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News about Christians in Iran in April

Baha'is

Four Baha'is from Varamin re-sentenced in Tehran

Hrana/ Sens Daily (13.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3rVrxUf> - A Revolutionary Court in Tehran, under Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, has sentenced **Mrs. Mona Mehraabi, Elhaam Karam-Pisheh, Afsaaneh Yaadgaar-Ardestaani and Mr. Ehsaan-Allah Yaadgaar-Ardestaani.**

These Baha'is all live in Varamin, Tehran Province. In September or October 2018, they were sentenced by a revolutionary court in Tehran, in a secret trial without a hearing or defence. This trial was not reported on Sen's Daily. The court has since agreed to a retrial, and has announced sentences of three years each, in place of the original five years. They were charged with membership of illegal organisations with the aim of undermining state security.

Mrs. Elhaam Karam-Pisheh and Mona Mehraabi were arrested on February 16, 2015, in a raid on a meeting in Tehran where six Bahais were present. All were separately interrogated in the house, and the two women were arrested in accordance with a warrant and taken away in a car from the Ministry of Intelligence. During the search, which lasted five hours, all the books, pictures and religious symbols of those present, as well as computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones, were seized. One report adds that the officers demanded that those present should sign undertakings not to participate in Bahai meetings.

Mr. Ehsaan Yaadgaar was arrested in a neighbouring home at the same time, and again religious materials were seized, along with some gold coins. He was told to present himself to the public prosecutor's office in Varamin (the capital of Varamin County in Tehran Province). He did so, and was released after several hours. He was again arrested in early March, 2015, and taken to Evin Prison for questioning before being released.

Mrs. Safa Forqani-Araani was arrested in a raid on her home [apparently in Tehran] on February 17, 2015, and her father Mehrdaad was arrested at his home in Varamin an hour later.

During these raids a number of other Baha'is in Tehran were questioned, but they are not mentioned in this report.

Iran to tighten repression of Baha'is and Sufis in Mazandaran Province

Hrana/ Sens Daily (11.03.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/wcFrVre> - A leak of confidential documents has revealed that a meeting of representatives from nine of Iran's security organisations, together with officials from government departments, held in Sari on September 3 last year, decided to tighten the repression of Baha'is and Sufis in Mazandaran Province.

The activities of Baha'is in the bazaar (in the economy) and in private meetings are to be more tightly controlled. The Directors of primary and secondary schools in Sari County are tasked with identifying Baha'i pupils and attracting them to Islam, while the heads of tertiary education in the County are required to ensure that the exclusion of Baha'is from tertiary education is enforced. The head of the Ministry of Industry and Mining was tasked with controlling the activities of Baha'is in the bazaar. Such a high-level meeting confirms anecdotal evidence that Baha'i and Sufi communities are growing in Iran, to the extent that they are seen as a threat.

Christian converts released on condition they stop meeting together

Article 18 (27.04.2021) - Four Christian converts arrested by agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence in the southwestern city of Dezful last week have been released without charge but only after they were ordered to sign commitments to have no further involvement in any Christian activities.

Hojjat Lotfi Khalaf, Esmail Narimanpour, Alireza Varak-Shah, and Mohammad Ali Torabi, also known as Davoud, were released on the evening of 21 April after two days in detention.

They were told to expect another summons for interrogation at any time.

According to Mohabat News, 10 to 15 other Christian converts have been interrogated over the past week in Dezful and ordered to sign such commitments to refrain from further Christian activities.

Continue reading [here](#)

Christian convert given 10-month sentence for 'propaganda against Islamic Republic'

Article 18 (27.04.2021) - An Iranian Christian convert has been sentenced to 10 months in prison for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic".

Hamed Ashoori, who is 31 years old and lives in Fardis, west of Tehran, was verbally informed of the verdict on 12 April following his final court hearing on 7 March at the 4th Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Karaj.

Hamed has received no written confirmation of the verdict, which he intends to appeal, nor has he at any stage been given any information about the names of any of his arresting officers, interrogators or judges.

Continue reading [here](#)

Christian converts take appeals to Iran's Supreme Court

Article 18 (22.03.2021) - Iran's Supreme Court is considering the retrial petitions for two high-profile cases involving Christian converts.

The first relates to the prison sentences given to a 62-year-old man with advanced Parkinson's disease, Homayoun Zhavah, and his wife Sara Ahmadi, 43, for belonging to a house-church.

The second concerns a court's decision to remove a two-year-old girl from her adoptive parents, Sam Khosravi and Maryam Falahi, because they are Christian converts and the girl, Lydia, is considered Muslim.

Continue reading [here](#)

Four Christian converts arrested in Dezful, others interrogated

Article 18 (21.04.2021) - Four Christian converts have been arrested and others summoned for interrogation by intelligence agents in the southwestern city of Dezful.

Hojjat Lotfi Khalaf, Esmaeil Narimanpour, Alireza Varak-Shah, and Mohammad Ali Torabi, also known as Davoud, were arrested on Monday, 19 April.

The following day – yesterday – a number of other converts were summoned for interrogation, though precisely how many is not yet known.

Continue reading [here](#)

Christian convert released after over three years in prison

Article 18 - (15.04.2021) - Christian convert Majidreza Souzanchi has been released after more than three years in prison.

The 37-year-old was released on furlough from the Greater Tehran Penitentiary last Thursday, 8 April, and has told Mohabat News he does not need to return to serve the remaining few months of his sentence.

Continue reading [here](#)

News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in March

Baha'is

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Karam-Pisheh, Afsaaneh Yaadgaar-Ardestaani and Mr. Ehsaan-Allah Yaadgaar-Ardestaani.

These Baha'is all live in Varamin, Tehran Province. In September or October 2018, they were sentenced by a revolutionary court in Tehran, in a secret trial without a hearing or defence. This trial was not reported on Sen's Daily. The court has since agreed to a retrial, and has announced sentences of three years each, in place of the original five years. They were charged with membership of illegal organisations with the aim of undermining state security.

