

Situation of Bahá'í Children in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Submitted prior to Iran's second periodic report to the CRC (January 2005)

Introduction

The Bahá'í community is the largest religious minority in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since 1979, Bahá'ís in this country have been subjected to attack, intimidation and discrimination solely on account of their religious beliefs. They have repeatedly been offered relief from persecution if they were willing to recant their Faith and declare adherence to Islam. The extent and systematic nature of the persecution – and the fact that it constitutes deliberate government policy – have been documented in reports issued by the UN Special Representatives.

The Concluding Observations on Iran's initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2000 expressed concern about the situation of the Bahá'í community in the following terms:

The Committee is especially concerned with the situation of members of non-recognized religions, including the Bahá'ís, who experience discrimination in areas of, *inter alia*, education, employment, travel, housing and the enjoyment of cultural activities.

In addition, the Committee endorsed the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance and recommended that the Islamic Republic fully implement them.

Bahá'í children have suffered many human rights abuses. The purpose of this report and its documented information¹ on the current situation of Bahá'í youth is to provide ample evidence of Iran's violation of the Convention. It is requested that the Committee use this information to question the State delegation, to express its continued concern about the situation and to strongly recommend that the State party fulfil its obligations under the Convention by ensuring that the human rights of Bahá'í children are respected.

¹ The report submitted to the Committee was fully documented. However, nearly all of the official documents provided in annex contained names and personal data; they were therefore removed from the website edition for reasons of security.

The report focuses on five thematic clusters of the Convention: general principles; civil rights and freedoms; basic health and welfare; education, leisure and cultural activities; and special protection.

1. General principles (Articles 2, 3, 6, 12)

The general principle of anti-discrimination contained in Article 2 of the Convention stipulates that States parties should ensure all the rights of the Convention to each child without any discrimination “irrespective of the child's or his or her parents’ or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, **religion**, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status” [emphasis added]. The cases reported here show that the Iranian government has not ensured all the rights of the Convention to Bahá’í children, discriminating against them solely on the grounds of religious belief.

While the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 19) forbids discrimination, it does so without specifically mentioning religion:

“All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.”

Article 14 specifies the rights of non-Muslims as follows:

“...the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and to respect their human rights.

Despite this stipulation, the authorities set a policy that violates the basic human rights of the Bahá’í community, as evidenced in an Iranian Government Memorandum obtained and published by the Commission on Human Rights in 1993². Produced by Iran’s Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Islamic Republic’s Supreme Leader, this document sets forth specific guidelines for dealing with “the Bahá’í question” so that Bahá’í “progress and development should be blocked.” That policy is still in effect today.

The Government Memorandum directly contradicted the general principles of the Convention regarding non-discrimination, care and protection of children, the survival and development of the child and freedom of expression.

Article 13 of the Iranian Constitution stipulates that “Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only *recognized* religious minorities....” Thus some 300,000 Bahá’ís – who constitute the largest religious minority in Iran – are not a *recognized* minority under the Iranian Constitution. Bahá’ís have no legal rights or protection under the law. The Islamic regime refers to the Bahá’í Faith as a heresy and a conspiracy. Slandorous statements regularly appear in the official newspapers of the Iranian government, for example in an article published as recently as 28 April 2004 in the *Kayhan* newspaper.

² See Annex 1 for the original Persian and Annex 2 for an English translation of this document.

It should be carefully noted that, when Government officials refer to religious minorities, only the three recognized minorities are included in their statements.

In August 2003, Iran presented its report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). In its Concluding Observations, the Committee took note “with concern of the reported discrimination faced by certain minorities, including the Bahá’ís, who are deprived of certain rights”, and also noted that certain provisions of Iran’s legislation “appear to be discriminatory on both ethnic and religious grounds”.

2. Civil rights and freedoms (Articles 13, 14, 15)

Bahá’í children in Iran have long been denied freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14) and freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15). Efforts to provide religious education to Bahá’í children have been severely punished, and the children’s prospects for future employment have been restricted.

In 2004, the Iranian authorities intensified their pressure on the Bahá’í community: threatening individual believers and ordering the Bahá’ís to suspend all social, educational and community-related activities, including religious meetings. Iranian Bahá’ís have, for all intents and purposes, been instructed to suspend any and all activities that go beyond observance of religious obligations at the level of the individual.

