

Bahá'í International Community

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Iranian President Raisi disregards human rights and calls for religious respect despite 44-year record of religious persecution and rights abuses

NEW YORK—20 September 2023—The Baha'í International Community (BIC) highlighted Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's disregard for human rights in his speech to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, on 19 September, even as the world remembers the Iranian government's treatment of women and minorities as well as its yearlong crackdown against Iran's Baha'í community.

Mr. Raisi's speech ignored the persecution of the Baha'is, Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority, a situation which has been condemned by UN member states and agencies. He also did not discuss the human rights concerns of other religious and ethnic minorities, women and prisoners of conscience.

The UN's own Special Rapporteur for the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javaid Rehman, [said just this past February](#) that the Baha'is remained "most severely persecuted, with a marked increase in arrests, targeting and victimization."

The president of the Islamic Republic also called for respect for religions around the world and for religious scriptures. But his government spends millions of dollars each year and vast resources of the state to produce hate speech materials about Baha'is teachings and Baha'í religious texts—resources that could instead be used to further develop Iranian society.

UN General Assembly sessions resume each September and world leaders gather to deliver speeches during High-level week—this week. The General Assembly is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, serving as its main deliberative, policymaking, and representative body, examining human rights issues among other topics.

"Each year we see an Iranian president appearing before the United Nations General Assembly to say, as President Raisi said this week, that the Islamic Republic believes all are equal and that treating others with violence is forbidden," said Bani Dugal, the BIC's Principal Representative to the United Nations. "The Iranian Government's breathtaking hypocrisy must be called out. If the Iranian government believes all people are equal, why has it systematically persecuted Iran's Baha'í community for the past 44 years? Why are Baha'is barred from higher education, why are they detained, summoned, tried without due process on false charges, and jailed for years? If Iran's authorities say violence should be forbidden then why are Baha'is—and many prisoners of conscience in Iranian jails, of all backgrounds—physically and psychologically abused?"

An annual General Assembly resolution has been passed against Iran since 1983, with cross regional co-sponsorship and support, outlining its human rights violations against its citizens.

"The Baha'í community has collected [thousands of items of evidence](#) over decades, including court documents, official policies and UN reports, showing its relentless state-sponsored persecution against the Baha'is," Ms. Dugal added. "We hope that world leaders from every region will stand up, during the remaining days of the General Assembly, to remember all those in Iran who are suffering injustice, including the Baha'is."

The past 12 months have seen a worsening crackdown in the situation of Iran's Baha'í community and the wider Iranian population. The Baha'is—Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority—have been [systematically persecuted](#) since the establishment of the Islamic Republic 44 years ago.

Multiple Iranian policy documents, including a secret 1991 memorandum signed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have called for the Baha'i community to be "blocked," surveilled and otherwise harassed, denied access to university and public employment.

In recent weeks, there have been over 180 incidents of persecution against the community, including 60 arrests and imprisonments.

[Two elderly Baha'i women](#), Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, have been held for over a year as part of unjust 10-year jail terms in Evin Prison. They had already served 10 years in prison together with five others who were members of an informal leadership group of the Baha'i community in Iran until 2008, when the group was disbanded, and all seven arrested and imprisoned.

[In August](#), Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, a 90-year-old Baha'i in failing health who had already served 10 years in prison for his Baha'i beliefs, was arrested as part of a new wave of repression targeting the Baha'is in the country. Mr. Khanjani and his daughter Maria, who was arrested with him, were later released on extortionate bails.

[In May](#), the BIC reported that, in the midst of the widespread suffering of Iranians, an agent of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence was forcibly burying deceased Baha'is without the knowledge of their families and in violation of Baha'i burial practices. The incidents were the latest of several and the remains of several Baha'is were kept in morgues as the Baha'is struggled to resolve the situation with the authorities.

And in summer 2022, a series of arrests, home demolitions, propaganda ploys and other acts of persecution marked the beginning of the ongoing crackdown against Iran's Baha'i community.

- [Iranian authorities separate Baha'i parents from their children with Shiraz sentences](#)
- [44 Iranian Baha'is arrested, arraigned or jailed in June as leading human rights figure says situation is "getting worse"](#)
- [Persecution of Baha'is in Iran intensifies for second month in a row](#)
- [Baha'is accused of "colonialism" and "infiltrating kindergartens" as 52 fresh acts of persecution add to more than 100 in recent weeks](#)
- [Breaking: Iranian government intensifies Baha'i persecution with outrageous demolition of homes and land grabs](#)
- [Update: 200 Iranian government agents destroy Baha'i homes and confiscate 20 hectares of land](#)
- [Revealed: Iran's brazen propaganda ploy to incriminate Baha'is through fake videos and hate speech](#)
- [Three weeks in Iran: 200 incidents of Baha'is being targeted as international community roundly condemns "sweeping crackdown"](#)
- [More Baha'is arrested in Iran as month-long crackdown total hits 245](#)

Millions of people around the world, however, were [reached by the global #OurStoryIsOne campaign](#), which included remarkable levels of support from thousands of human rights figures, government officials and political leaders, prominent individuals, artists and ordinary citizens from around the world, to support the rights of the Iranian Baha'i community.

"Mr. Raisi appears before the international community just as millions of citizens in his country are facing human rights violations," Ms. Dugal said, "and each year the Iranian government is rebuked yet again by international bodies for persecuting Baha'is and harassing many others. Today the community of nations must look for new ways to hold Iran's government accountable for violating the human rights of all its citizens. All innocent and long-suffering Iranians, including the Baha'is, deserve justice."