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Iran to tighten repression of Baha'is and Sufis in Mazandaran Province

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5-year sentences confirmed for Sufeya Mobini and Negin Tadrissi

Hrana/ Sens Daily (10.03.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/7cFyTWH> - The Review Court for Tehran Province has confirmed the five-year prison sentences of Sufeya Mobini and Negin Tadrissi. They were initially sentenced in the Revolutionary Court by Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad. For the details see [a previous report](#) on this blog.

Christians

Parkinson's sufferer and wife summoned to begin prison sentences

Article 18 (25.03.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/8192/> - A Christian convert with advanced Parkinson's disease and his wife have been summoned to begin their prison sentences for belonging to a house-church.

Homayoun Zhaveh, who is 62 years old, and his wife **Sara Ahmadi**, 42, received the summons on Friday, telling them to report to Tehran's Evin Prison within days.

Their lawyer has applied for a retrial.

Homayoun faces two years in prison, while his wife was given a stiffer sentence of eight years for her alleged leadership role within the house-church.

The sentences were handed down in November 2020 but only reported last week after the couple were informed by their lawyer that they could be summoned any day.

Sara was initially sentenced to 11 years in prison, but her sentence was reduced to eight years on appeal.

Article18 calls for renewal of mandate of UN rapporteur on human rights in Iran

Article 18 (12.03.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/8073/> - Article18 has joined 38 other rights groups in calling for the renewal of the mandate of the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javid Rehman.

The renewal of Mr Rehman's mandate is set to be voted upon at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council, where he presented his latest report earlier this week.

In a joint letter sent today to all member states of the Council, we say the renewal of the mandate by at least another year is "essential in light of the persistence of widespread and systematic violations of human rights committed by Iranian authorities with total impunity".

[Continue reading on the link above.](#)

UK ambassador calls on Iran to end persecution of Christian converts

Article 18 (11.03.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/8062/> - The UK's permanent representative to the UN has called on Iran to end its "persistent" discrimination and persecution of religious minorities, "particularly the Baha'i and Christian converts".

Julian Braithwaite was speaking as part of a 9 March interactive dialogue with the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javid Rehman, who was presenting his latest report.

Honouring the Iranian Christian women persecuted for their faith

Article 18 (08.03.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/features/7989/> - On International Women's Day, we honour the Christian women who have been arrested, charged or imprisoned over the past 12 months in Iran as a result of their faith or religious activities.

This article highlights just 12 such women, but this is by no means an exhaustive list, nor does it include all the women whose husbands are currently serving prison sentences as

a result of their faith and are thereby deprived of support in looking after their homes and children.

[Read more about each of them on the link above](#)

It's their land

#ItsTheirLand: Unprecedented reaction makes voice of persecuted Bahá'ís in an Iranian village global

BIC GENEVA (05.03.3021) — <https://news.bahai.org/story/1495/> - A global campaign in support of the persecuted Bahá'ís in Iran has generated an unprecedented outpouring of solidarity from officials at the United Nations and the European Union, statesmen, government officials, religious figures including Muslim leaders, lawyers, prominent human rights advocates, farmers' associations, actors, and other prominent figures.

Campaign supporters called for an end to the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran and particularly for the return of ancestral lands belonging to the Bahá'ís in Ivel, a village in northern Iran, which were illegally confiscated by the Iranian government solely because of the landowners' religious beliefs.

The wave of concern—outstanding in its diversity and geographic spread—reflects an ongoing outcry from the international community over the human rights abuses Iranian Bahá'ís have suffered for decades.

"In the past week, the voices of the Bahá'ís in a small village in Iran became global, thanks to the extraordinary support offered by governments, organizations, prominent figures, groups, and thousands of sincere individuals around the world," said Diane Ala'i, Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. "This exceptional support not only condemns Iran's actions but shows the long-suffering Bahá'ís in Iran that the international community stands with them."

The campaign comes after Iranian courts ruled to confiscate Bahá'í-owned properties in Ivel, leaving dozens of families internally displaced and economically impoverished. The Bahá'ís are Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority and have been the target of 42 years of state-sanctioned systematic persecution—documented extensively by the United Nations.

Ahmed Shaheed, the UN's Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, said he stood in solidarity with the Bahá'ís in Iran "who are facing systemic persecution [and] egregious rights violations."

A webinar was held at the European Parliament on the situation in Ivel with participation from European Union officials and a former UN Special Rapporteur, Miloon Kothari. Additionally, the Chair of the European Parliament delegation for relations with Iran, Cornelia Ernst, called the Bahá'ís a "particularly vulnerable community" and condemned the Iranian government's "disastrous policies towards the Bahá'ís."

Brian Mulroney, a former Canadian prime minister, signed a high-profile open letter by more than 50 judges, lawyers, and former attorneys-general, addressed to Iran's chief justice, Ebrahim Raisi. The letter stated that the court ruling departs "not only from

international human rights standards but also from the text and intent of the Iranian constitution itself.” The open letter was widely publicized, including by [The Globe and Mail](#) newspaper and the [CBC](#).

Global food systems and agricultural experts, including officials at the UN Development Programme, the World Bank, the Rockefeller Foundation, business figures, and academics at universities around the world, signed an [open letter](#) describing the Bahá'ís in Ivel as “hard-working, low-income agricultural workers with no other assets and means of earning a livelihood aside from their homes and farmlands” and expressing “alarm” at the confiscation of their properties. The call was underpinned by a moving [video message](#) of solidarity on behalf of the farming community in Australia which called on the Iranian government and judiciary to “return the land and properties to their rightful owners: Bahá'í farmers in Ivel.”

Canadian Members of Parliament also added their voices to the campaign in [a video](#) in which they called on Iran to “return the properties of Bahá'ís and respect their human rights as citizens of Iran.”

The foreign ministers of Canada and Sweden, [Marc Garneau](#) and [Ann Linde](#), each made statements on the situation in Ivel, expressing alarm at the ongoing discrimination and seizure of properties owned by Bahá'ís. Other government officials and parliamentarians from [Brazil](#), [Germany](#), the [Netherlands](#), the [United Kingdom](#), and the [United States](#) also denounced the Ivel confiscations, urging Iran to stop persecuting the Bahá'ís.

