



THE SENTINEL PROJECT FOR GENOCIDE PREVENTION

Monthly Summary: Iranian Bahá'í Situation of Concern

March 2012

Prepared by Troy Powell

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. *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.
3. Human rights reports (Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran, Iran Human Rights, Bahá'í News Service)
4. Releases on bail

1. Polarization

Sentencing

- Four Bahá'í citizens (Anisa Dehqani, Kivan Dehqani, Ayah Anvari and Sanaz Tafazzoli) in Mashhad have received an 18-month prison sentence. The Bahá'í citizens were charged with “membership of the Bahá'í Administration and propaganda against the regime.” They were all tried on 22 and 23 February 2012. A fifth Bahá'í named Farhoud Eshtyaq faced trial in Isfahan where he resides. Of the five Bahá'ís, four accused in this case come from Isfahan. Kivan and Ayah were initially arrested in Isfahan on 27 June 2011 and then sent to the Ministry of Intelligence in Mashhad.
Source: [Human Rights Activist News Agency \(HRANA\)](#)
- Two Bahá'ís named Dari Amri and Mona Reza'i have been sentenced to one year in prison. They were charged with “propaganda against the regime by teaching the Bahá'í' faith.” Dari's arrest took place last summer after which he was released on bail after serving seven months in Prison. Mona who was the second defendant in this case had her sentence suspended for several years. She was also arrested last summer and freed on bail after serving 10 days in prison.
Source: [HRANA](#)



Questioning

- Within the past few recent months 14 Bahá'í citizens of Qorveh, Kurdistan were called to local offices of the Ministry of Intelligence. They were interrogated about Bahá'í meetings taking place in Qorveh, the membership of these meetings, and how they were organized. The intelligence personnel also questioned the Bahá'ís about the names of their relatives outside of Iran, their income, their relationships with non-Bahá'ís, and their interest in leaving the country.

Source: [Human Rights House of Iran \(RAHANA\)](#) - 8 March 2012

School Expulsions

- Bahá'í secondary school student Afrouz Dhabih of Sari was expelled from her school due to her Bahá'í beliefs. Afrouz was an exemplary student at the top of her school according to provincial examinations run by the Organization for the Development of Talented Students. Dhabih was previously denied admission to the school for talented students because of her Bahá'í beliefs in her fifth year of elementary school and the third year of secondary school.

Source: [PCED](#) (Iranian educational rights activist group) - 11 March 2012

- Bahá'í computer studies student Meshkat Shadepour at the Imam 'Ali University in Yazd was expelled due to his Bahá'í beliefs.

Source: [Bahá'í News Service](#) - 13 March 2012

Detention

- A family of three Bahá'ís from Kerman province will be held in custody for two months longer after their detention orders were extended. Bakhtiyar Rasekhi, his wife Farhnaz Na'imi and daughter Farin Rahemi were initially detained due to their religious beliefs for more than two months. The family was arrested by security forces that had raided a home where Bahá'ís were celebrating the Day of Iranian Youth. Farhnaz and Farin were eventually transferred to the general wing of the Kerman prison following a fifty-day stint in solitary confinement. As of this writing Bakhtiyar remains in solitary confinement.

Source: [RAHANA](#) - 10 March 2012

- Ten Bahá'ís previously arrested in Shiraz remain in prison, some of the family of the detained have made inquiries to the authorities in Shiraz while others have done the same in Tehran. An official from the revolutionary court of Tehran stated to one of the Bahá'í family members that “the Bahá'í have no right even to life itself [because] being a Bahá'í is a crime.”

Source: [RAHANA](#) - 10 March 2012



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- Four Bahá'í prisoners currently serving a 10-month sentence were denied parole. The prisoners - Vahdat Dana, Afshin Ehsaniyan, Keyvan Kerami, and Farham Ma'sumi - have served more than four month in Pir Banu prison. Despite being told by authorities that they could leave after fifty days (one-sixth of their prison terms) and despite inquiries made by their families they have not been permitted to leave. Some of the imprisoned Bahá'ís have serious health concerns. Vahdat currently has a heart condition and Keyvan Karami suffers from kidney stones. Both have been denied leave and medical treatment.

Source: [HRANA](#) - 30 March 2012

- Ten Bahá'ís from a group of 12 imprisoned for two months remain in prison. Their names are Yekta Fahandezh, Mezhdeh Falah, Mazhgan 'Amadi, Eyman Rahmat-Penah, Nima Dehqan Munshadi, Farshid Yazdani, Farid 'Amadi, Sina Sarikhani, Sam Jaberi and Houman Zara'i. After repeated queries by the family members of the imprisoned no clear information about the status of the prisoners has been provided by the authorities. The families have been unable to arrange a meeting with any judge or prosecutor.