Iranian government officials also demanded that Bahá’ís not discuss their Faith with non-Bahá’ís in Iran. Any such association – even so much as introducing themselves as Bahá’ís – would be considered as teaching the Bahá’í religion, which the officials declared illegal. The authorities took this action despite the fact that Iran is a signatory to both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: documents that affirm the freedom of all people to practice and to teach their religion.

Since 1983, the Bahá’í community in Iran has been denied both the right to assemble officially and the right to maintain its sacred institutions. Iranian Bahá’ís gradually made arrangements to worship in small groups, conduct classes for their own children and take care of other community needs in private homes. However, authorities have continued to harass the community by disrupting meetings and arresting teachers of children's or "family life" classes. The following documented cases demonstrate how Bahá’í individuals have been arrested, detained and sentenced solely for having provided educational classes for the children of the community:

- Two Bahá’í men were arrested on 29 February 1996, while conducting a Bahá’í children’s class, and were sentenced to three years’ imprisonment. They were convicted of being active in the Bahá’í community, of gathering for Bahá’í meetings in a private house and of working against the country’s security by organizing a

children's art exhibit. One of them was released on 16 April 1998 and the other in 2000.

- Two Bahá'ís were arrested in 1997 under charges of continuing "family life" meetings (which means teaching children's classes, providing religious instruction). They were sentenced to death. Another, arrested at the same time, was given ten years imprisonment. In 2000, the two death sentences were commuted to seven and five years, respectively, and the ten-year prison sentence was reduced to four.
- Two Bahá'í teachers in Mashhad were sentenced to three years' imprisonment for the same "crime": providing religious instruction in private homes. They have since been released. Their students were given suspended sentences, to be carried out should the young people again commit the "crime" of participating in such classes. In September 1998, three more Bahá'ís were arrested, this time in Bujnurd (northern Khurasan), for participating in Bahá'í "family life" gatherings. After spending six days in prison, they were released with suspended sentences of five years' imprisonment.
- On 1 May 1998, authorities in Mashhad surrounded and raided the home of a Bahá'í family, where a class for youth was being held. The teacher (a woman) and the owner of the house (a man), along with twelve students aged 15 and 16, were arrested and detained for one week. They were hastily sentenced without being allowed to engage a lawyer. The two adults were sentenced to three years' imprisonment, while the twelve young students were released on parole, having been given suspended sentences of three years' imprisonment to be activated should they ever again commit the "crime" of taking part in Bahá'í moral education classes. The Bahá'í woman was released after having been imprisoned for 30 months; the man was released in 2000.

During the past few years, it has become more and more difficult to obtain any official documents in these and other cases involving arbitrary arrest and short-term detention. The recent practice of government officials has been to provide no written documentation of any kind to the Bahá'ís regarding their arrest or punishment. However, more Bahá'ís – young students as well as adults – have been arrested and given suspended sentences, to be carried out should they again attend religious instruction in a private home. The Bahá'ís are known to be obedient to their government, and the Ministry of Information (the Iranian Government's Intelligence service) has thus been able to use suspended sentences to prevent them from participating in monthly religious gatherings.

Furthermore, it should be noted that employment prospects remain dismal for Bahá'í youth in Iran, who cannot obtain any jobs in the public sector. Even when Bahá'ís find employment in the private sector, government officials often intervene and force the owners of the companies to fire them. And when Bahá'ís start a private business, the authorities attempt to block their activities.

One very recent case provides evidence of how the government continues to stifle the community by depriving its members of economic means. An administrative injunction

was issued to impede a Bahá'í-owned company in Isfahan from doing business. The company is owned and directed by a Bahá'í engineer and employs some 120 staff – most of whom are Bahá'ís – manufacturing electrical and communication cables. In the document, the Director-General of the Central Office of Protection (under the Iranian Ministry of Post, Telegraph and Telephone) informed its recipients of an official memorandum issued earlier this year. The document concluded that “the link between the... company... and the perverse Baha'i sect is established to be true; therefore it is advisable to adopt measures to prevent any collaboration with the above-mentioned company”.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has repeatedly made reference to the ongoing discrimination against the Bahá'ís in Iran at its annual Conference on Conventions and Recommendations. The *ILO Global Report* treated the theme of discrimination in 2003, and its section on religious discrimination addressed the situation in Iran, specifically stating: “the situation of members of the Baha'i faith, an unrecognized religious minority, continues to be a source of concern. The barriers that these people face in access to higher education and to employment in public institutions are still high (para. 102).” The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) addressed the issue in its 2003 and 2004 reports, as well, reiterating its concern about “the treatment in education and employment of members of unrecognized religions, in particular the members of the Baha'i faith”.