Officials of two governments called for the recognition of the Bahá'í community in Iran. “Stop confiscating Bahá'í properties in the village of Ivel,” [stated](#) Jos Douma, the Netherlands’ Special Envoy for Religion or Belief. “And—at last—recognize Bahá'í[s] as a religious community.” The German Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion, Markus Grübel, also [called](#) for Iran to recognize the Bahá'ís and to end the “discrimination and persecution of Bahá'í communities.”

The [US statement](#), issued by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, condemned the “alarming escalation” of the Iranian government’s “measures targeting Bahá'ís in Iran on the basis of their faith.”

Muslim leaders around the world also joined the campaign, calling on Iran “to address this injustice,” adding, “Islam does not permit a government to confiscate land from citizens just because they follow a different religion.”

The statements, coming from Muslim leaders in India (the [All India Tanzeem Falahul Muslimeen](#) and the [All India Safi Association](#)), the [United States](#), the [United Kingdom](#), [Canada](#), and [Australia](#), sent a powerful signal to Iran’s government that, contrary to its claims, their co-religionists do not see their actions as consistent with Islamic law.

In addition to this, fourteen prominent Iranian religious scholars issued a [collective statement](#) to “urgently request” that Iran’s government “end the brutal confiscation of Bahá'í property throughout the country” and to address the “persecution, animosity, and insults” suffered by the Bahá'ís. A prominent op-ed article was also published in [The Wall Street Journal](#) by Reza Afshari, an expert on human rights in Iran.

Civil society organizations in the United States, including the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, the Anti-Defamation League Task Force on Middle East Minorities, United for Iran, the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, Freedom House, the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute, and others, signed yet another [open letter](#) addressed to the two judges who made the ruling, Mr. Hasan Babaie and Mr. Sadegh Savadkouhi.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Raoul Wallenberg Center, Brazil's National Council of Churches, South Africa's Legal Resources Centre, and Germany's International Society for Human Rights were also among the many faith and civil society groups that stood in solidarity with the Bahá'ís in Ivel.

Thousands of members of parliaments, human rights activists, actors, and ordinary citizens also joined a Twitter storm sharing articles and messages of solidarity about the land seizures in Ivel with the hashtag #ItsTheirLand. The social media push saw 35,000 tweets reaching some 52 million people around the world, at one point trending in Australia. The equivalent hashtag also trended in Persian-language Twitter.

Prominent Iranian academics, authors, activists, actors, and artists outside Iran, including Masih Alinejad, Max Amini, Nazanin Boniadi, Nina Ansary, Abbas Milani, Sina Valiollah, Omid Djalili, Maziar Bahari, Ladan Boroumand, and others, also joined the Twitter storm, as did the American actors Rainn Wilson, Justin Baldoni and Eva LaRue and the British novelist and comedian, David Baddiel.

"The show of support for the Bahá'ís in Ivel demonstrates that the Iranian government's religious motivation for the persecution of the Bahá'ís has been exposed to the world. Iran's treatment of its Bahá'í community is, more than ever, condemned by a growing chorus of governments, civil society groups, and individuals, not only in the international community but by Iranians themselves," stated Ms. Ala'i.

"The freedom to believe is a fundamental right that cannot be taken away from any individual by a government. The world is watching Iran and demands that the government bring to an end the utterly baseless persecution of innocent Bahá'ís for their beliefs."

News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in February

Baha'is

Confiscation of assets from Baha'is in Bandar Lengeh

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (23.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3b1fP5h> - The business, homes and bank accounts of two Baha'ís in the Southern port city of Bandar Lengeh have been confiscated by court order. The workshop and houses of Mohabatullah Thaabet and Erfaan Noahnezhaad were ordered to be seized following pressure from the "security office" [ie, agent of the Ministry of Intelligence, ~ Sen] in the town's Tax Department, and the levy of a substantial, and abnormal, fine on the Baha'ís.

Their workshop, making composite beams, has been closed by the authorities since November, 2019, because of their Baha'í beliefs. They had operated the workshop for five years prior to that, and had paid their taxes and kept accounts as required. The business of another Baha'í in that town, Vahid Zaraa`at-Kaar, was also sealed at that time [presumably in relation to the celebration of the Birth of Baha'u'llah ~ Sen] and also remains sealed by the authorities.

Eight Baha'is summoned to prison in Bandar Abbas

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (23.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3q6GbqF> - A Review Court has confirmed the sentences of eight Bahais from Bandar Abbas who were previously sentenced to jail and re-education, and on February 21 they were summoned to present themselves at prison within ten days.

Arash Raasekhi, Nasim Qanawaateyaan, Maaraal Raasti, Mahnaaz Jaan-Nethaar, Omid Afaaqi and Mehrollah Afshaar were sentenced to two years in prison, while **Adib Haqq-pazhuh and Farhaad Amri** were sentenced to one year in prison.

In addition, all eight were given a two-year ban on membership of social and political parties and groups and attending Baha'i meetings, and are required to attend five counselling sessions on "sects" under the supervision of the "Sajjadiyyeh" Institute (named after the fourth Imam, aka Zayn al-Abidin). The court also confiscated 30 million tumans in cash, two small pendants, a gold necklace, gold bracelet and gold ring, all with religious motifs, books, photo displays, statues and CDs.

The eight were sentenced on 12 December 2020 in Branch Two of the Islamic Revolutionary Tribunal of Bandar Abbas, presided over by Judge 'Ali Balaador. They were charged with conspiracy to undermine national security, based on evidence that they had conducted children's classes and youth classes for Bahai children, and music classes, and had attended a "Ruhi" study circle and collected donations [from Baha'is] for the Baha'i "Feasts" (community devotionals).

On 2 February, the Review Court for Hormouzgan Province, consisting of Judge Mash'allah Afshaarpour and Counsellor Ebraahim Mohammadi, confirmed the sentences. The verdict of the Review Court does not mention any activities against national security, instead referring to the fact that the Bahai Faith [like Buddhism, Hinduism and many other religions] is not recognized in the Constitution of Iran.