Source: [HRANA](#) - 31 March 2012

Prison Terms

- Bahá'ís citizen Sharam Chiniyan Meyandoab a resident of Hassan Abad had his sentence confirmed by the review court. Sharam was summoned to serve his sentence and was sent to Evin prison. He was initially arrested in March 2009 and later released bail but had to use his business licence as bail. He was accused of insulting Islam by his neighbour.

Source: [Bahá'í News Service](#) - 4 March 2012

Prison Transfers

- One of the seven Bahá'í leaders (Afif Naeimi) currently serving a 20-year sentence in Raja'i Shahr prison had to be transferred to hospital to have a CT scan done on 7 March 2012. He currently suffers from an inflammation of the lymph glands which has been worsened by a lack of medical care during his imprisonment.

Source: [HRANA](#) - 10 March 2012

- Ten Bahá'ís recently arrested in Shiraz in early March 2012 were transferred to Kayan Abad women's prison and Adel Abad prison from Shiraz's Detention Centre 100 on 16 March 2012 a court letter notified families that they would be able to visit their imprisoned relatives however after waiting for a few hours only ten minutes of contact was allowed.

Source: [HRANA](#) - 22 March 2012



Searches / Arrests

- On 7 March 2012 agents from the Ministry of Intelligence searched the homes of Houriyeh Mohsani and Negin Ahmadiyan two Bahá'ís living in Mashhad. The intelligence agents seized computers, CDs, books, and religious imagery. The arrested Bahá'ís were taken to an unknown location.
Source: [HRANA](#)
- Security agents from the Ministry of Intelligence raided a home shared by seven Bahá'ís in Shiraz. Personal effects and religious items were confiscated. Two of the Bahá'ís living there (Kavus Samimi and Kambiz Habibi) are said to have been arrested and taken to Detention Centre 100 in Shiraz.
Source: [CHRR](#) - 17 March 2012

2. International / Political Events

- Three days before meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Barack Obama sternly warned Iran against building a nuclear weapon. Obama also took the opportunity to caution Israel against a pre-emptive strike on Iran. Although both leaders hold stern positions over the Iranian nuclear issue, Netanyahu appeared to want Obama to more forcefully define the nuclear threshold that Iran must not cross while Obama attempted to dissuade Netanyahu from unilateral action, giving diplomacy and sanctions primacy in dealing with the issue.
Source: [Reuters](#) - 2 March 2012
- Dozens of Iranian banks have been barred from doing business with Western firms due to a new set of sanctions aimed at preventing Iran from developing nuclear weaponry. The initiative was spearheaded by the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT). SWIFT is a secure private network used by a majority of the world's banks to facilitate messages that lead to the transfer of money across international borders.
Source: [Huffington Post / Associated Press](#) - 15 March 2012
- The United States Treasury Department has added four Iranian firms as well as two individuals to its sanctions list due to their alleged affiliation with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or connection to country's national maritime carrier. The blacklist targets the country's Maritime Industrial Company SADRA and Deep Offshore Technology firm PJS. The list alleges that these organizations are controlled by the IRGC. Another designation was made by the Treasury declaring Modality Limited and Malship Shipping Agency to be Maltese-based front organizations for the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL). It is notable that the IRISL was blacklisted back in 2008 for providing logistical support to Iran's ballistic-missile program.
Source: [Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty](#) - 28 March 2012



- Note: For information on non-state actors affiliated (officially and unofficially) with the IRGC see our 2010 [Supplementary Report](#) on the threat of genocide to the Bahá'í community of Iran.

3. Human Rights Reports

- The [Iranian Human Rights](#) (IHR) organization has released its [annual report](#) detailing the efforts of Iranian authorities to repress dissidents and civil society. The report was presented in press conferences at the Italian Senate, Paris City Hall, and the University of Oslo. The report details several disturbing trends in Iran, among them are the following:
 - At least 676 people were executed in 2011 (the highest number in an 11 year trend)
 - Only 416 of the 676 executions (62%) were announced by Iranian officials
 - 65 of the executions were carried out in public (the highest number in 10 years)
 - At least 15 women were executed in 2011 - 13 of these executions were not announced by Iranian officials
 - One man was executed due to a conviction for “apostasy”
 - More than 80% of those executed were convicted of drug trafficking
 - Only 9% of those officially executed for drug charges were fully identified.
 - The IHR has received reports that secret or “un-announced” executions have taken place in more than 15 prisons
- A report from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran covers developments in the region up to August 2011. According to the report, 97 Bahá'ís were imprisoned, 199 were free on bail, and 26 were free without bail pending trial while 96 Bahá'ís were sentenced but free pending appeal or summons to begin serving their sentences. Five Bahá'ís were living in internal exile.
Source: [Iran Press Watch](#)
- A [summary](#) of events unfolding in Iran has recently been published by the [Bahá'í News Service](#). The summary asserts that “the cases of some 430 Bahá'ís are still active with authorities” the summary provides an extensive list of various kinds of persecution against the Bahá'í community, among the list include:
 - Denial or confiscation of business licences
 - Court proceedings where Bahá'ís are accused of promoting propaganda against the regime
 - Desecration and destruction of Bahá'í cemeteries and harassment over burial rights
 - Denial of work opportunities
 - Denial of rightful inheritances to Bahá'ís



