

Baha'is

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A history of the Baha'i movement begins in Iran with the self-proclamation of Ali-Muhammad in 1844 as the 'Bàb', the messianic figure that was anticipated by the Shaykhi School of Twelver Shi'ism. Many Shaykhis joined the new religious movement during this period, triggering conflict with the ruling Shi'a clerical government. The Bàb and his followers were violently repressed from the outset, leading to his exile and, ultimately, to his execution in 1850.

The Bàb was succeeded by Baha'u'lláh, who declared himself in 1863 to be the Manifestation of God that was foreseen in the Bàb's writings. Baha'u'lláh was in turn succeeded by his eldest son, Abdul'l-Bahá, who was then followed by his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, in leading the movement. It was under their leadership that the Baha'i faith spread considerably and established itself as a global religion.

Today the Baha'i community is governed by the Universal House of Justice, a nine-member administrative body that is elected by all national Baha'i assemblies every five years. The community numbers between five and seven million members worldwide. Although Baha'is do not currently make up the religious majority in any single country, they do represent the large religious minorities in several countries. For example, in **Iran**, there are currently about 300,000 Baha'is, mostly concentrated in Tehran and Semnan.

Teachings

Baha'i religion bears the traces of its predecessor movements, 19th-century Shaykhism and Bábism, in its belief that there is one God who has been revealed progressively through a series of Manifestations throughout history for the uplifting of humanity and the advancement of civilisation. These have included the great teachers of religion, such as Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed, all pointing to the one and same world religion, originating from God. Thus, the world religions represent subsequent chapters of the same religion, as opposed to separate irreconcilable belief systems.

Central to the teaching of Baha'i is the oneness of God, the inherent harmony of all religions and the unity of humankind. Consequently, Baha'i anthropology places strong emphasis on the equality of all humans, who are each made in the image of God and deserving of the same just and equal treatment. Individual conscience is respected, all forms of prejudice are rejected, the equality of women and men is upheld, and human diversity is valued.

Baha'u'lláh is especially revered by the Baha'i, who regard his teachings as foundational to the covenant that God has established through him. These teachings were subsequently passed down through the line of succession which followed him. Baha'u'lláh is believed to be a messenger from God, proclaiming a coming age when all of humanity would be united into a single global society. It is this message that often draws heavy opposition from state authorities.

IRAN: Reasons for the Persecution of Baha'is

US government estimates in July 2018 approximate the population of Iran at 83 million people. 99.4% of Iranians are Muslim, with 90-95% of them identifying as Shia and 5-10 % as Sunni (mostly Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchis, and Kurds living in the northeast, southwest, southeast, and northwest, respectively).¹

The persecution of the Baha'is in Iran dates back to the 19th century.

In 1848, 81 prominent Bábís met in the village of Badasht to discuss the nature of their community and the revelation they had received from the Báb. Did it constitute a new sect within Islam? Or was the revelation an entirely separate religion? The latter position was adopted. The beginning of a new Dispensation was announced, and the Baha'i faith was born.

¹ For more religious statistics, see U.S. Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Report on international Religious Freedom: Iran*, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iran/>.

Violence erupted almost immediately between the Bábís and the Qajar government. The Báb publicly claimed to be a Manifestation of God, which is a direct affront to official Islamic teaching since it was a denial of the finality of Prophet Muhammad's mission. Baha'i adherents were therefore considered to be apostates and 'enemies of God'.

Aside from religious doctrine, the rapid growth of the early Baha'i movement was perceived to be a threat to clerical and governmental authority. From the beginning, the repression by Iranian authorities has been singularly cruel. Following a failed assassination attempt in 1852 of the Shah by a small group of Baha'is, several thousands of Baha'is were killed in retaliation.

The Qajar dynasty was replaced by the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, during which the repression of Baha'is became more institutionalised. The central government presided over a series of measures which would more firmly anchor discrimination against Baha'is as a matter of policy.

Baha'i centres and schools were closed, Baha'i individuals were expelled from the military as well as governmental posts, and the printing of Baha'i literature was officially banned. The primary instrument of repression shifted from mobs to the courts. Many Baha'is served long jail sentences during this period for altogether mundane activities.

The last Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty was overthrown by the 1979 Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The persecution of Baha'is intensified early on and continues to this day.

Since 1979, more than 200 Baha'is have been executed. Others have been and remain in Iranian prisons for their faith, including five members of the former leadership team for the Baha'is in Iran. They were arrested in 2008 and sentenced in 2010 to twenty years of imprisonment each.