Three Baha'is sentenced in Tehran Revolutionary Court

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (23.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3kxPsXD> - Saeed Naasseri, his brother Hamid Naasseri, and Afsaaneh Emaami, wife of Saeed Nasseri, have been sentenced by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran. Judge Mohammad-Reza Amouzaad sentenced Mrs. Emami to three years in prison, and the two brothers to two years in prison, for membership of an illegal group intended to undermine national security. The same court had previously handed down these sentences in absentia and without a hearing, and now, after a hearing, has confirmed its own findings.

Afsaaneh Emaami was arrested at her home on the evening of February 2, 2019. Agents searched her house thoroughly and confiscated her mobile phone, computer, books, and essays. Hamid Nasseri was arrested on the street in front of his business on March 11, 2019, and Saeed was arrested on the same day after going to the Evin detention center to inquire about the condition of his brother and wife.

She was released on bail of 500 million tumans (105,000 euros; \$US 119,000) on March 16, 2019, and Saeed and Hamid were released for the same bail amount on April 18 and 24, respectively.

Five Baha'i women begin 1-year sentences in Mashhad

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (05.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3b1jYpS> - Five Baha'i women from Mashhad have been summoned to the city's Vakilabad Prison to begin serving their sentences. They are **NoghmeH Dhabihayan, Nakisa Hajipour, Nika Paakzaadaan, Faraaneh Daaneshgari and Saanaaz Eshaaqi**. Each has been given a one-year sentence on charges of "propaganda against the regime through propagation of the Baha'i Faith." The sentences were handed down in September 2019 in the Revolutionary Court by Judge Baghdehi, who has a track record of issuing custodial sentences to Iranian Bahais for no reason other than their faith. The sentences were confirmed by the Review Court around December 25, 2020.

Touraj Amini begins his 6-month sentence

HRANA/ Sen's Daily (01.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3q16QVZ> - On January 29, Baha'i researcher and author Touraj Amini was summoned to the Prosecutor's office and taken to Karaj Central Prison, near Tehran, to begin his six-month sentence. He was originally sentenced by the Revolutionary Court in Karaj to one year in prison and two years of exile from the city, but this was reduced by the Alborz Provincial Review Court. On August 4, 2019, security forces searched his home, seizing books and notes and a laptop, and he was previously detained for a short time, in March 2008. He was charged with "propaganda against the regime."

His books include one on the role of religious minorities in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911; "The Hidden Awakening", on the relationship between Iranians intellectuals and the Babi and Bahai Faiths; a five-volume collection of source documents relating to the Bahais in Iran, and a volume of "Documents of Contemporary Zoroastrians of Iran."

Christians

Ebrahim Firouzi released on bail, but charges not dropped

Article18 (28.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7933/> - Iranian Christian convert Ebrahim Firouzi has been released on bail after nearly three weeks in detention.

The 34-year-old, who has already spent years in prison and is now living in exile, was detained on 8 February on new charges of "insulting the sacred" (blasphemy) and "propaganda against the Islamic Republic in favour of hostile groups".

Read the full article [here](#)

Yasser Mossayebzadeh granted conditional release from prison

Article 18 (24.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7906/> - Mohammad Ali (Yasser) Mossayebzadeh, who was serving a 10-year sentence as a result of his membership of a house-church, has been granted conditional release from prison.

It is understood that his release is dependent on him having no further interaction with other Christians, nor engaging in any Christian activities.

Article18 understands that Yasser's 10-year sentence – on charges of "forming a house church" and "promoting Zionist Christianity" – was reduced to three years during a court hearing last month, and that he was subsequently released from prison on Monday, 22 February.

Read the full article [here](#)

Iran found guilty of 'arbitrary detention' of Christian pastor

Article 18 (23.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7890/> - The UN's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has ruled that the Iranian government is guilty of arbitrarily detaining Christian pastor [Yousef Nadarkhani](#), and called for his immediate release.

In a damning [verdict](#), the working group found Iran guilty on four counts – lack of legal basis for detention, detention resulting from "legitimate exercise" of freedoms, lack of fair trial and due process, and "discrimination based on religious beliefs" – and called not

only for Yousef's immediate release, but for compensation and "other reparations" to be given to him, and for Iran to conduct an independent investigation into his arbitrary detention and hold accountable those responsible.

Read the full article [here](#)

Iran passes bill that threatens further repression of Christian converts

Article 18 (19.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7872/> - Iranian president Hassan Rouhani has signed into law two controversial amendments to the Penal Code, which it is feared will be used to further clamp down on unrecognised religious minorities, including Christian converts.

The amendments affect two articles of the Penal Code that are routinely used in the prosecution of converts: Articles 499 and 500.

Indeed, every one of the more than 20 Christians currently in prison on charges related to their peaceful religious activity were prosecuted under either or both Article 499 or 500, which relate respectively to membership or organisation of "anti-security groups", and "propaganda" against the state or in support of opposition groups.

Read the full article [here](#)

UN rapporteur tells Iran to 'release all imprisoned for exercising right to religious freedom'

Article 18 (10.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7824/> - The UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Iran has reiterated his "deep concerns" over "persisting" discrimination against religious minorities in the country.

In his latest report, published ahead of the 46th session of the Human Rights Council later this month, Javaid Rehman says "the imprisonment of individuals from ethnic and religious minorities for practising their culture, language or faith is an ongoing concern" and calls on Iran to "release all those imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief" and "eliminate all forms of discrimination against them".

Read the full article [here](#)

Annual Report: Rights Violations Against Christians in 2020

Article 18 (02.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/reports/7736/> - In a year dominated by Covid-19, Iran still found time to persecute Christians in 2020, Article18's annual report reveals.

The report, published today in collaboration with Middle East Concern, Open Doors, and CSW, shows that 15 Christians were being held in Tehran's Evin Prison on account of their faith by the end of the year, while two others were living in internal exile and another was imprisoned on a disputed criminal charge.

A further 115 Iranian Christians were arrested in 2020, though only 52 of those arrests were publicly reported.

