bahá'í students meant that many were out of school for extended periods of time and had to enroll in distant schools where this practice was not as prevalent.

By order of the revolutionary courts in 1980, Bahá'ís were banned from studying or teaching at universities and colleges. Bahá'í
students and faculty were dismissed from all universities, and no Bahá’í student has been admitted to or new Bahá’í faculty hired by a university since. A number of those dismissed were medical students or nurses who were either in the last stages of their studies or awaiting a license to practice.

Bahá’ís have been permitted, since the Revolution, to continue attending elementary and high school with the exception of the final year, which is termed “pre-university,” and is devoted solely to preparing students for entering universities. In the past year Bahá’ís have been permitted to attend the pre-university year. However, they are still barred from entering universities. The inability to continue education after high school has created a great deal of stress for young Bahá’ís. Young Bahá’í women feel this stress acutely because of the restricted life style imposed on women in the Islamic Republic. The relief brought by relative freedom of movement and social interaction enjoyed by Bahá’í young men is denied to young women. The result is despondency and depression.

The Bahá’í Open University

In 1987 the Iranian Bahá’ís founded the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education, also known as the Bahá’í Open University, to address the educational needs of Bahá’í youth. The institute had, until September 1998, an enrollment of more than 900 students, a faculty of more than 150 academics and instructors, and an infrastructure composed of various classrooms, laboratories, and libraries scattered throughout Iran in private homes and buildings. It offered bachelor’s degrees in ten subject areas and had arrangements with some universities in the West for transfer of credits. Several reports indicate that the Open University has had a positive effect on the mental health of the Bahá’í youth, particularly young women.

At the end of September 1998 the Iranian government launched a coordinated attack to shut down the Open University by orchestrating the arrests of its most prominent professors and staff and looting more than five hundred homes where the institute’s activities were conducted. Subsequently, classes have resumed.

Conclusion

In 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), establishing an internationally accepted standard of fundamental rights and freedoms, accorded to individuals and groups within sovereign states in recognition of the inherent dignity of all humanity. Categorical provisions of the UDHR state that everyone has the right to “life, liberty and security of person”; that all are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection before the law; that no one should be “subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”; that all are allowed freedom of religious belief.
and thought, equal access to public services, the right to work and freely choose their employment, to have access to professional education based on merit, and to have a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of an individual and his or her family, “including food, clothing, housing and medical care.” The UDHR was adopted in 1948 by a vote of forty-eight UN member states in favor, with none opposed, and with eight member states abstaining. Iran was among the member states who voted in favor of the UDHR.

Although states cannot be internationally sanctioned for failing to adhere to the UDHR, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide criminalizes state-sponsored actions that are calculated to destroy a religious group. Similarly, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, designed to safeguard persons from being mistreated while in state custody, requires countries to prevent and punish torture and degradation committed by state agents. Furthermore, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requires ratifying States to uphold the individual’s right to gainful employment, equal opportunities based on merit in employment and education, and the right to the “enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” These conventions and covenants incorporate the nondiscriminatory standards and fundamental rights established in the UDHR. Iran signed the Genocide Convention in 1946 and ratified it in 1949. Iran signed the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1968 and ratified it in 1975 but is not currently a signatory to the Torture Convention.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is also not only a signatory but one of the principal forces behind the drafting of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam. Together with guaranteeing that “all men are equal in terms of basic human dignity . . . without any discrimination on the grounds of . . . religious belief,” this document repeats the Koranic injunction that “it is prohibited to exercise any form of compulsion on man . . . to convert him to another religion . . .” Like the UDHR, the Cairo Declaration affirms many of the basic human rights: “The State shall ensure the availability of ways and means to acquire education and shall guarantee educational diversity.” “Work is a right guaranteed by the State.” “Everyone shall have the right to medical and social care. . . .” “Everyone shall have the right to live in security for himself, his religion, his dependents, his honor and his property.” “The State shall protect him from arbitrary interference.” “A private residence is inviolable in all cases. It will not be entered without permission from its inhabitants or in any unlawful manner, nor shall it be demolished or confiscated and its dwellers evicted.” Finally, the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam declares that “It is forbidden to resort to such means as may result in the genocidal annihilation of mankind.”

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52. 78 UNTS 277; UN General Assembly Resolution 260 A III (1948), Art. II.
54. 993 UNTS 3; UN General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), UN Doc A/6316 (1966), Art. 1, 2, 6, 7, 12, 13.
55. United Nations, Multilateral Treaties Deposited with the Secretary-General, Status as of 30 April 1999, 89.
Despite the willingness of health-care professionals to provide care to Bahá'ís, the actions and policies of the Iranian govern-

ment, including the financial strangulation of the Bahá'í community and the denial of higher education to its members, have created serious obstacles to the Bahá'ís' physical and psychological health. The Iranian government's continued violation of the human rights of the Bahá'ís is bound to ensure ongoing health-care problems. Condemnation by the United Nations and world governments of Iran's continued campaign of persecution of the Bahá'ís has brought much-needed attention to their plight and has strengthened the principles and application of international law. Nevertheless, the Iranian government's attempts to eradicate the Bahá'í community persist. Continued condemnation by the global community of Iran's blatant disregard for its obligations under international law is one avenue through which the complete emancipation of the Iranian Bahá'ís may be realized.

58. See "Iran's Blueprint to Destroy the Bahá'í Community," *World Order*, 25.1 (Fall 1993): 44–49, which reprinted in Persian and in English translation the secret 25 February, 1991, memorandum of Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Council for dealing with the "Bahá'í question." The *New York Times* likened the document to Hitler's Nuremberg laws, for it "spells out a considered policy worked out at the highest level of government for the eradication of a peaceful and law-abiding minority. It violates all international treaties, conventions, and declarations to which Iran is a signatory and stands as yet another monstrous monument to inhumanity" (p. 45); see also U.S. Department of State, "Iran Country Report" and Bahá'í Office of External Affairs, "Current Situation."
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