The charges for which the Baha'is are typically convicted include 'disturbing national security', 'spreading propaganda against the regime', and 'engaging in espionage'. It is also common for Baha'is to be told before their conviction that if they deny their Baha'i faith all charges will be dropped, and they will be set free. It is clear that the basis for the imprisonment of Baha'is in Iran is not due to any genuine criminal activity, but instead directly related to their religious conviction as Baha'i believers.

The post-Revolutionary government of Iran has been especially repressive toward the Baha'i and other religious minorities. This is because their very

existence poses a challenge to the legitimacy of the current regime, which is largely based on its interpretation of Twelver Shi'ism. Individuals who identify themselves with groups outside of this interpretation are considered a threat to the security of the state and are dealt with accordingly. This is particularly true for the Baha'i community, as it is the largest non-Muslim minority in the country and has historically shown potential for rapid growth within the population.

There were hopes that the 2013 election of President Hassan Rouhani would help to improve the treatment of the Baha'i and other religious minorities. During his campaign he promised to ease religious discrimination and develop a Citizens' Rights Charter that would establish equality for all citizens without discrimination based on religion, race, or sex. The Charter has now been published, but the final version has been disappointing. Moreover, the level of human rights violations has not diminished and has even increased by some accounts. For instance, one measurable increase has been the amount of anti-Baha'i propaganda that is disseminated by the government. During the first six months of Rouhani's presidency, the instances of anti-Baha'i propaganda in government-run media grew exponentially.

Ahmed Shaheed, the then UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, reported in 2015 that the persecutions and prosecutions against Baha'is 'appear to be mainly rooted in the unrecognized status of the faith, as well as a pervasive view held within the Government that Baha'is represent a heretical sect with ties to foreign enemies'.²

This was illustrated by a statement in 2014 by a high-ranking Iranian cleric and former member of the Supreme Judicial Council, Ayatollah Bojnourdi, that Baha'is have no right to education, as they 'don't even have citizenship rights'.³ After negative reactions, he later backtracked, saying that Baha'is who cooperate with Israel or advocate against Islam are not entitled to certain citizenship rights, such as going to university in Iran.⁴ Regardless of attempts by Iranian officials to position themselves positively in respect to the treatment of Baha'is in their country, it is clear that Baha'is continue to face discrimination, arrest and arbitrary detention in connection with their religious identity and activities.

Baha'is in Prison in Iran

² Digital Library of United Nations, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed (Report A/HRC/28/70) May 28, 2015. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/795162?ln=en>

³ "ندارند شهروندی حق اصلا بهائیان: بجنوردی موسوی محمد الله آیت", International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, accessed May 2020. <http://persian.iranhumanrights.org/1393/09/bojnourdi-bahais/>

⁴ "توضیح آیتالله بجنوردی درباره حقوق بهایی‌ها- اخبار رسانه ها - اخبار تسنیم", Tasnim. تسنیم خبرگزاری. December 17, 2014, accessed April 2020. <http://www.tasnimnews.com/Home/Single/592485>.

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, have suffered egregious forms of repression, persecution and victimisation.⁵ Since 1979, more than 200 Baha'is have been killed or executed solely because of their religious beliefs.

Fortunately, Iran no longer executes Baha'is for their religion.⁶ However, Baha'is still frequently receive lengthy prison sentences because of their religious identity, or 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 was approved by the Supreme Leader of Iran and remains in force.⁷

Baha'is behind bars: some statistics

As of 1 June 2020, HRWF documented **57 cases** of Baha'is in its Prisoners' Database.⁸ As of December 2019, 123 Baha'is were either in pretrial detention for some time before being released on bail or were serving a prison term.⁹

As of February 2019, 97 Baha'is were in prison according to a report of the Baha'i International Community.¹⁰

In 2015, the *Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran* published a list of 74 Baha'is in prison, all on false or fabricated charges.¹¹

Articles of the Penal Code

The articles of the Iranian Penal Code used to prosecute Baha'is are:

⁵ General Assembly of the United Nations, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Report A/74/188) July 18, 2019, <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/74/188>.

⁶ "Situation of Baha'is in Iran: Current situation," Bahá'í International Community, February 26, 2019. <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais/current-situation>.

⁷ "The Bahá'í question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran," Bahá'í International Community, September 2008. <http://dl.bahai.org/bwns/assets/documentlibrary/TheBahaiQuestion.pdf>.

⁸ Our Database is updated on a regular basis. For more details about imprisoned Baha'is, see <https://hrwf.eu/prisonersdatabase/>.

