

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

26 January 1982

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

With indignation and anguish the Bahá'ís of the world, over the past three years, have received continuously tragic news of the sufferings and martyrdoms of their brethren in Iran, where a reign of relentless terror is now encompassing that long-abused and downtrodden community. The inhuman cruelties heaped on the followers of the Most Great Name—worthy descendants of their forebears, the Dawn-Breakers—in that land where the heroes and martyrs of the Faith have shed such luster on their generations, are increasing daily. We have seen how the House of the Báb in Shiraz and Bahá'u'lláh's ancestral home in Tákur have been demolished, all Bahá'í endowments, including our Holy Places, have been seized, and the main financial assets of the community sequestered. We have seen with what callousness Bahá'í children have been refused admission to schools, Bahá'í employees dismissed from government positions, and the essential human rights of the sorely tried Bahá'ís violated, their means of livelihood undermined or destroyed, their homes plundered, their properties confiscated, their very lives snuffed out.

Contemplating the history of the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, we note an alarming acceleration in the degree of blatancy with which the traditional enemies of the Faith pursue their single purpose of extirpating the Faith in the land of its birth. In the past, with the exception of a few specific instances, the persecution of the members of the Bahá'í community by those traditionally inimical to the Faith, was random and sporadic, resulting from the incitement of easily aroused mobs to attack the lives and properties of the Bahá'ís.

Now the enemies of God's precious Cause who, as they themselves attest, have in the past twenty-five years organized themselves to counteract the influence of the Faith, to vilify and misrepresent its purpose and teachings, to inflame religious passions leading to the harassment and intimidation of the believers, to sow seeds of doubt among the friends and sympathizers, have infiltrated the ranks of officialdom, where, from this more advantageous position, they continue to instigate the persecution of the Bahá'ís. The incidence of violation of the rights of the Bahá'ís is thus becoming more frequent as is well evidenced by reports published in the press of Iran in recent months. Examples abound. For instance, formerly when Bahá'ís were arrested they were given an opportunity to defend themselves in some form of judicial proceedings held for the sake of appearances. On one occasion part of the proceedings which resulted in the execution of seven believers in Yazd, as late as September 1980, was televised. But recently the court proceedings, if any, have been held in camera, and reports have even been received of the torture of Bahá'ís before their execution. No longer are the relatives of imprisoned Bahá'ís permitted to visit them, as they were until recently; no longer are the condemned permitted to solace their families with letters of farewell or the making of wills before their execution; and, more tragically, disturbed by the large number of Bahá'ís and sympathetic people of other religions who attended the funeral services of the slain Bahá'ís, the authorities have now seized the Bahá'í cemetery in Tehran and do not permit burial there. Indeed, the families of those most recently martyred were not even notified of the secret execution of their loved ones, whose bodies, unceremoniously deposited in graves for “infidels,” were only fortuitously discovered.

Although the oppressors maintain that they are killing the Bahá'ís because they are guilty of serving as political agents and spies, it has been ascertained that in almost every instance of execution, the accused Bahá'í was offered recantation as a means of release.

The inveterate enemies of the Faith imagine that their persecutions will disrupt the foundations of the Faith and tarnish its glory. Alas! Alas for their ignorance and folly! These acts

of oppression, far from weakening the resolve of the friends, have always served to inflame their zeal and galvanize their beings. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “... they thought that violence and interference would cause extinction and silence and lead to suppression and oblivion; whereas interference in matters of conscience causes stability and firmness and attracts the attention of men’s sight and souls; which fact has received experimental proof many times and often.”

Every drop of blood shed by the valiant martyrs, every sigh heaved by the silent victims of oppression, every supplication for divine assistance offered by the faithful, has released, and will continue mysteriously to release, forces over which no antagonist of the Faith has any control, and which, as marshaled by an All-Watchful Providence, have served to noise abroad the name and fame of the Faith to the masses of humanity in all continents, millions of whom had previously been totally ignorant of the existence of the Faith or had but a superficial, and oft-times erroneous, understanding of its teachings and history.

