



Monthly Summary: Iranian Bahá'í Situation of Concern

February 2012

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Summary of Incident Types

1. *Polarization events (sentencing, expulsions, arrest)* - These are actions by the government which appear calculated to separate Bahá'í citizens from mainstream Iranian society, thereby weakening their community and socially isolating them to prevent Muslim Iranians from sympathizing with them.
2. *Internet censorship events* - Censorship of all types continues to be a problem in Iran, particularly on the internet, which Iranians use more than any other Middle Eastern country for information and communication.
3. *Preparation events* - These are events which indicate that the Iranian authorities may be preparing to escalate the persecution of Bahá'ís by either increasing the vulnerability of this targeted group or strengthening government agencies which may act against them.
4. *International/political events* - As tensions increase between Iran, its neighbours, and the international community over its nuclear program, the implications for human rights - particularly those of minority groups - within the country remain unclear.

1. Polarization

Sentencing

- Bahá'í citizen Iqan Shahidi has received a confirmed sentence of 5 years in prison from the Iranian Review Court. Shahidi was a student residing in Kermanshah and was previously prevented from receiving an education. He is charged with “membership of the illegal association for the right to education,” “propaganda against the regime,” and “membership of the Bahá'í community.” - Source: [PCED](#) (Iranian educational rights activist group) - 1 February 2012
- The Bahá'í couple Kamran Rahimiyan and Faran Hesami have been sentenced to 4 years in prison. They were arrested among the others in the crackdown on the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education and charged with “membership of the Bahá'í community” and “meeting and colluding to disturb national security.” Both Rahimiyan and Hesami received master's degrees in educational counselling from the



University of Ottawa. They had been detained without charges since 13 September 2011. - Source: [PCED](#) (Iranian educational rights activist group) - 1 February 2012

- Two Bahá'ís, Zhila Rezvani and Sa'ideh Faroughi, residing in Mashhad have received a 4-month sentence for teaching the Bahá'í faith. - Source: [Human Rights Activists News Agency \(HRANA\)](#) - 24 February 2012
- A Bahá'í resident of Semnan, Tareneh Turabi, was sentenced to 5 years and 10 months in prison. The charges against him include “setting and running an illegal group with organizational goals” (i.e. the Bahá'í community), and membership of an illegal group (the Bahá'í religion) whose aim is allegedly to “attract Muslims and promote goals in opposition to the regime and favourable to foreigners” as well as “propaganda against the sacred regime.” - Source: [Human Rights Activists News Agency](#) - Date of event unclear from source

Arrests

- Four Bahá'ís (Samitra Momtazian, Farshid Yazdani, Eyman Rahmat-Penah, and Farid Amadi) have been arrested as part of a raid and search that took place at 30 Bahá'í residences in Shiraz. - Source: [Khabar Navard](#) (News blog tracking the persecution of the Bahá'í community) - 3 February 2012
- Security forces in Mashhad have reportedly arrested eight Bahá'í youths (Ezatollah Ahmadian, Shayan Tafazzoli, Navid Nabili, Shahrzad Khalili, Fattaneh Hajipour, Arman Mukhtari, Behnaz Hundadzadeh and Noghmeheh Dhabihayan-Esami). The reason for the arrest is currently unknown, as is the current location and condition of the eight individuals. - Source: [Human Rights House of Iran \(RAHANA\)](#) - 17 February 2012
- Attolli Derakshan, a writer and poet living in Sari, was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on 21 February 2012. Derakshan's home was searched by seven agents who confiscated all of his books, religious media (CDs and photos), family pictures, and his works of poetry. - Source: [Human Rights House of Iran \(RAHANA\)](#) - 22 February 2012
- A Bahá'í resident of Shiraz, Houman Zara'i, was arrested at his workplace by security forces who had first gone to his residence. He was taken to Detention Centre 100 in Shiraz and his current status is unknown. - Source: [Human Rights Activists News Agency \(HRANA\)](#) - 23 February 2012
- A Bahá'í resident of Kerman named Erfan Shoja'i was arrested outside of his home, which was then searched by security forces. In addition to his computer, a number of books were confiscated. Iranian court officials stated that his arrest is related to a



case involving three other Bahá'ís arrested in Kerman on 6 January 2012. - Source: [Human Rights Activists News Agency \(HRANA\)](#) - 26 February 2012