Meanwhile, two Iranian Christians were **flogged** for drinking wine as part of Communion, others were denied **education** or **employment**, and one couple were **told** they could no longer retain custody of their adopted daughter on account of their faith.

The vast majority of the Christians affected were converts from Muslim backgrounds, whom the state does not recognise as Christians, but Christians from the recognised Armenian and Assyrian Christian communities were also affected.

Read the full news [here](#)

Converts face prison for 'promoting Christianity'

Article 18 (01.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7727/> - An appeals court in the southwestern Iranian city of Bushehr has upheld the one-year prison sentences given to three Christian converts for "propagating against the Islamic Republic through promoting Christianity".

Habib Heydari and brothers Sam and Sasan Khosravi were **sentenced** last June alongside a fourth convert, Pooriya Peyma, who was given a 91-day sentence, and Sam, Sasan and Pooriya's wives, who received fines. However, only Habib, Sam and Sasan appealed.

Read the full news [here](#)

"An extraordinary wave of support": Muslim leaders and government officials denounce Iran's persecution of Baha'is

Baha'i International Community (18.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/37D6oqC> - Leading Muslims, government officials, and parliamentarians around the world have joined a growing outcry at the unjust confiscation of properties owned by Baha'is in the farming village of Ivel in Iran. The ruling to allow Iranian authorities to confiscate the properties, clearly motivated by religious prejudice, was recently upheld in an appeals court and has left dozens of families internally displaced and economically impoverished.

The [American Islamic Congress](#)([link is external](#)), the [Canadian Council of Imams](#)([link is external](#)), Chair of the Virtues Ethics Foundation and one of the leading Islamic scholars in the United Kingdom [Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra](#)([link is external](#)), [the All India Tanzeem Falahul Muslemin](#)([link is external](#)), and [the All India Saifi Association](#)([link is external](#)) have all issued statements in support of the Baha'is in Ivel, expressing grave concern about the confiscation of the properties.

"We are calling for the Higher court in Mazandaran and all responsible personnel to take action and to help the Baha'i community in Ivel get back their properties," reads the statement from the American Islamic Congress. Echoing these sentiments, the Canadian Council of Imams writes, "We are deeply concerned by the ruling issued by an Iranian Court to confiscate the properties of 27 Baha'is in the farming village of Ivel." Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra from the United Kingdom specifically called upon Iran's Chief Justice, Ebrahim Raisi, "to address this injustice", adding that "Islam does not permit a government to confiscate land from citizens just because they follow a different religion".

"The sight of Muslim leaders around the world coming to the aid of their Baha'i friends in Iran in an extraordinary wave of support is a powerful signal to the Islamic Republic that their co-religionists around the world condemn their actions," says Diane Ala'i, Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. "Statements of support from leading Muslims for the Baha'is in Ivel, who have lived there for more than 150 years with their Muslim neighbours, show that the Iranian government's invocation of Islamic law is a thin veil covering its persecution of the Baha'is." Ms. Ala'i added.

In a further sign of international support for the Baha'is in Iran, government officials around the world have condemned the Iranian court decision. The Canadian Foreign Minister, Marc Garneau, [says\(link is external\)](#) his government is concerned by the ruling, urging Iran to "eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religion or belief." The call has been echoed by officials in [Germany\(link is external\)](#), the [Netherlands\(link is external\)](#), [Sweden\(link is external\)](#), the [United Kingdom\(link is external\)](#), [Brazil\(link is external\)](#), the [United States\(link is external\)](#), the [European Parliament and the United Nations\(link is external\)](#). In Sweden, 12 members of parliament and elected representatives have also [strongly called on Iran\(link is external\)](#) to return the lands of the Baha'is of Ivel.

"Stop confiscating Baha'i properties in the village of Ivel," states [Jos Douma\(link is external\)](#), the Netherlands' Special Envoy for Religion or Belief. "And—at last—recognize Baha'i[s] as a religious community." The German Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion, Markus Grübel, also [called\(link is external\)](#) for Iran to recognize the Baha'is as a religious community in the country and to end the "discrimination and persecution of Baha'i communities."

South Africa's Legal Resources Centre, an organization known for its human rights work during apartheid, has also issued a [letter\(link is external\)](#) condemning the property confiscations.

Confiscation of Baha'i-owned properties in Ivel began in the early years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. In 2010, properties belonging to some 50 Baha'is in Ivel were [burned and demolished](#), driving them away from their ancestral farms and homes.

The Baha'is in Ivel have repeatedly appealed for their rights in the past, filing complaints with the authorities at all levels and taking legal action to reclaim their lands, to no avail.

"The world is watching and is appalled by the Iranian government's blatant injustices towards the Baha'i community," says Ms. Ala'i. "The innocence of the Baha'is is more evident than ever to the international community, and Iran is being held accountable for the gross injustices it has inflicted on the Baha'i community in Iran. The government must take the necessary steps to not only return the lands to the Baha'is in Ivel but to end the systematic persecution of the Baha'is throughout the entire country once and for all."

Background

- The fresh support comes after a former Canadian prime minister and more than 50 others in Canada's legal community signed an [open letter](#) to the head of Iran's judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, expressing "deep concern" over the confiscations.
- The ruling to confiscate the properties was made in a Special Court for Article 49 of the Iranian Constitution, which allows the Iranian government to seize any properties in the country. Article 49 states that the "ruling must be carried out by the government after investigation, research and proof through Islamic law."

- However, despite the requirements of law, [numerous court rulings](#) and official documents reveal the discriminatory motives behind the confiscations. The seizure of properties is part of Iran's systematic persecution of the Baha'is, reported [extensively](#) by the United Nations.
- In October 2020, despite many efforts by the Baha'is—whose lawyers were denied the chance to see files related to their case, to prepare their defense—an appeals court upheld the ruling by the Special Court. The ruling allowed the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, a foundation under Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to sell the lands owned by the Baha'is.
- Confiscation of Baha'i properties—holy places as well as individual properties—has been part of Iran's systematic campaign of economic, cultural and social persecution against the Baha'is. It has been part of a four-decades long effort to destroy the Baha'i community as a viable entity in the country.
- Confiscation of Baha'i-owned properties in Ivel began in the early years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Baha'is were also denied access to health clinics and other institutions, which they had helped to establish; teachers found various means to persecute Baha'i pupils, including by failing them in their exams; the 100-year old Baha'i cemetery in the village was confiscated and sold for conversion into residential property; and in 1983, more than 130 Baha'is were locked in a local mosque, held captive for three days without food and water, and pressured to recant their faith.