The current persecution has resulted in bringing the name and character of our beloved Faith to the attention of the world as never before in its history. As a direct result of the protests sent by the worldwide community of the Most Great Name to the rulers in Iran, of the representations made to the media when those protests were ignored, of direct approach by Bahá’í institutions at national and international levels to governments, communities of nations, international agencies and the United Nations itself, the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh has not only been given sympathetic attention in the world’s councils, but also its merits and violated rights have been discussed and resolutions of protest sent to the Iranian authorities by sovereign governments, singly and in unison. The world’s leading newspapers, followed by the local press, have presented sympathetic accounts of the Faith to millions of readers, while television and radio stations are increasingly making the persecutions in Iran the subject of their programs. Commercial publishing houses are beginning to commission books about the Faith.

But in spite of this great wave of publicity now bringing the name of the Faith to the attention of large masses of mankind, and in spite of the many representations made to the authorities in Iran, the persecution of the Bahá’ís there continues. The world stands helpless before the imperviousness of that country to outside opinion or criticism. In face of this tragic impasse we can only redouble our efforts to teach the Cause, taking advantage of the increasing interest in the character and principles of our beloved Faith created by the sufferings of the Persian community.

Indeed, this new wave of persecution sweeping the Cradle of the Faith may well be seen as a blessing in disguise, a “providence” whose “calamity” is, as always, borne heroically by the beloved Persian community. It may be regarded as the latest move in God’s Major Plan, another trumpet blast to awaken the heedless from their slumber and a golden opportunity offered to the Bahá’ís to demonstrate once again their unity and fellowship before the eyes of a declining and skeptical world, to proclaim with full force the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to high and low alike, to establish the reverence of our Faith for Islam and its Prophet, to assert the principles of noninterference in political activities and obedience to government which stand at the very core of our Faith, and to provide comfort and solace to the breasts of the serene sufferers and steadfast heroes in the forefront of a persecuted community. Our motto in these days of world-encircling gloom should be the Words of God addressed to the Blessed Beauty Himself: “When the swords flash, go forward! When the shafts fly, press onward!”

Future historians will have to assess the impact of this crisis on the onward march of a triumphant Faith. A detailed list of the steps that have already been taken by the Bahá’ís of the world during the past three years is attached for the study of the friends.

Our fervent prayers are offered most ardently at the Holy Shrines for the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh to surround His lovers and loved ones in every land, and to assist and confirm them as

they face with certitude and confidence the challenges of the future.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Summary of Actions Taken by the Bahá'í International Community, National and Local Bahá'í Institutions, Governments, Non-Bahá'í Organizations and Prominent People in Connection with the Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran

The Bahá'í International Community

- Issued official statements to the press;
- kept the Secretary-General and appropriate offices of the United Nations apprised of developments as they occurred;
- cabled the Ayatollah Khomeini, the President and Prime Minister of Iran, and the President of the Iranian Supreme Court, urging their intervention and refuting accusations made against the Faith;
- prepared materials and made statements in connection with the adoption of resolutions by the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;
- made statements at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the Question of Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances;
- contacted the Iranian representative to the United Nations in New York in order to repudiate falsehoods made about the Faith and provide him with the true facts;
- and prepared the “White Paper” and “Update” and arranged for their translation in three languages, the “Chronological Summary of Individual Acts of Persecution in Iran,” and other documents for submission to high-ranking officials, government and United Nations offices, and worldwide distribution to National Spiritual Assemblies.