School Expulsions

- Sayyid Keyan Hashemi, a Bahá'í student in his third semester at Tehran University, was expelled under instructions from the Ministry of Intelligence. A statement from an official from the Student Disciplinary Committee at the Ministry of Science remarks that “There is a law in which Bahá'ís cannot continue studying.” This is only the latest in a long line of school expulsions explicitly targeting Bahá'í students. - Source: [PCED](#) (Iranian educational rights activist group) - 11 February 2012
- A Bahá'í student named Shima Moufeqi at the Non-Profit University of North Amol was expelled due to her Bahá'í beliefs. She was first prevented from attending her classes and eventually referred to the university's disciplinary body. Ultimately, the university security staff prohibited her from entering the university, after which she was referred to the Ministry of Science, where her inquiries have not been answered. - Source: [PCED](#) (Iranian Educational Rights Activist Group) - 17 February 2012
- Yasmin Fana'eyan, a Bahá'í first-year accounting student at Peyam-e Nour University, which is located in Sari, was expelled due to her beliefs. Yasmin received reprimands several times throughout the year and was ultimately expelled at the end of it. - Source: [PCED](#) (Iranian Educational Rights Activist Group) - 27 February 2012

2. Internet Censorship

- A number of Iranian web users have reported that their access to the internet has returned after a four-day outage. The semi-official Mehr News Agency reported that more than 30 million people were affected by the outage. The government has declined to comment. - Source: [Huffington Post](#) - 13 February 2012
- On 20 February 2012, Iranian internet users were once again cut off from email access. To date, no one has taken responsibility for this. - Source: [Radio Zamaneh](#) (world news and cultural affairs website facilitated by Persian writers and Islamic scholars)
- The occurrence of recent internet blackouts in Iran has fueled speculation that the country may be testing its previously-announced “[national Internet](#).” Plans have been unveiled previously that the country was intending to design a national network deemed compatible with Islamic beliefs and able to work independently from the World Wide Web. This news has raised concerns amongst privacy and human rights activists who fear that a national internet could be used to mask human rights abuses



and hamper the efforts (communication/organization) of human rights activists inside the country and abroad. - Source: [Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty](#) - 10 February 2012

- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has adopted a regulation that requires governments to organize “necessary action” to halt any jamming of satellite broadcasts occurring in their jurisdiction. This decision was recently lauded by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. Representatives of the campaign believe that both the ITU and its member states should make efforts to monitor Iran’s compliance with this regulation as well as take any required steps to make certain that Iranian authorities cease their interference with satellite broadcasts. - Source: [Payvand Iran News](#) - 22 February 2012

3. Preparation

- A directive was issued by Iran’s Ministry of Education ordering the country’s schools to identify and report Bahá’í pupils to the ministry. This news follows a consistent pattern of Bahá’í targeting and expulsions in Iranian educational institutions. - Source: [Human Rights Activists News Agency \(HRANA\)](#) - 27 February 2012

4. International/Political Events

- United States Defence Secretary Leon Panetta cautioned that there is an emerging possibility that Israel could attack Iran over concerns related to Iran’s controversial uranium enrichment program. Panetta has predicted that Israel could strike as early as April, May, or June 2012 in order to prevent what Israeli officials perceive as a “zone of immunity” affording Iran the time to build a nuclear weapon, an event which would be perceived as a destabilizing occurrence in the region. - Source: [Reuters](#) - 2 February 2012
- A recent United Nations mission to Iran regarding its nuclear program has failed. Iran has received criticism from the United States regarding its failure to abide by guidelines set out by the International Atomic Energy Agency. - Source: [Reuters](#) - 22 February 2012
- A report by Amnesty International recorded a notable increase in state-sponsored repression in the lead-up to the 2 March 2012 Parliamentary Elections in Iran. The report records arrests of filmmakers, bloggers, human rights defenders, students, lawyers, journalists, political activists, and ethnic minorities. - Source: [Amnesty International](#) - 28 February 2012
- Canadian senators recently condemned the Iranian regime for its flagrant abuse of human rights. The inquiry was initiated by Senator Linda Frum on 7 February 2012



with follow-up sessions on 15 and 16 February 2012. - Source: [Canadian Bahá'í News Service](#) - 27 February 2012

Commentary

The possibility of an Israeli strike on Iran remains a potentially dangerous trigger event which could cause violent reprisals against the Bahá'í community, possibly including killings. Bahá'ís continue to be branded by the Iranian government and media as seditionists, spies, and monarchists who have plans to threaten the country's national security and the dominance of Islam. The Bahá'í world headquarters is situated in Haifa, Israel because the founder of the Bahá'í religion was exiled there by the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century. Although the Bahá'í temple was built prior to the foundation of the State of Israel, these historical truths have been grossly ignored and deliberately warped by state-sponsored propaganda efforts in Iran, which constantly frame Bahá'ís as agents of Israel and the United States. Thus, in the case of a military attack on Iran, it is likely that the regime would turn against its perceived internal threats rather than retaliate against its external enemies, which its military limitations would make difficult to do in any credible sense. Since they are constantly framed as being "Zionist agents," Bahá'ís make an obvious potential target for the regime in this scenario.