

CULTURAL CLEANSING

DESTROYING A COMMUNITY. ERASING MEMORY.

FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has persecuted the Bahá'ís, a peaceful, law-abiding religious minority. More than two hundred leading Bahá'ís have been put to death, tens of thousands have lost their jobs, tens of thousands more have felt compelled to leave their homeland, Bahá'í youth have been denied access to higher education, and retired workers have had their pensions summarily canceled. In 1991 an official government document signed by Supreme Leader Khamenei spelled out measures aimed at slowly strangling the community.

The hatred of the extremist mullahs for the Bahá'ís is such that they, like the Taliban of Afghanistan who destroyed the towering Buddhist sculptures at Bamiyan, intend not only to eradicate the religion, but even to erase all traces of its existence in the country of its birth. It was for this reason they demolished the House of the Báb in Shiraz, center of pilgrimage for the Bahá'ís of the world and a gem of the city's cherished past. This is why they confiscated Bahá'í cemeteries and bulldozed the graves of Bahá'í heroes and saints. This is why they desecrated the resting place of Quddus, one of the apostles of the faith.

This June a wrecking crew descended upon a historical monument, a precious example of Islamic-Iranian architecture, "a matchless model of art, spirituality, and architecture." "How is it," a brave Tehran newspaper article asked, "that in the middle of the day ... the very essence of our cultural heritage is being destroyed?" The answer is heartbreakingly simple.

The demolished building was the house of a great nineteenth-century statesman, calligrapher and literary figure, Mirza Abbas Nuri. Although he was born and died a Muslim, his son, Bahá'u'lláh, founded the Bahá'í Faith, a religion that promotes abolition of all prejudice, independent investigation of truth, equality of women and men, universal education, harmony of religion and science, and universal peace. For this the clerical bigots have declared Bahá'ís, followers of Bahá'u'lláh, to be heretics and apostates, deserving of death.

In their determination to rid Iran of the Bahá'í community and obliterate its very memory, the fundamentalists in power are prepared even to destroy the cultural heritage of their own country, which they appear not to realize they hold in trust for humankind. Surely the time has come for Iranians everywhere to raise their voices in protest against such willful desecrations.

For more information, please visit www.bahaiworldnews.org.

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