Iranian converts have to prove their faith to obtain asylum

A significant proportion of Iranians seeking asylum in France say they are persecuted because of their conversion to Christianity

By Anne-Bénédicte Hoffner

La Croix International (17.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2N7kObE> - When Ali (not his real name) went to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) for his interview, he knew that he would be questioned about his personal history, particularly about his conversion to Christianity in Iran.

He was asked to name a scripture passage that was important to him. He chose the Passion of Jesus Christ.

"How did this passage resonate with you?" the protection officer asked.

"What attracted me most is that a human being, even at the moment of being tortured, asks people for forgiveness, even though he is here because of their faults. (...) That's what made me begin to love Jesus and this gesture," Ali said.

The interviewer was not convinced. He informed Ali a few days later that his request for asylum had been rejected.

"When asked to describe the personal journey that led him to convert to Catholicism, the person described a family environment marked by a rigorous practice of Islam and his

words remained impersonal, invoking only the notion of forgiveness," wrote the OFPRA agent.

"The agency cannot consider him to be at risk of persecution upon return to Iran, as the sincerity of his approach was not considered to be established," the official said.

Assessing the sincerity of a convert's faith

Every year, just over 100,000 foreigners seek France's protection because of the threats they face in their home countries.

A handful are Iranians -- around 350 in 2020, a little more in previous years -- and among them, many say they have converted to Christianity.

Though he does not keep statistics about the "motive", the director of OFPRA, Julien Boucher, observes that "for two decades" the issue of conversion has often appeared in the files of Iranians, most of the time within a Protestant Church.

Boucher says that, because religious persecutions "touch on the intimate", this is the reason why "the examination is very specific".

"We are fully aware of this. It is not a question of judging the sincerity of the applicant's faith, but of assessing the validity of the alleged fears," he points out.

Threats are very real for those the Iranian regime considers to be "apostates". But how can the true danger of such threats be verified without actually trying to assess the sincerity of the asylum seeker's conversion?

An obstacle course for Iranian asylum-seekers who have converted to Christianity

Father Jean-Marie Humeau assists the Iranian Catholic community. On his desk are seven files of Iranian converts whose requests have been rejected by OFPRA.

"In all seven cases, OFPRA asked spiritual questions to see whether or not the conversion is genuine and to challenge the risk of persecution. This raises questions," the priest argues.

Arshad, 36, is currently in France awaiting the decision of OFPRA. He's familiar with the obstacle course for Iranian converts.

He was arrested in Tehran while he was reading the Gospel with friends and subjected to several weeks of interrogation and psychological torture in prison before finally being released on bail.

After he returned home, he started receiving anonymous threats over the telephone. Pressure was put on those close to him, he lost his job and, finally, he did what many people do -- he fled to another country.

"The difficulty of the French interrogations is famous," he says.

OFPRA asked one of his friends "the name of the twelve apostles", another to say "what the Trinity means to him".

"I understand that they are trying to verify whether the danger is real, but that they decide that our faith is not 'complete' seems really strange to me," Arshad says.

For the National Association of Border Assistance for Foreigners (Anafé), these "intrusive" questions are even more incomprehensible when applicants are in waiting areas, such as ports, train stations or airports.

They are summoned to explain themselves in a few hours, face-to-face or over the phone, sometimes not even knowing whom, exactly, they are speaking with.

"The protection officer asked the man many questions about the Christian religion, its rituals, its saints and its beliefs, and expected him to give precise answers," said an Anafé employee who witnessed an Iranian couple being interviewed in 2017 at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport.

The man had to indicate how often he went to Mass, although going to religious services is illegal for Iranians who do not belong to recognized churches.

He was even asked "the date of Christmas, without taking into account the fact that Iranians do not have the same calendar".

Ordinariate for Catholics of the Eastern Churches offer to help

"While it is only supposed to verify the credibility of the request, OFPRA often launches into a substantive examination, under conditions that do not allow it," says Anafé's director, Laure Palun.

"And it is not even certain that those who have been Christians for a long time know how to answer these questions," she notes.

But OFPRA's director, Julien Boucher, denies that.

"Under no circumstances do we ask protection officers to give a kind of knowledge test," he insists.

He claims his organization takes its lead from the good practices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Agents limit themselves to asking questions concerning the person's "path of conversion", the "circumstances" of the conversion, the new religious practice and, finally, the persecutions suffered or feared.

"Something the claimant says may, in turn, prompt further questions from the instructor," Boucher explains.

The role of the interpreters -- in the vast majority of Iranian and Shia Muslim cases -- is also regularly questioned.

Do they know the Christian terms used? Do they risk distorting certain words because of their own bias against or disapproval of conversion?

OFPRA's director points out that interpreters are bound by a "strict code of ethics" and have received "awareness-raising and (other) training". In addition, "the recording of all interviews" are "available in case of a dispute".

The Ordinariate for Catholics of the Eastern Churches in France is trying to help improve the handling of these complex cases and has offered assistance, again based on UNHCR recommendations.

"Refugee status determinations based on religion could also benefit from the assistance of independent experts with particularized knowledge of the country, region and context of the particular claim and/or the use of corroborating testimony from other adherents of the same faith," UNHCR guidelines state.

But OFPRA's management, so far, has declined the Ordinariate's offer to help.

"Our information, documentation and research division already mobilizes many external resources to refine our knowledge of countries of origin," says Boucher, OFPRA's director.

"As for testimonials, we take them into consideration, but assess their probative value," he adds.