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- Dissemination - including in official news media - of misinformation about Bahá'í and incitement of hatred against them
- Attempts by authorities to get Bahá'ís to spy on other Bahá'ís
- Denial of pension benefits
- Threatening phone calls and letters made to members of the Bahá'í community
- Denial of access to publishing or copying facilities for Bahá'í literature

4. Releases on Bail

- Two Bahá'ís - Samira Momtazian and Payvand Taslimi - who were previously arrested on 3 and 5 February 2012 were released on a bail of 100 million tumans (\$90,000 US / 67,000 euros).
Source: [RAHANA](#) - 10 March 2012
- Three Bahá'ís - Navid Nabili, Behnaz Hudadzadeh, and Fattaneh Hajipour - have been released on a bail of 60 million tuman (\$53,000 US / 40,000 euros). They were a part of a group of 10 Bahá'ís arrested last month.
Source: [HRANA](#) - 18 March 2012
- Natolli Derakshan, a Bahá'í poet residing in Sari who had been arrested in February 2012 was released on a bail of 200 million rials (\$18,000 US / 13,000 euros). Derakshan was charged with propaganda against the regime. He previously wrote a letter to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei raising the issue of human rights abuses against the Bahá'í community in Iran.
Source: [PCED](#) - 28 March 2012

Commentary and Analysis

The arrest and sentencing of Abdolfattah Soltani follows a trend of the Iranian authorities targeting and rendering ineffective influential Bahá'í leaders and advocates. It is noteworthy that his sentencing mirrors that of the BIHE facilitators in length and severity. Historically, this anti-Bahá'í strategy fits within a wider four-pronged stratagem that involves (1) attacks on Bahá'í leadership, (2) economic persecution, (3) social isolation, and (4) ethnic cleansing. These were detailed in specifics in a [paper](#) by Friedrich Affolter addressing the ongoing ideological campaign against Iranian Bahá'ís.

This month has seen a growing number of reports criticizing the Iranian judicial system for its processes and outcomes. Both international and national entities have called the officials of Iran to release its religious prisoners and end their abject human rights violations.

The report on Iran's increase in executions is particularly troubling in light of the growing number of Bahá'ís whose status becomes unknown following imprisonment and/or have limited contact with their families or legal counsel. The UN has previously condemned Iran's death penalty for alleged narcotics convictions as it is a disproportionate punishment for the



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charge and a violation against international convention. Historically, the Iranian regime has failed to convince the international community of the threat that they perceive the Bahá'í community to pose to the regime and civil society. A similar observation was made in the IHR report addressing Iran's disproportionate number of drug trafficking charges. If the Iranian regime is indeed smearing political and religious dissidents with charges that nationally warrant the highest capital punishment this may warrant the greater use of violence against Bahá'ís and other repressed groups in Iran.

The latest round of sanctions is certain to worsen the Iranian economy. The extent of the country's economic disenfranchisement of religious and ethnic minorities was detailed in a [report](#) by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). In light of the latest developments on the sanctions issued on Iran, it is obvious that the country's ethnic and religious minorities will be the hardest hit. Social psychologist Ervin Staub has observed that there are a variety of factors which combine to make a social climate amenable to group violence and ultimately genocide, all of which are currently present in Iran: (1) the exclusion of minority groups from one's own "moral universe," (2) difficult life conditions, (3) a political culture that fosters authoritarianism.

Additionally, in a recent [interview](#) with Al Jazeera, Babak Emamian, chairman of the British-Iranian Business Association commented on the latest sanctions by SWIFT, warning that Iran could soon become a "low-demand" economy, causing business in the country to have greater financial struggles as the national currency gradually becomes devalued and avenues for financial trade are limited. Emamian also mentioned that responses to sanction usually illicit the response of two kinds of business efforts; a moralist type that seeks to conduct "best" practices (usually in accord with international principles) and an exploitive type ("sanction-busting") that seeks to make profit by exploiting "underground" opportunities that become more appealing in the wake of sanctions.

This is significant and cautionary as Iran has garnered some degree of international support from countries (e.g. Russia, China, and Syria) which have similar human rights abuse profiles. Thus sanctions, while pressuring regimes to change in response to isolation from the wider international community, are simultaneously hurting the most vulnerable minorities of the population, while emboldening the regime to seek support from countries in similar predicaments. In fact, it was recently [rumoured](#) that Iranian officials have been providing logistical support to the Assad regime in Syria and its efforts to crack down on protesters.