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For immediate release

Iran: Stop ruthless attacks on persecuted Baha'i religious minority

The Iranian authorities' persecution of the Baha'i religious minority has increased in intensity with a recent flurry of raids, arbitrary arrests, home demolitions and land grabs, Amnesty International said today.

Since 31 July 2022, Ministry of Intelligence agents have raided and confiscated dozens of Baha'i properties and arrested at least 30 members of the Baha'i community on account of their faith in various cities throughout Iran. The authorities have subjected many more to interrogations and/or forced them to wear electronic ankle bracelets. The Ministry of Intelligence announced on 1 August that those arrested were "core members of Baha'i espionage party" who "propagated Baha'i teachings" and "sought to infiltrate various levels of the educational sector across the country, especially kindergartens".

"The despicable onslaught against the Baha'i religious minority is yet another manifestation of the Iranian authorities' decades long persecution of this peaceful community. Baha'is in Iran cannot feel safe in their homes or while exercising their faith because they are at risk of persecution," said Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"The authorities must immediately and unconditionally release all the Baha'i individuals who were recently detained as well as anyone in prison from before solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion. All convictions and sentences imposed on this basis must be immediately quashed."

An additional 26 men and women in Shiraz, Fars province, are at imminent risk of arbitrary detention after a Revolutionary court convicted them of spurious national security charges stemming from their identity as Baha'i

adherents in a grossly unfair mass trial and sentenced them in June 2022 to prison terms of between two and five years.

According to the Baha'i International Community (BIC), the recent arrests bring the total number of those currently imprisoned in Iran on account of their Baha'i faith to at least 68, including those who have been in prison since as early as 2013. According to the [United Nations](#), over 1000 Baha'i individuals are currently at risk of imprisonment.

Intensified persecution

On 2 August 2022, authorities bulldozed six Baha'i houses and confiscated more than 20 hectares of land in the village of Roshankouh in Mazandaran Province, northern Iran. According to state media reports, the demolitions were carried out in the presence of several senior judicial and executive officials.

Three victims told Amnesty International that more than 200 agents from various security forces, including plainclothes intelligence agents and riot police, sealed off the village and its access road from 6am to 4pm, confiscating the mobile phones of villagers to prevent filming, beating and/or pepper spraying individuals, including several elderly men, who had peacefully gathered to protest the bulldozing, and firing into the air to disperse crowds. Two men were detained for several hours after sustaining severe beatings.

Since 2016, authorities have been [attempting to appropriate](#) Baha'i properties in Roshankouh under the false pretext that they have encroached on protected landscapes. As a result of the recent confiscations, at least 18 Baha'i farmers have been denied their source of livelihood. In 2021, the authorities also demolished two Baha'i houses that were under construction and confiscated about one hectare of land, which was the source of livelihood for two farming Baha'i families.

In a separate case, an appeal court upheld a verdict on 25 June 2022, which authorized the confiscation of 18 Baha'i properties in Semnan Province on the grounds that the owners are leading figures of the "perverse Baha'i sect", which "engages in illegal activities and espionage to the advantage of foreigners".

Over the past decade, authorities in Semnan forcibly closed at least 20 Baha'i stores, confiscated the equipment of two Baha'i manufacturing units, and confiscated or blocked access to the lands of two Baha'i businesses involved in agriculture and animal farming.

“The Iranian authorities have brazenly imposed a system of discrimination and oppression against the Bahai’s. Iranian authorities must immediately abolish all discriminatory laws, policies, and institutional practices which have been adopted to expel and dispossess Baha’is of their land and property, and deprive them of their human rights, and ensure that Baha’i people can exist and practise their faith freely and openly,” said Diana Eltahawy.

Amnesty International issued a [call for Urgent Action](#) on 23 August, urging people around the globe to write letters and speak out against the Iranian authorities’ intensified assault on the Baha’i minority.

Background

Baha’is are Iran’s largest non-Muslim religious minority. They suffer widespread and systematic violations, including arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearance, forcible closure of businesses, confiscation of property, house demolitions, destruction of cemeteries, and hate speech by officials and state media, and are banned from higher education.

In 1991, an official policy was adopted by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by Iran’s Supreme Leader, which clearly states that “the state’s dealings with the Baha’is must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked”. The policy adds that “they must be expelled from universities” and that “they shall be denied employment if they identify as Baha’is” and “any position of influence, such as in the educational sector”.

Iranian authorities have used the fact that the Baha’i religion’s headquarters is in the city of Haifa in Israel to denounce the faith and falsely accuse its community of espionage.

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