Photo : The family during Mass in a Catholic church in Tehran. (Photo by ATTA KENARE/AFP)

News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in January

HRWF (04.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7906/> - Human Rights Activists (HRA) in Iran have published their "[Annual Statistical Report of Human Rights Conditions in Iran](#)". A section is devoted to the persecution of members of religious minorities and illustrated by maps, tables and pie charts. Here is an excerpt of their report:

"In this category, 136 reports have been registered by the Department of Statistics in 2020. According to these reports, 77 arrests, 49 cases of prevention from economical activities, 126 cases of summon by the judicial and security institutions, and 22 cases of depriving and preventing from education, and 69 cases of police home raids, has taken place.

98 individuals of the religious minorities were sentenced by the judicial institutions to a total of 4351 months of imprisonment. Additionally, the ministry of cultural heritage of Tehran and the Municipality of Tehran demolished the Adventist church of Tehran in the past year.

In the field of religious minorities, the Baha'is constitute the highest of the Human Rights reports on religious minority violations with 45%, Sunnis 26%, Christians 15%, Dervishes 4%, Jews and Yarsans 1%, and others 9%, of the total reports. Note that the reports labeled as "Others" are those that did not belong to a specific group of religious minorities.

The number of citizens arrested in the category of religious minorities has decreased by 42 % in 2020 compared to 2019, and the imprisonment sentences issued by the judiciary has increased by 28.9 %."

What follows is not part of this report but is a compilation of facts gathered from various sources by *Human Rights Without Frontiers*.

Baha'is

Touraj Amini begins his six-month sentence

HRANA (30.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3cEbG8s> - On January 29, Baha'i researcher and author Touraj Amini was summoned to the Prosecutor's office and taken to Karaj Central Prison, near Tehran, to begin his six-month sentence. He was originally sentenced by the Revolutionary Court in Karaj to one year in prison and two years of exile from the city, but this was reduced by the Alborz Provincial Review Court. On August 4, 2019, security forces searched his home, seizing books and notes and a laptop.

His books include one on the role of religious minorities in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911; "The Hidden Awakening", on the relationship between Iranians intellectuals and the Babi and Baha'i Faiths; a five-volume collection of source documents relating to the Baha'is in Iran, and a volume of "Documents of Contemporary Zoroastrians of Iran."

For more information: <https://bit.ly/3roUuIt>

Three Baha'is sentenced in Tehran

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (29.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2YGk3Z5> - Mrs. Marvash `Adaalati `Ali-Abaadi, who in previous reports was named as Mahvash `Adaalati-Za'iri, Mrs. Sepideh Keshaavarz and Mr. Farid Ismaa`ili have been sentenced to three years and seven months in prison by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran. They were tried around January 1 this year.

The Judge, Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, issued his verdict on January 10, but the accused were only informed in the past few days. This sentence refers to the charge of "collusion intended to undermine national security by conducting Bahai activities." They were also found guilty of "propaganda against the regime in the form of teaching and spreading the Baha'i Faith," and sentenced to eight months. However, if the sentences are confirmed by the Review Court, they will serve only the longer sentence.

The home of Mrs Mahvash `Adaalati-Za'iri in Tehran was searched by security forces for three hours on November 20, 2018, with the seizure of Baha'i books and other personal effects, and she was summoned to Evin Prison for interrogation on November 26, and arrested after two hours of interrogation. Interrogations continued in the following days, and she was released on bail on November 29.

The home of Farid Ismaa`ili was raided on the same day. Agents seized his mobile telephone, laptops and books and images relating to the Bahai Faith. They left a summons requiring him to report to Evin Courthouse in Tehran. According to the latest HRANA report he was released on bail the following day: I have no previous record of that.

Mazhdeh Eqteraafi and Houshmand Taalebi bailed at last

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (24.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3pM6SIk> - Mazhdeh Eqteraafi and her husband Houshmand Taalebi, Bahais from Vilashahr, were released from prison in Isfahan on January 24. They have been detained since August 23, 2020. After their arrest, officers went to the Baha'i couple's home and searched it, confiscating laptops, cell phones, books, and an acoustic "Dastgah" keyboard. Two cars and a truck belonging to the family

were also confiscated. During their interrogation, they were charged with propaganda against the regime and links to foreign governments.

Sufeya Mobini's sentence reduced to five years

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (21.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/36CsusE> - In an unusual step, a Revolutionary Court in Tehran has reduced the sentence of Sufeya Mobini, from ten years to five years. This is not a Review, but the correction of an administrative error within the Revolutionary Court system.

Her sentence, and Negin Tadrissi's five-year sentence in the same case, will still be considered by the Provincial Review Court, which reviews all the findings of the Revolutionary Courts, and often reduces the sentences. The accused are usually free on bail until the Review Court has spoken. The correction in this case was made by Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad. The initial 10-year sentence, handed down by the notorious Judge Moqayeseh, was based on Article 498 of the Islamic Penal Code, which provides for a maximum of 'only' five years' imprisonment for "acting against national security" [i.e., commemorating a birth that took place 200 years ago !

Mrs Mobini and Tadrissi were arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence in October 2017, during the bicentenary celebration of the Birth of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet Founder of the Baha'i Faith.].

The precise charges in this case are "acting against national security by administering the Bahai organisation and promoting its teachings." In his ruling, Judge Moqayeseh had also accused them of paying the tuition for an Afghani student to attend language classes, of giving counselling regarding behavioural, sexual and economic awareness, and of writing in a personal journal that "the people in this region need education."

Two more Baha'is barred from universities

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (18.01.2021) - In two separate items, HRANA has reported that Mahsa Foruhari, a Baha'i student from Karaj, and Sima Fattaahi-Mirshekaarlu, a Baha'i studying in Urmia (Urumiyyeh), have been barred from tertiary education because of their Bahai beliefs.

Ms. Foruhari registered for the tenth consecutive year for entrance to tertiary education with exemption from the University Entrance examination. This exemption is available to those with good academic records, and her average was just over 19 [out of 20, presumably]. Nevertheless, she was rejected for "incomplete file" – the usual term used when students are excluded because of Baha'i beliefs. After the most recent University Entrance examination, HRANA reported 21 other cases of Baha'is excluded from university for "incomplete file."

