

Baha'is in Prison

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HRWF (23.04.2020) - Over the past 40 years, the Baha'i community, which is considered the largest non-Muslim and unrecognised religious minority in the Islamic Republic of Iran at about 350,000 members, has suffered egregious forms of repression, persecution and victimisation (1). Since 1979, more than 200 Baha'is have been executed solely because of their religious beliefs. Fortunately, Iran no longer executes Baha'is for their religion (2).

However, Baha'is still frequently receive lengthy prison sentences because of their religious identity or their activities related to their faith and community life.

In 1991, the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran wrote a secret official document with the goal of the elimination of the Baha'is as a recognisable entity in Iran. The document, E/CN.4/1993/, was approved by the Supreme Leader and remains in force.

As of 1 April 2020, Human Rights Without Frontiers had documented 60 cases of detained Baha'is in its Prisoners' Database (See <https://hrwf.eu/prisoners-database/>).

The official charges for Baha'i prisoners are usually: forming an illegal cult, acting against national security, espionage, propaganda against the regime, posing a threat to the regime by sharing Baha'i ideas with Israel, plotting to overthrow the regime, membership in an anti-Islamic group, membership in illegal groups and assemblies, and jeopardising the security of the country, all to further the aims of the Baha'is and international organisations.

The articles of the Iranian Penal Code used to prosecute Baha'is are: Articles 498, 499 and 500. (3)

On 18 July 2019, a report by the UN Special Rapporteur, Javaid Rehman, was published about the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (4). It stated that:

48. (...) Since August 2005, more than 1,168 Baha'is have been arrested and charged with vaguely worded offences. Given that the Baha'i faith is regarded as a "misguided sect" and Baha'i worship and religious practices are deemed heresy, they frequently face charges such as "breaching national security", "propaganda against the holy regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran" or "propaganda activities against the regime in the interests of the Baha'i sect". The Government, in its comments, noted that "all Baha'is can freely perform their personal rituals".

49. As of the end of June 2019, there were reportedly 49 Baha'is arbitrarily detained in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There was a total of 95 Baha'is reportedly arrested in 2018, compared with at least 84 in 2017 and 81 in 2016. This suggests that, while the number of such arbitrary arrests each year may fluctuate, the persecution is not subsiding.

The report mentions concrete cases of arrests and imprisonment, such as:

55. On 1 January 2019, the court of appeal of Isfahan reportedly condemned, in separate judgments, nine Baha'i citizens to a total of 48 years of prison. They had been charged with "membership of the illegal Baha'i community and propaganda against the regime by spreading the Baha'i faith in the society."

On 29 November 2019, Gary Bauer, the Commissioner for the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), reported on the Iranian government's relentless persecution of Baha'is and called for an immediate end of this systematic violation of freedom of religion (5).

For more information about the persecution of Baha'is in Iran, see our [website](#) (6). For more information about Baha'I prisoners, check our [Prisoner Database](#). (7)

1 <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/74/188>

2 <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais/current-situation>

3 <https://iranhrdc.org/islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five/>

4 <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/74/188>

5 <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscirf-condemns-iranian-government-measures-targeting-baha>

6 <https://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

7 <https://hrwf.eu/prisoners-database/>