

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

11 September 1980

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey to you the following....

An official statement published in Iran in the columns of newspapers of nationwide circulation charges that those executed [the seven martyrs of Yazd] were guilty of spying and subversion and denounces the Local Spiritual Assembly of Yazd as an instrument of espionage. These accusations are nothing but downright falsehood....

Recently the world press has carried several excellent articles written by fair-minded and well-known non-Bahá'í writers in support of our beloved Faith. *Le Monde* of Paris in its 29 August issue published a remarkable article earnestly defending the Bahá'í community in Iran. The Universal House of Justice has asked us to send you a copy of the article in French, with a translation of its text into English, for your information and use in any manner you deem advisable.

The situation of the friends in Iran is perilous. The total number of believers imprisoned in the country has exceeded sixty. The friends have no refuge save their trust in Bahá'u'lláh. We must steadfastly continue to cling to the Hem of His Garment, fervently pray for the alleviation of the sufferings of our oppressed brethren, resolutely arise to win victories in His name, and be confident that the promised deliverance of the Faith of God from the shackles of blind orthodoxy will, in the fullness of time, be fully realized with the aid of His invisible hosts and as decreed by His invincible Will.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

The Bahá'ís: An Accursed Community

The Iranian press is still silent concerning the arrest, on 21st August last, of the nine members of the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í community, "the National Spiritual Assembly" (*Le Monde* of 28th August). No one knows who proceeded to arrest them, except that it was a group of armed men "claiming authority," who took refuge in pregnant silence. Nothing is known, either, of the place of their confinement. Neither President Bani-Sadr, nor the Attorney-General, Ayatollah Ghodoussi, could, or would, reply to the anguished appeals of the families and co-religionists of the nine persons.

Accused of "plotting against the security of the State," they are in danger of execution. In accordance with the procedure of the "Islamic revolutionary tribunals," the arraignment and the trial will take place in camera without the presence of an advocate; the verdict could be pronounced and executed before even the Attorney General is informed.

Thousands of "counterrevolutionaries" are no doubt in the same situation. But the situation of the Bahá'ís is, in general, far more grave inasmuch as the repression falls not only on individuals who could have been guilty of subversive activities, but on an entire group of people who lack the benefit of any legal protection. In the eyes of the Constitution, indeed, the Bahá'ís ... do not exist. Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, although far less numerous than the followers of this humanist religion, are mentioned in the fundamental law and benefit from all the

rights accorded to other citizens of Muslim faith, including that of being represented in Parliament. Thus some three hundred thousand Bahá'ís have been reduced to the condition of pariahs.

The anarchy produced by the revolution—which was in principle directed against imperial autocracy and foreign domination—has favored the unleashing of the fanaticism, not of the population, but of ultraconservative religious organizations like the brotherhood of the *Tablighat-i-Islamí* (an Islamic propaganda group), who already under the monarchy were conducting persecutions with the active collaboration of SAVAK. Since the installation of the Republic a score of Bahá'í Holy Places have been destroyed or confiscated by the local authorities; centers of worship in eighty towns and villages have been destroyed or burned down; some forty cemeteries have been profaned and in most cases confiscated; museums, shops, or places of business belonging to Bahá'ís have been attacked or looted in more than three hundred and eighty urban or rural settlements, according to a report compiled two months ago by the National Spiritual Assembly of the community.

The high authorities of the Republic would find it difficult to exonerate themselves from all responsibility for these collective crimes. Not one of them, as far as is known, has explicitly condemned them. Worse, the Revolutionary Council, on which, moreover, some “liberals” are represented, decreed last winter (see the daily *Eteleat* of 20th December) that the army must expel from its ranks all persons who do not belong to one of the four “official” religions of the State (Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian). Following this, in addition to the officers and soldiers, civil servants, employees of nationalized industries, university professors and teachers have been dismissed from one day to the next without any indemnity or pension. Again by order of the government, Bahá'í places of worship in several cities, notably in Tehran and Mashhad, have been converted into “free Islamic Universities.”

The Bahá'ís are denounced as “heretics,” as “renegades” from Islam, because the Founders of their religion, in the last century, were for the most part, Persian Muslims, because their Prophet, the Báb (1819–1850) had the misfortune to be born after Muḥammad, who is considered to be the last Messenger of God. However, the millions of Bahá'ís scattered today in some eighty-eight thousand localities across the five continents are neither of Persian origin nor are they Muslim converts. Beyond this, the Bahá'í Faith recognizes and respects Islam.

However, the persecutors have “refined” their accusations by “politicizing” them. The Bahá'ís, according to them, are “agents of Israel” because the World Center of the community is situated in Haifa. But the seat was established in that city in 1868, almost a century before the foundation of the Jewish State.

The Bahá'ís, it is said again, were “supporters of the regime and of SAVAK!” Yet they refused—in face of demands of the Shah—to join the single Rastakhiz party, in spite of the pogroms organized against them by SAVAK, notably in 1955 and in 1963. In the last months of the monarchy the agents of the secret police had caused some three hundred houses belonging to Bahá'ís to be burnt. In accordance with their teachings, the Bahá'ís are required to be obedient to the established authority, whatever it may be, and refuse—under pain of being expelled from the community—to involve themselves in any activity or to accept any office of a political nature. This shows how absurd appears the accusation of “plotting against the security of the State” formulated against the nine elected members of the supreme body of the community in Iran.

They knew that they were in danger. They could, like so many others, have chosen exile. As one of them said to us recently, they had nevertheless decided “to remain at the side of our fellow believers in distress.” Their fidelity can cost them their lives. But who, in Iran or abroad, will have the courage or the wish to intervene in favor of a community accursed among all others?

—Eric Rouleau