Ms. Fattaahi, who began a Master's degree in International Law at Urmia Azad University about two years ago, received a message on the university website on January 17, saying that she was barred from defending her dissertation and continuing postgraduate studies because of her adherence to the Bah'ai Faith. This message refers to a letter dated December 29, 2019 regarding the exclusion of Baha'i students and the expulsion of Ms. Fattaahi. The report does not explain who wrote the letter, but the image caption says it is from the "Security Office," the on-campus branch of the the Ministry of Intelligence. Presumably it was addressed to the University, who had no choice but to obey.

Christians

Iranian Christian group 'dismantled' for 'creating moral deviations'

Article18 (25.01.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7717/> - An Iranian news agency linked to the Revolutionary Guard Corps has reported the arrest of a "network" of Christians in "several provinces" for "creating moral deviations" and "promoting [religious] conversion".

According to the [report](#), published by Fars News Agency on Saturday, the "Zionist" group was "dismantled" in a coordinated operation, though there is no indication of the number of Christians arrested, nor when or where the arrests took place.

The report accuses "Christian-affiliated networks" of "extensive" efforts against Iran's national security over the past two years.

There are currently [at least 15](#) Christians in prison in Iran for alleged "actions against national security" – because of their membership or leadership of house-churches.

Mary Mohammadi told she can't have old job back, arrested again

Article18 (21.01.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7699/> - Iranian Christian convert Fatemeh (Mary) Mohammadi has been arrested again – this time for alleged "improper" hijab – and continues to be denied employment a year after her latest release from prison.

The 22-year-old was arrested by Iran's "morality police" on Monday, 18 January, and told her trousers were too tight, her headscarf was not correctly adjusted, and she should not be wearing an unbuttoned coat.

Mary has already spent six months in prison as a result of her membership of a house-church – recently [labelled](#) by the Iranian regime as "enemy groups" belonging to a "Zionist" cult – and was last year given another [suspended prison sentence](#) for participating in a peaceful protest.

Mary says she has been unable to return to her work as a gymnastics instructor since her [release](#) from prison in February last year, despite good relations with her employer.

For more information: <https://bit.ly/2NZCAxn>

Iran denies persecuting Christians, calls house-churches 'enemy groups'

Article18 (20.01.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7675/> - Iran has denied systematically persecuting Christians and called house-churches "enemy groups" of a "Zionist cult", in response to a formal enquiry by six senior UN rights experts.

In a letter dated 11 November but only [made public](#) after Iran failed to respond within the 60-day deadline, the experts* – including the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, and special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javid Rehman – expressed "serious concern" over "numerous" reports of "continued systematic

persecution" of Christians, "particularly discriminatory practices and violations of their human rights".

Iran has since written a [response](#), denying the accusations and claiming "nobody is prosecuted on religious grounds". Instead, Iran says it has taken legal action against members of "enemy groups" and "private churches" (house-churches), which it accuses of belonging to a "Zionist Christian cult" with "anti-security purposes".

The rapporteurs name 24 Iranian Christians reported by organisations including Article18 to be either currently in prison or awaiting summons, and include details of each case.

Iran ranks eighth in global persecution of Christians

Article18 (14.01.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7669/> - Iran has risen to eighth place in the latest annual listing of the 50 countries in which the persecution of Christians is most prevalent.

The [2021 World Watch List](#) was published yesterday by international Christian charity Open Doors. North Korea, Afghanistan and Somalia top the list, as they did last year. Iran was ranked ninth last year.

According to the new list, Eritrea and Yemen are ahead of Iran, with Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Saudi Arabia ranking 11th to 14th, respectively.

"The Iranian government sees the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as an attempt by Western countries to undermine the Islamic rule of Iran. Christians from a Muslim background are persecuted the most. Secret house-churches are often raided, and their leaders and members have been arrested and given long prison sentences for 'crimes against national security'," Open Doors' report states.

German FoRB Commissioner calls for an end to persecution of Baha'is in Iran

Iran Press Watch (03.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3rpRFHb> - **German MP and Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion Calls for an End to the Discrimination and Persecution of Bahá'í Communities in Iran**

Press release (15 January)

On World Religion Day on 17 January 2021, Markus Grübel, Member of the German Parliament and Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion, calls for an end to the discrimination and persecution of Bahá'í communities in Iran:

"I call on the Iranian government to recognise the Bahá'í as a religious community and to respect the rights of all religious and faith minorities. Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians and other communities, too, must be able to live according to their beliefs in freedom. Conversion, which carries the threat of the death penalty, must be decriminalised. Freedom of religion or belief is a universal right that applies equally for all people."

World Religion Day is observed annually on the third Sunday of January. The day was initiated in 1950 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í in the United States and is now celebrated around the world by the Bahá'í and other religious communities. The focus of the celebration is the common ground of the world's religions. People of all religions are called upon to remember their shared values of respect and tolerance, and to work for peace and justice in the world.

Markus Grübel:

"In a world in which religions continue to be misused for conflicts and in which religious minorities in many places are subjected to repression by the state and by society, World Religion Day is an important sign for constructive cooperation between and with the religions. The Bahá'í community in Iran has been subjected to discrimination and systematic persecution by the government ever since it first came into being in 1844. Unlike Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, the Bahá'í are not recognised by the predominantly Shi'ite government. They are not permitted to practise their faith publicly and they suffer arbitrary arrests and torture. Their educational institutions and prayer houses are often attacked and even destroyed. Children are intimidated, access to higher education is denied to the Bahá'í.

Since January 2020, citizens have to use a new form when applying for an identity card in Iran. Since then, members of religious minorities that are not officially recognised are no longer able to state their religious affiliation on their identity cards. This means that the Bahá'í and other minorities face the choice of either not applying for an identity card – and being denied the possibility of participating in public life – or of denying their faith by declaring a different belief on the application form.

The political, economic and societal discrimination of the Bahá'í has further intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. The community reports that arrests, displacement and expropriation of property have been increasing. In August 2020, an administrative court confirmed a judgement which described Bahá'í ownership of land in the village of Ivel in northern Iran as "illegal".

Markus Grübel

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