Bahá'í Institutions

- National Assemblies throughout the world cabled the Ayatollah Khomeini on four occasions, the Prime Minister and Head of the Iranian Supreme Court three times each, and the Secretary of the Revolutionary Council of Iran once.
- 118 National Spiritual Assemblies cabled the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as did thousands of Local Assemblies, Bahá'í groups and isolated centers. It was estimated that some 10–15,000 cables reached him, protesting the execution of seven Bahá'ís in Hamadan.
- Over 10,000 Local Spiritual Assemblies cabled the Ayatollah Khomeini, urging his intervention regarding the expropriation of Bahá'í properties in Iran.
- Most National Assemblies contacted by letter or delegation, or sent cables to their respective Iranian Embassy or Consulate, on five occasions and kept their government officials continually informed of developments.

- Selected National Assemblies cabled the Ayatollah Khomeini, the President and the Prime Minister of Iran, and the Secretary of the Revolutionary Council on several occasions. They also cabled or contacted their respective Iranian Embassy or Consulate at least eleven times; approached humanitarian, business or professional organizations; and were in constant touch with government offices and the media.
- A large number of National Assemblies pursued a well organized campaign of approaching the mass media, providing them with accurate information about the Faith and refuting false accusations made by enemies of the Cause. As a result, an unprecedented volume of publicity occurred in leading newspapers and periodicals throughout the world, as well as in newspapers having modest circulations. Well-known journalists wrote articles, some of which were distributed through international news agencies. Interviews were held with families of the martyrs, individual Bahá'ís wrote letters to editors of newspapers, and many radio and television programs were aired, including “Iran’s Secret Pogrom” on W5 TV in Canada, and “Day One” and “John Craven’s Newsround” on BBC TV.
- Many National Assemblies contacted immigration authorities and appropriate government offices in efforts to assist the displaced Iranian Bahá'ís in extending their visas and obtaining work permits and travel documents. They established special committees to work specifically to assist the Iranian friends, and they set up Persian Relief Funds on a national scale to aid deserving cases. The National Assemblies of Australia and Canada worked out with their respective immigration offices procedures whereby the process of immigration by Iranian Bahá'ís would be facilitated.
- Bahá'í communities the world over have assisted Iranian students abroad, who have been faced with the termination of their education because they are unable to receive funds from their families in Iran whose assets in Nawnahálán Company were frozen, or did not receive funds because the Iranian government prevented the transfer of money from Iran to Bahá'í students abroad. In some areas, Iranian embassies have refused to extend the visas of Bahá'í students. Certain universities and colleges have allowed the Bahá'í students to continue their studies, and in some instances their tuition fees have even been waived.

Resolutions Adopted on Behalf of the Bahá'ís in Iran

- Canadian Parliament (2)
- House of Representatives, Australia
- Senate, Australia
- German Federal Parliament
- A meeting held in a committee room of the House of Commons, United Kingdom
- United Nations General Assembly, Third Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance
- United Nations Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Commission on Human Rights (2)
- European Parliament (2)

- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2)
- House of Representatives of the State of Alaska, U.S.A.
- House of Representatives, State of Illinois, U.S.A.
- International Association for Religious Freedom

Statements and Letters from Governments, World Leaders and Others

- To name just a few
- Prime Minister's Office of the United Kingdom
- President Mitterrand of France
- Offices of the King and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium
- President and Minister of Cultural Affairs of Luxembourg
- All three parliamentary parties in Luxembourg
- Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of Germany
- Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India
- 148 out of 150 Members of Parliament in the Netherlands
- Swiss Parliamentarians
- Western Samoan Government
- Minister of Foreign Affairs, Australia
- Governor of the Hawaiian Islands, U.S.A.
- Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Some Non-Bahá'í Individuals and Organizations that Issued Statements, Letters, Cables, or Press Releases

- Human Rights Commission of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland
- Amnesty International
- Trinidad and Tobago Bureau on Human Rights
- Former Chief Justice, India
- Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism
- Pacific Conference of Churches
- 13 Heads of Colleges in Oxford, U.K.
- The Master, Balliol College, Oxford, England

- Iran Committee for Democratic Action and Human Rights (based in the United States)
- Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (based in France)
- A large number of Senators and Congressmen of the United States