Finally, an extract from a recent official document clearly indicated that it is the policy of the Iranian government to deprive the Bahá'ís of their civil rights. In this document (pertaining to one of the many cases where Bahá'ís have been denied access to their own rightfully earned pensions), the Ministry of Agriculture responded to an Administrative Court's verdict in favour of the plaintiff as follows:

“[Implementing this judgement] not only create[s] a variety of problems for the Ministry, but also allow[s] such individuals, who openly confess to being followers of the perverse Baha'i sect, to claim civil rights”.

The Ministry's blatant statement serves as further evidence that, contrary to their claims, national government officials sanction and pursue persecution against the Bahá'ís even when solutions are proposed at individual or local level.

3. Basic health and welfare (Article 27)

As mentioned above, the Iranian authorities intensified their pressure on the Bahá'í community in 2004, in ways that included threatening individual believers. Moreover, the Bahá'ís were clearly informed that they had to cease all collective activities or face a withdrawal of protection by the Iranian government. The officials stated that the most compassionate act of the Islamic Republic had been to establish laws that protect the Bahá'ís from the people of Iran, who might otherwise take the law into their own hands and “follow the dictates of their Islamic sentiments”. The implication was that, unless the Bahá'ís followed the instructions, they could be subjected to mob attacks without any protection from the government.

These threats endanger all the members of the Bahá'í community in Iran, including young people and families with small children.

Bahá'í children continue to be adversely affected by human rights abuses in the area of housing, as well: the property rights of individual Bahá'ís are generally disregarded. Officials have arbitrarily confiscated a large number of private and business properties, homes and farms. It is difficult to obtain documentation that distinguishes between confiscated homes where children were living and confiscated properties that do not involve children, but all Bahá'í families face this threat.

One house confiscated in Tehran in 1998 belonged to a Muslim landlord, who was leasing the property to a Bahá'í. The landlord lodged an appeal, and an extract from the court documents (dated 15 September 2001) reveals the underlying judicial issues:

“In principle, the foundation for the Ministry of Intelligence taking legal and serious action against the cultural activities of the misguided sect of Baha'ism has been on the order of His Excellency the Supreme Leader (...) ...the action taken by Court 49 regarding the seizure and confiscation of the properties belonging to the misguided sect of Baha'ism is legally and religiously justifiable (...) such opposition [however] must be carried out in a manner and within a framework through which the rights of the righteous [literally, 'those to whom rights are due'] would be safeguarded and protected.”

During the past two years, there has been an increase in confiscation of Bahá'í properties, in particular in the cities of Rafsanjan, Kerman, Marv-Dasht, and Yazd. We have documented evidence of recent judgements involving two homes in Tehran (one of which had been owned by the same Bahá'í for 60 years) as well as homes and farmland that belonged to three Bahá'ís in the village of Matneq. The documents received in 2003 prove that the properties were confiscated because the owners were Bahá'ís. The concomitant eviction of families from their residences caused unnecessary suffering to the children involved.

The most recent case shows that the authorities continue to confiscate Bahá'í homes, even those belonging to families with children. In October 2004, we were informed that the homes of six Bahá'í families in a village in the Buyir-Ahmad region had been confiscated by order of the prosecutor of the city of Shiraz, with the assistance of the local police. This act, which deprives these rural families of their only means of livelihood, was perpetrated solely because of their adherence to the Bahá'í Faith.