⁹ "FoRB and Blasphemy Prisoners Lists Archive," Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2020. <https://hrwf.eu/prisonersdatabase/>.

¹⁰ "Situation of Baha'is in Iran: Current situation," Bahá'í International Community, February 26, 2019. <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais/current-situation>.

¹¹ Digital Library of United Nations, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed (Report A/HRC/28/70) May 28, 2015. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/795162?ln=en>

Article 498 – Anyone, with any ideology, who establishes or directs a group, society, or branch, inside or outside the country, with any name or title, that constitutes more than two individuals and aims to perturb the security of the country, if not considered as *mohareb*, shall be sentenced to two to ten years’ imprisonment.

Article 499– Anyone who joins, as a member, any of the groups, societies, or branches aforementioned in article 498, shall be sentenced to three months to five years’ imprisonment, unless it is proved that he had been unaware of its aims.

Article 500– Anyone who engages in any type of propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations, shall be sentenced to three months to one year of imprisonment.¹²

The charges against Baha’i prisoners are typically: 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 to further the aims of the Baha’is and international organisations.

International advocacy

On 18 July 2019, a report presented to the **UN General Assembly** by the Special Rapporteur on Iran, Javaid Rehman, titled *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran* 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

¹² This source has since been redacted but was originally found at: “Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran – Book Five,” Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, March 18, 2019. <https://iranhrdc.org/islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five/>.

2016. This suggests that, while the number of such arbitrary arrests each year may fluctuate, the persecution is not subsiding.¹³

This report references 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'.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

On 18 December 2019, the **U.S. State Department** re-designated Iran as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Additionally, it re-imposed existing ongoing travel restrictions on Iranian individuals connected with serious human rights abuses.¹⁶

In its 2020 Annual Report, USCIRF recommended that the US Government:

- reauthorize and ensure implementation of the Lautenberg Amendment, which aids persecuted Iranian religious minorities seeking refugee status in the United States;
- impose targeted sanctions on Iranian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals' assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities, citing specific religious freedom violations.¹⁷

¹³ General Assembly of the United Nations, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Report A/74/188) July 18, 2019. <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/74/188>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "USCIRF Condemns Iranian Government Measures Targeting Baha'is," United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, January 29, 2020. <https://www.uscirtf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscirtf-condemns-iranian-government-measures-targeting-baha>.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Report on international Religious Freedom: Iran, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iran/>.

¹⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report, USCIRF-Recommended for countries of particular concern: Iran*, 2020. https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Iran_2.pdf

CASE STUDIES

Ali Ahmadi's 11-year sentence confirmed

On 15 January 2020, the Review Court for Mazandaran Province upheld the 11-year sentence of **Ali Ahmadi**, a Baha'i from Qaemshahr. He was charged with propaganda against the regime and administering Baha'i activities. The Court considered the possession of Baha'i religious texts sufficient to justify the sentence.

Ali Ahmadi was arrested on 20 November 2018 by agents who insulted his religious beliefs, calling him 'unclean' and 'Baha'i dog'. They also seized some religious books, a mobile phone and a computer. He was held in solitary confinement at the Kachou'i Detention Centre in Sari until being released on bail on 2 January 2019 (bail was 150 million tomans,¹⁸ about 31,000 EUR).

This was the fifth time he was arrested in the past ten years. On the first occasion he was sentenced to 10 months in prison, and on the second occasion he was acquitted. In 2011, he was arrested with two others and charged with participation in Bahai activities. In 2017, he was held in custody for 43 days before being released on bail for 150 million tomans (about 31,000 EUR) on 21 July 2017.

Ali Ahmadi is 60 years old. He worked as a rice trader.¹⁹

Three Baha'is in Semnan given lengthy sentences

Three Baha'is were arrested by masked agents from the Ministry of Intelligence in Semnan during simultaneous raids on their homes on 30 April 2019. On 20 October 2019, the Revolutionary Court in Semnan sentenced these three men to lengthy prison terms. They were found guilty of 'membership of illegal groups acting against national security' and 'acting against national security through propaganda and organisational activities'.

Ardeshir Fena'eyan, who is 30 years old, was sentenced to ten years in prison and one year of exile in the town of Khash in Sistan and Baluchestan Province. **Behnaam Eskandreyan** and **Yalda Firouzeyaan**, both aged 20, were sentenced to five years in prison and two years' exile from the city of Semnan.²⁰

¹⁸ The toman is a superunit of the official currency of Iran, the [rial](#). One toman is equivalent to ten rials. Although the rial is the official currency, Iranians use the toman in everyday life.

