

Information sheet

PERSECUTIONS AGAINST THE BAHÁ'Í

Persecutions for any reason and even more so for religious reasons are today outside the spirit of our times which calls us ever more to reconciliation and unity in diversity, which in the spirit of Assisi we are exhorted to be brothers. Since its inception (1844) the Baha'í Faith has suffered fierce repression by the Iranian government and religious authorities, one of persecution, cruel torture and mass killings.

There were more than 20,000 martyrs in the first decades. After a period of relative lessening of the persecutions, of this, however, which was the most numerous religious minority, once again became systematic with the Islamic revolution of 1979. In the beginning, more than 200 were publicly executed or disappeared and meeting centres, historic sites and cemeteries were destroyed in more than 50 cities. The 1980s saw fierce economic persecution while the message of Baha'u'llah had spread to all countries throughout the world. Iranian Baha'is were dispossessed of their homes, businesses and civil rights, in general, and subjected to violence. In the early 1990s, perhaps in response to condemnation by international organizations for numerous cases of arbitrary imprisonment, torture and killings, the Iranian government switched to "softer" persecution measures, that is less obvious for the 'Baha'í issue' which was being conducted regularly with assaults that did not follow legal proceedings and investigations and even murders for which there was no clarity. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved in recent decades.

According to B. I. C. (Baha'í International Community - non-governmental organization with 180 affiliated countries) since 2007, there have been 780 documented cases of economic persecution: forced closure of shops, lay-offs, revocation of permits for commercial activities. Because of the difficulty in obtaining detailed and accurate information it is supposed that the figures are not

correct. In 2008, a case rose to international prominence for the arrest and detention for twenty months of seven directors of institutions in charge of community management without official accusations being made or without being able to contact lawyers. Known as the Yaran (friends in the Farsi language) they were victims of blatant violations of human rights, not even recognizing those provided for by Iranian law. They were tried after lengthy isolation and received legal advice one hour before the trial in which they were sentenced to imprisonment. There are also violations of rights, including, not least, the right for young people to study, which has become the dominant theme for substantial religious freedom in Iran.

This lack of freedom with violent implications has also occurred in other countries such as in 2017 in Yemen, where various arrests and coercion followed in the wake of treatment in Iran to those who refuse to renounce their faith. While recognizing that some Yemeni leaders have expressed dissatisfaction with the continuing persecution of the Baha'is, the time still seems distant in which violent discrimination will give room for the constructive and inclusive culture for which we are working and uniting spiritually in prayer so that these obstacles can be overcome and in which there can be the advent of a new society based on the religious principles of justice, brotherhood and love.

The words written by Baha'u'llah confirm the attitude of the Baha'i as of all oppressed by religion or prejudice: "O beloved ones! The Tabernacle of union has been raised; do not consider yourselves strangers to one another. You are fruit of a single tree and leaves of one branch. We cherish the hope that the light of justice will shine on the world and purify it from tyranny".