

# Bahá'í International Community

United Nations Office

Route des Morillons 15, CH-1218 Grand-Saconnex / Geneva, Switzerland  
Tel: +41 (0)22 798 5400 Fax: +41 (0)22 798 6577 Email: geneva@bic.org  
www.bic.org/offices/united-nations

## **“A Change in Tactics”: Baha’i International Community details “brutal” persecution in Iran**

GENEVA—4 December 2023—The Iranian government is using intensified and brutal new tactics to persecute the Baha’i religious minority in Iran, according to [a new statement](#) of the Baha’i International Community (BIC) released today, with a view to “robbing” the Baha’is of a “sense of peace and security in their daily lives.”

A troubling range of “new and harsh methods” by the authorities have included [violent home raids](#), an increase in the number of Baha’is both in prison and awaiting their summons to jail, punishing property confiscations, denial of burial rights, denial of higher education, and surging official hate speech against the community.

The new, intensified and increasingly violent incidents of persecution have disproportionately affected women and the elderly, and have resulted in hospitalizations and traumatic separations of mothers from their children.

“The growing volume of attacks on Iran’s Baha’is, which we have observed for over a year, is exceeded only by the brutality of the new tactics that the Iranian government is bringing to bear against the innocent Baha’i community,” said Simin Fahandej, BIC Representative to the United Nations in Geneva. “These tactics speak to a strategy to terrorize the most vulnerable members of the Baha’i community—people who have already faced extreme pressures for their faith—to demoralize not only the Baha’is but all of Iranian society. The new statement details how the government is trying to achieve this; through increasing violence, state-sanctioned theft, and intensified efforts to deny them the right to study, learn, live or even die with dignity. The international community must insist that the Iranian government immediately desist in its policies against the Baha’is.”

Two-thirds of Baha’is detained during the recent raids [have been women](#), many in their twenties and thirties, the statement said, with some being separated from young children by their arrest.

The BIC added that the “crimes” for which these individuals were arrested include providing social services to disadvantaged groups, including Iranian and Afghan children and the victims of a recent earthquake, which “the rest of the world would consider as providing community service.”

Since the beginning of October, 40 Baha’is have been arrested and the homes of close to 100 families have been invaded and searched in cities across the country.

About 70 Baha’is are in detention, or are serving prison terms, and are often subjected to psychological and physical abuse during interrogations. And 1,200 others are either caught in ongoing trials relating to incidents of persecution or have been convicted and await a summons to prison.

Sentencing by the courts has also become increasingly harsh—with tens of Baha’is sentenced to a combined total of hundreds of years in prison in recent weeks. The harsh treatment of Baha’is in prison is even extended to the denial of leave to attend the funerals of their own parents. Baha’is that are granted bail are obliged to post exorbitant sums or surrender property deeds as collateral.

A recent example saw a young woman in Shiraz, only in her early twenties, being required to post bail of about US \$200,000, a vast sum for any ordinary Iranian.

Violent home raids and searches have been a disturbing feature of the new crackdown, the BIC said. In dozens of cases, masked agents had forced their way into Baha'i homes at gunpoint, searching the premises, confiscating electronic devices, any available cash, jewelry and items of value, as well as work equipment valued at hundreds or thousands of US dollars, and then detaining or arresting the individuals for questioning.

"When security agents invaded the home of a family, the young son objected," the BIC said in its statement, when listing examples of the raids. "The agents then severely beat the boy in front of his parents and his grandmother, who were powerless to intervene." In another case, involving the mother of a young family arriving at her residence, the woman was "forcibly thrown inside" her own home by four men who had been waiting for her and who then conducted a search. A separate reported incident also saw a Baha'i man suffer a heart attack after security agents broke into his home and arrested his daughter.

The statement added that, on some occasions, agents broke the windows of homes and broke down doors to gain access. Security cameras had also been trained on the homes of several Baha'is to monitor their activities and visitors.

A series of raids on the homes of elderly and ailing women left several of them traumatized and hospitalized. One of these women suffered a heart attack during the raid and another suffers from Alzheimer's disease.

"How can the Iranian government possibly justify terrorizing some of the most vulnerable members of the Baha'i community such as the elderly, the sick, mothers, young men and women who have already been socially and culturally isolated from society in every way possible through denial of higher education and employment?" added Ms. Fahandej. "What logic is there in taking young mothers away from their children, in some cases for between five and 10 years, when these women have done nothing other than serve the poor and deprived communities? If this is not religiously-motivated persecution, with the single aim of eliminating the Baha'i community and cutting Baha'is off from their faith, then what is?"

University-age Baha'is have, according to the statement, also faced fresh barriers to higher education. Baha'is have been barred from university since the 1979 Islamic Revolution: but now students have been asked to "sign declarations denying the authority of their religious institutions" and thus to recant Baha'i beliefs to be able to attend university.

Increasing numbers of anti-Baha'i statements and claims of immorality had also been made by media outlets linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as well as the Supreme Leader, the statement said.

And at Baha'i cemeteries in some cities, Iranian officials are attempting to take over the cemeteries and have prevented families from burying loved ones according to Baha'i funeral rites. The BIC statement added that, at the Baha'i cemetery in Tehran, Ministry of Intelligence agents had barred Baha'is from using their own plots and had buried deceased Baha'is in a mass grave of thousands of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.

Burying Baha'is there is an attempt to "eliminate the memory of the mass grave," the statement said, which was "against the expressed wishes of the Baha'i community" out of respect for relatives of those buried at the site.

In the past week, one Baha'i family has even chosen to donate the body of a deceased loved one to scientific research rather than accept the denial of burial rights by the Iranian authorities. The move was a final act on behalf of a woman—the deceased—whose husband was executed in the 1980s for his Baha'i beliefs and whose two sons have spent time in prison.

Baha'is are also now unable to register their marriages, the statement said, because of the introduction of an online registration system. The effect has been to render Baha'i marriages void under the law and this, in turn, has serious implications for any subsequent registrations of births and other social rights.

The BIC's statement was released after letters by two Baha'i women currently in Evin Prison, [Mahvash Sabet](#) and [Fariba Kamalabadi](#), were published online. Both women appealed to their compatriots to call on the Iranian government to end its persecution of the Baha'is. "Our story is one," Ms. Kamalabadi said, with Ms. Sabet saying "My story is yours," both echoing the BIC's [#OurStoryIsOne](#) campaign. The campaign, launched in June, commemorates the 1983 execution of 10 Baha'i women who gave their lives for equality and justice, principles that are today the desire of many other Iranians.