¹⁹ "Ali Ahmadi's 11-Year Sentence Confirmed," Sen's daily, January 15, 2020. <https://sensday.wordpress.com/2020/01/15/ali-ahmadis-11-year-sentence-confirmed/>.

²⁰ "Three Bahais in Semnan given Long Sentences," Sen's daily, October 28, 2019. <https://sensday.wordpress.com/2019/10/29/three-bahais-in-semnan-given-long-sentences/>.

Veteran sentenced to 1 year in prison despite serious health concerns

Ruhollah Zibaa’i was arrested on 3 August 2019 and released on bail on 2 September 2019. Media outlets sponsored by the state reported that his arrest was due to his alleged affiliation with ‘a scheme to tighten the economic sanctions against Iran’.

On 26 January 2020, Ruhollah Zibaa’i was found guilty of ‘propaganda against the regime and supporting the Bahai Faith’ and sentenced to one year in prison. He was not allowed a defence lawyer during the trial and was notified of his sentence by text message.

He served in the military during the Iran-Iraq War and, due to injuries, has had one foot amputated and has lost a kidney and part of his liver. Consequently, he has many medical issues that require constant supervision.²¹

YEMEN: Reasons for the Persecution of Baha’is

US government estimates in July 2018 approximate the total population of Yemen at 28.6 million people. In 2010, it was estimated that more than 99% of the population was Muslim, belonging either to the Shafi’i order of Sunni Islam or the Zaydi order of Shia Islam.²²

For years, Yemen has been a battlefield where Saudi Arabia and Iran wage a proxy war to extend their influence on that part of the Arabic Peninsula. It is within this context that Iran has exported its anti-Baha’i ideology.

Baha’is in Prison in Yemen

For several years, a number of Baha’is have been on death row in Yemen because of their religious identity.

Baha’is behind bars: some statistics

As of 1 June 2020, HRWF documented **five cases** of Baha’is in its Prisoners’ Database.²³ All five are being held on death row, one of whom has been in detention for 7 years.

²¹ “Four Bahais in Karaj sentenced to one year in prison,” Sen’s daily, January 27, 2020. <https://sensday.wordpress.com/2020/01/27/four-bahais-in-karaj-sentenced-to-one-year-in-prison/>.

²² For more religious statistics, see United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Office of International Religious Freedom, *2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Yemen*, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/>.

²³ Our Database is updated on a regular basis. For more details about imprisoned Baha’is, see <https://hrwf.eu/prisonersdatabase/>.

Articles of the Penal Code

Charges against Baha'is are often based on these articles of the Yemeni Criminal Code:

- **Article 125:** violating the independence, unity or territorial integrity of the Republic, punishable by death.
- **Article 128:** working in the interests of a foreign state, or the provision or exchanging of information with a foreign government, punishable by death.
- **Article 195:** ridicule, contempt or claiming inferiority of the Islamic religion, punishable by imprisonment of five years or a fine.
- **Article 259:** leaving or denouncing the religion of Islam after being given the opportunity for repentance three times and a respite of thirty days, punishable by death. Apostasy in public by speech or acts is considered contradictory to the principles of Islam.²⁴

International advocacy

On 4 October 2018, the **European Parliament** adopted a resolution on the situation in Yemen that condemned the systemic campaign of harassment, arbitrary and abusive detentions, and forced disappearances and torture against religious minorities. At that time, twenty-four Baha'is, including one child, were facing charges that could result in the death penalty due to their beliefs.²⁵

A *Report on the Situation of human rights in Yemen* presented to the **UN General Assembly** on 9 August 2019 highlighted the authorities' continued persecution of the Baha'is on the basis of their beliefs. This includes detaining and charging them with apostasy, openly deriding and demonising the Baha'i faith in legal filings, issuing death sentences and threatening their supporters.²⁶

On 26 September 2019, the **UN Human Rights Council** adopted a resolution expressing its concerns about the egregious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in Yemen, including the severe

²⁴ "Republican Decree for Law No 12 Concerning Crimes and Penalties, of the Republic of Yemen – Book One," issued October 12, 1994, *Presidency of Yemen*, 1994.

<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/83557/92354/F1549605860/YEM83557.pdf>.

²⁵ European Parliament, Resolution on the situation of Yemen (2018/2853 (RSP)) October 4, 2018, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0383_EN.html?redirect.