The Bahá'ís of this village have been subjected to mob attacks, shootings, burning of property and pressure to force their conversion to Islam since the early days of the Islamic revolution. Many families fled their homes and took refuge in Isfahan, where local Bahá'ís cared for the injured and the children. On 18 October 2000, the Ministry of the Execution of the Decrees of the Imam informed the Ministry of Justice of the province of Buyir-Ahmad that the "possessions of the fleeing Bahá'ís situated in the village of... were confiscated". The province Ministry was then provided with a list of properties belonging to Bahá'ís from that village, instructed to confiscate them and (with

assistance from the Maymand police department) to transfer any rents to the officer of the Islamic Council of the village. The directives were later published in the 21 October 2003 issue of the 'Asr newspaper, along with an even more complete list of homes and land. This published "Announcement of the Judgement" declared the verdict to confiscate the properties definite and executable. The same list and text appeared the next day in the *Khabar* newspaper in Shiraz.

The confiscation in 2004 of homes owned by the six Bahá'í families was executed on the basis of the judgement in 2000. It is therefore feared that the properties of all the Bahá'ís still residing in the aforementioned village – some 35 families – are also in danger of being confiscated.

4. Education, leisure and cultural activities (Articles 28, 29, 31)

Iranian officials have often interfered with instruction being given to Bahá'í youth, for example seizing (through property confiscations) three classrooms in 2001. In 2002, one of the instructors for Bahá'í youth in the city of Qaim-Shahr was summoned to the Intelligence Agency and ordered to bring all of his booklets and textbooks for submission to the authorities.

In Iran's report to the Committee, it is stated that: "children's participation in the camps, and other scientific, cultural and sports, is fully endorsed, encouraged and supported by the Government." Yet, in 2002, 17 Bahá'í youth were arrested while in a camp. They were released after a few hours of questioning; the Iranian press reports about this incident referred to the young Bahá'ís in a very derogatory manner.

Even more importantly, however, an entire generation of Bahá'ís has been barred from higher education in legally recognized public and private institutions in Iran. Bahá'í children continue to grow up with no hope of being able to pursue opportunities for university study that their peers enjoy. Parents face the challenge of preparing them for this reality and its implications for their future professional prospects. In response, Iranian Bahá'ís finally set up their own programme, entitled the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), and by 1996 several hundred students were enrolled and eleven had graduated with the equivalent of a bachelor's degree.

In September 1998, officers of the Ministry of Information arrested 36 BIHE faculty members in cities across the country. They also seized textbooks, scientific papers, documentary records, over 70 computers and furniture used by students. Those arrested were asked to sign a document declaring that the BIHE had ceased to exist and that they would no longer cooperate with it. The detainees refused to sign any such declaration and were subsequently released.

In a recent court case, a Bahá'í man appealed for the return of his home, confiscated because of its alleged use as a venue for teaching the Bahá'í Faith (which had been declared illegal) and for holding classes of the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education. In

rejecting the appeal, the Islamic Revolutionary Court upheld the decision of a lower court on the grounds that the owner had held Bahá'í classes in this home and that over 900 volumes of Bahá'í books had been found there. A further attempt to obtain redress was also denied, as Branch 23 of the Appeals Court in Tehran declared the verdict final and ended all legal recourse in this case. A document dated 27 October 2003 states the Appeals Court's ruling that "the verdict is reasonable and in agreement with standards and regulations".

On 19 July 2002, the BIHE was holding qualification examinations across the country. In Shiraz, examinations were being held in nine different districts. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards entered three of these premises, videotaped the proceedings, interviewed several students and confiscated 25 examination papers. In Mashhad, the Guards entered all five district examinations and confiscated all the examination papers along with Bahá'í books. The fact that the authorities harassed Bahá'ís in eight different locations simultaneously shows that the government was keeping the BIHE under close scrutiny and pursuing its policy of intimidation.

Finally, as part of the intensified pressure applied by the Iranian authorities in 2004 (mentioned above), the Bahá'ís were ordered to suspend all of the social, educational and community-related activities that they have developed over the years for their children and young people. They were specifically ordered to close the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) and Advanced Bahá'í Studies Institute.

The Bahá'í Faith places a high value on education; being denied access to higher education is profoundly demoralizing, and any erosion in educational level leads inevitably to the impoverishment of a community. The Bahá'í International Community has placed particular emphasis on this point during the past few years, with strong support from the international community. Under pressure from several international bodies and following the resolution adopted by Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, the Iranian government gave the impression that it was taking a small step towards enabling access to higher education for Bahá'í students.

