



Australian Bahá'í Community

Update on the persecution of Baha'is in Iran 2013

For more than three decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has waged a widespread and systematic campaign of persecution against the country's Baha'i religious minority. Since 2005 there has been a major upsurge in human rights violations involving not only civil and political rights, but also a wide range of social, economic and cultural rights.

Imprisonments: Since 2005 at least 660 Iranian Baha'is have been arrested or detained. As of September 2013 there were 115 Baha'is in prison, more than ten times the number as in December 2005. The imprisonments are based on trumped-up charges such as spying or posing a threat to national security, but in fact stem solely from their belief and practice as members of the Baha'i Faith. Many of those arrested suffer beatings, solitary confinement, and other forms of coercion or torture.

Leaders sentenced to 20 years: After a sham trial, seven Baha'i leaders were each sentenced to 20-year jail terms – the longest sentences for any prisoners of conscience in Iran. May 14, 2013 marked the fifth anniversary of their detention. Australia's then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Bob Carr, called for their immediate release: <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/yaran-special-report/>

Educators jailed: Among the prisoners are a group of Baha'i educators who have been sentenced to four and five year jail terms for their involvement with an educational program set up by the Baha'is of Iran to provide education to their young people, who are otherwise denied access to tertiary education because the Iranian government bans them from universities due to their religion. Those imprisoned were teaching subjects such as psychology, computing and accountancy. May 2013 marked the second anniversary of their arrests: <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/education/>

Systematic violence and harassment: In a report released in March 2013, the Baha'i International Community documented many incidents of torture, physical assault, disappearances, unexplained suspicious deaths, arson against homes and businesses, vandalism, cemetery desecration and the abuse of schoolchildren that have occurred since 2005 – all carried out with total impunity. Most recently, on 24 August 2013, a prominent Baha'i was murdered in Bandar Abbas in a religiously-motivated hate crime. Since 1979 tens of thousands of Baha'is have been denied employment, education, pensions, freedom of worship and other rights – solely on the basis of their religion. <http://news.bahai.org/story/942>

International outcry: The only protection for Iranian Baha'is comes from continued international scrutiny and action. Among the public figures who have made statements condemning the persecution are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, former Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator Bob Carr, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, UK Prime Minister David Cameron, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and Nobel Laureates Desmond Tutu and Jose Ramos Horta.

Australian Government and Parliament: Australia has consistently supported UN resolutions condemning the persecution, most recently in December 2012. Australia also raises the issue regularly in the UN Human Rights Council. A bipartisan motion condemning the persecution was addressed in the House of Representatives in February 2012, following similar successful motions dating back to 1981. Individual MPs have spoken out in the Federal and State parliaments.

No threat: The Baha'i community of Iran, numbering around 300,000, poses no threat to the government. Iranian Baha'is are not aligned with any other government, ideology or opposition movement. The principles of their Faith require them to avoid partisan political involvement, subversive activity and all forms of violence. Iranian Baha'is seek no special privileges but ask only for protection under the International Bill of Human Rights, a covenant to which Iran is party.