²⁶ "Situation of Human Rights in Yemen, Including Violations and Abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as Submitted to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/42/17) (Adv. Edited Ver.) [EN/AR] – Yemen," ReliefWeb, September 2019. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/240/87/PDF/G1924087.pdf?OpenElement>.

restrictions of freedom of religion or belief for minorities such as the Baha'i faith.²⁷

Additionally, the persecution of Baha'is in Yemen was outlined in a press release published by the **Baha'i International Community**.²⁸

CASE STUDIES

Death penalty upheld in January 2020 despite international appeals

Hamed Kamal Bin Haydara was arrested in 2013 and sentenced to death. This conviction was on the grounds that he entered Yemen illegally in 1991 from Iran to allegedly establish a Baha'i homeland in collaboration with Israel, for apostasy, and for compromising the independence of the Republic of Yemen by spreading the Baha'i faith.

According to the Baha'i community, he has suffered beatings and electric shocks during his time in prison. In January 2020, seven years after his arrest, a court run by Yemen's Houthi rebels upheld the death sentence.²⁹

Numerous members of the international community have critiqued this unjust decision.

On 23 March 2020, Johnnie Moore, the Commissioner of USCIRF decried the verdict and stated: 'We condemn this verdict and urge Democrats and Republicans to press the Houthis to release Bin Haydara and drop the spurious charges against members of Yemen's Baha'i community'.³⁰

'At a time when the international community is battling a global health crisis [referring to COVID-19], it is incomprehensible that the authorities in Sanaa have upheld a death sentence against an innocent individual solely because of his beliefs', said Diane Ala'i, the Baha'i community's representative to the United Nations in Geneva.³¹

²⁷ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/RES/42/2) October 2, 2019. <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/42/2>.

²⁸ Baha'i World News Service, "Baseless Charges in Yemen Signal Intensified Persecution: BWNS," Bahá'í World News Service (BWNS), September 18, 2018. <https://news.bahai.org/story/1285/>.

²⁹ "Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Newsletter 2020: Yemen," Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2020. <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Yemen2020.pdf>.

³⁰ "USCIRF Deplores Houthi Order to Execute Hamid Bin Haydara and Dissolve Baha'i Institutions in Yemen," United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, March 23, 2020. <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscirf-deplores-houthi-order-execute-hamid-bin-haydara-and>.

³¹ France 24, "Yemen Huthis Uphold Death Sentence for Baha'i, Community Says," France 24, March 23, 2020.

<https://www.france24.com/en/20200323-yemen-huthis-uphold-death-sentence-for-baha-community-says>.

Mass arrest of Baha'is

In April 2017, authorities called for the arrest of over twenty-five Baha'is, many of whom were prominent members of the Baha'i community. On 10 August 2017, at least eight Baha'is - most unnamed by media reports - were arrested in Sana'a and imprisoned. Several of them were released in September 2017 while the others have remained in prison.

No further information is known about them.³²

Two Baha'is imprisoned for helping the poor

In April 2017, **Walid Ayyash**, a prominent member of a well-known Yemeni tribe, was arrested with **Mahmoud Humaid** near the city border of Hudiedah. They were charged with displaying 'rectitude of conduct in order to attract people to the Baha'i faith' because they had been helping poor families.

At the time this report was written, their current whereabouts were still unknown.³³

Conclusions

The persecution of Baha'is continues unabated in Iran. This is especially true with a figure like Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, at the wheel. In 2013, Khamenei issued a fatwa against the Baha'i, describing them as a 'deviant and misleading sect'.

Historically, it has been the vitality of the Baha'i movement itself that has provoked the sharpest reaction from Tehran. Whenever the government passes through a period of instability or transition, hard-liners have tended to exert their authority by increasing pressure on perceived threats. In such times, the Baha'is become easy targets and scapegoats for the preservation of 'national security'. Iran's anti-Baha'i policies are largely driven by fear: the fear that the religion's popularity could outrun the regime's ability to maintain control.

One possible avenue for engagement could be to pressure the government to no longer require its citizens to identify their religion when seeking to enter university or starting a business. The forced disclosure that the applicant is a

³² "Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Newsletter 2017: Yemen," Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2017. <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Yemen2017.pdf>.

³³ "Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Newsletter 2017: Yemen," Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2017. <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Yemen2017.pdf>.

follower of Baha'i has been an obstacle to full participation in Iran's higher education or economy.

Such discriminatory practices create an ongoing hostile environment for the Baha'is, who wish to live their faith freely in Iran without legal consequences.

The situation of the Baha'is who are on death row in Yemen is immensely alarming and should be prioritised by the United Nations, the US Government and the European Union.