For the first time in over 20 years, Bahá'í students were able to register and take the national university entrance examination in 2004. About 1,000 Bahá'ís took the exam and over 800 passed, many with very high scores. When they received their results in August, however, the Bahá'í students saw that they had been falsely recorded as Muslims. Allowing this statement to stand unchallenged would have been equivalent to renouncing their Faith, which, as a matter of principle, Bahá'ís will not do. The students reported the mistake to the relevant authorities and requested a correction, but they were told that the "incorrect religion would not be corrected" and that they either had to accept identification as Muslims or forget about entering university. Moreover, there were reports of officials saying, after the Bahá'ís had taken the exam, that this amounted to a *de facto* declaration of faith in Islam.

Each Bahá'í student concerned wrote a letter of protest to the Educational Measurement and Evaluation Organization (EMEEO), expressing their objection to having been designated as Muslims after having previously been promised that they could take the

exam and seek admittance to university without having to disclose their religion. As a result of this collective protest, a large number of students received personal calls from the Iranian authorities. The officials said that a new results form had been created without reference to religion, and that they and other Bahá'í students should come to sign it and proceed with registration.

A small group of Bahá'í students was assigned to meet with EMEO officials on 5 September to review the new forms, choose their field of study and submit their names for placement in universities. The reference to religion had indeed been omitted from the new form, and the small group received assurances that all Bahá'í students would be able to follow the same procedure in a timely fashion. They also found out, however, that the deadline for submitting these new forms would be 7 September – only two days later. EMEO would then be completing the processing of all forms and announcing university placement results on 12 September 2004.

Under the tight deadline, EMEO staff at first allowed these few dedicated students to facilitate the issuance of new results forms for many other Bahá'ís. Placement applicants whose new forms could not be prepared and signed in the next two days were to select their field of study on another form designed for this purpose. It was agreed that this would be attached to their letter of protest and mailed back to them along with their new results form. As of 7 September, facilitated placement submissions had been handed in to EMEO for the (approximately) 800 Bahá'í students who had passed the exam. This should have made it possible for all these students to be included in the placement results announcement published in newspapers and available on the Internet. On 12 September, however, only ten of the Bahá'í students' names appeared in the list published in the official bulletin, *Peykesanjesh*.

The same group of students returned to EMEO and asked why the other Bahá'í applicants had been excluded. The EMEO official (who had assisted them a week before) refused to provide an explanation, stating only that “the organisation had done its duty” and that any objection should be directed to the Public Relations Office. The students enquired about the remaining submissions, which had been left for the organisation to prepare and mail. The response was that EMEO personnel were too busy and that all its office printers were being used for other purposes – none could be employed to print out the new results forms.

When the group went to EMEO's Public Relations Office, the person in charge repeated that the organisation had done its job and stated that any objection should be written on a special form and submitted for consideration. The students followed this procedure, asked how long it would take to receive a response, were told that it would take a while and that they should come back in ten days. The group took copies of their objection letters to the EMEO Secretariat, as well, asking the same question. Again, they were told that it would take a while to prepare a response (no specific date was given).

As the deadline passed, it became clear that the authorities had no intention of admitting any more Bahá'í students to university in the first round of placements. Out of solidarity with their brothers and sisters who had once again been deprived of their right to higher

education, the ten admitted students declined to register in the universities to which they had been accepted.

It should be noted that in Iran, all students who pass the university entrance exam are given a ranking number according to their scores, from highest (ranked #1) to lowest. Placement in university is competitive, with fields of study and specific universities available to students on a "first ranked, first served" basis.

Even among the Bahá'ís who met with EMEO officials on 5 September, some students with very high rankings – which should have guaranteed success – were not admitted to any university during the first round of placements. Comparable cases show a clear pattern of discrimination, as Bahá'ís with high ranking were not accepted in the fields and universities of their choice, while non-Bahá'ís with a much lower ranking obtained a slot. For example, one non-Bahá'í female student ranked 6,975 was accepted in *Payam-e-Nur* University in the field of humanities, while a Bahá'í female student ranked 689 – i.e. ten times higher in ranking – was not accepted at the same university in the same field of study. We have received documented evidence for this and several other similar cases.

A second round of placements was opened through an official EMEO announcement entitled *Filling the Quota*, dated 18 October 2004. In this published notice, Iranian students were informed that placements were still available in certain fields already dealt with in the first round, as well as in some fields that had not been previously included. Students who had passed the entrance exam could now apply for these placements. Given their high scores, many Bahá'í students should have been among the first to obtain placements in the second round. However, the list of requirements (published with the announcement) clearly stated that all applicants had to believe in and actively adhere to Islam or one of the three recognized minority religions specified in the Iranian Constitution. Thus Bahá'í students were once again not permitted to apply for placement in a university unless they were willing to renounce their religion.

Also in October, applications were available on the EMEO website for the Advanced English Language Examination. The stated purpose of this exam was "to create an environment conducive to learning languages and to provide the mechanism by which language capabilities of students and other applicants may be assessed". The website suggested that success on the exam could help students carry out their assignments and assist individuals in finding employment. The registration form required applicants to state their religion and restricted the choice to the four officially recognized religions in Iran, excluding the Bahá'í Faith.

Barring Bahá'í students from access to higher education has been a long-standing policy of the Islamic Republic. The Government Memorandum from the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Council clearly stated, "They [Bahá'ís] must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís". A statement currently posted on Ayatollah Safi's official website in Iran also refers to this policy. In response to a question about registering Bahá'ís in educational institutions, the Ayatollah responds: "Their registration as

Bahá'ís, which is an anti-Islamic intelligence organization, is not allowed and is contrary to the interests of Islam and the principles and values of the Islamic Revolution."

5. Special protection (Article 30)

Children belonging to religious minorities are given special attention in the Convention (Article 30); their right to profess and practice their religion is upheld in unequivocal terms.

Iranian officials have quoted Articles 14³ and 20⁴ of the Iranian Constitution to prove that all citizens of the country are equal before the law and "enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights". However, the patterns of persecution described above are clear evidence that these provisions are not enforced in cases involving Bahá'ís. Moreover, they are restricted by Article 13 of the Constitution, which specifically defines the three recognized religious minorities.

In Iran, Bahá'í children are prevented by government authorities from taking part in Bahá'í religious instruction and other educational classes held in private homes, barred from higher educational institutions, impeded in their access to employment and obstructed from fully professing and practising their religion. They are not accorded any special protection as members of a religious minority, but rather are singled out for persecution and harassment.

Summary of recommendations

It is requested that the Committee ask questions regarding the situation of Bahá'í children in the list of issues to the Iranian government, specifically in the priority areas identified in this submission: religious discrimination; freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of assembly and peaceful association.

It is requested that the Concluding Observations of the Committee reflect the concerns raised in this submission and urge the Iranian government to guarantee respect for the rights of Bahá'í children in Iran.

³ Article 14 reads as follows: *In accordance with the sacred verse "God does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with those who have not fought against you because of your religion and who have not expelled you from your homes" [60:8], the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and to respect their human rights. This principle applies to all who refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran.*

⁴ Article 20: *All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria.*

Conclusions

The persecution and discriminatory practices highlighted above continue to this day.

On 20 December 2004, at its 59th session, the Plenary of the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The text specifically referred to the Bahá'ís in two operative paragraphs, as follows:

The General Assembly (...)

2. Expresses its serious concern at:

(...)

- h. The continuing discrimination against persons belonging to minorities, including Christians, Jews and Sunnis, and the increased discrimination against the Baha'is, including cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, the denial of free worship or of publicly carrying out communal affairs, the disregard of property rights, the destruction of sites of religious importance, the suspension of social, educational and community-related activities and the denial of access to higher education, employment, pensions and other benefits;

3. Calls upon the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

(...)

- g. To eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religious grounds or against persons belonging to minorities, including the Baha'is, Christians, Jews and Sunnis, and to address this matter in an open manner, with the full participation of the minorities themselves, and to ensure respect for the freedom of religion or belief of all persons ...

We remain convinced that international support is a key factor in protecting the oppressed Bahá'í community in Iran.

At its meeting in January, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has a vitally important opportunity to add its voice to international concern and advocacy on behalf of a particularly vulnerable segment of the Iranian population.