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IRAN INTENSIFIED ASSAULT ON BAHA'I MINORITY

Iran's persecuted Baha'i minority are suffering escalated attacks on their human rights. Since 31 July 2022, the authorities have raided dozens of Baha'i houses, detained at least 30 people, and subjected many more to interrogations, electronic ankle bracelets and threats of imprisonment in relation to their Baha'i faith. They have also ramped up confiscation and demolition of Baha'i properties.

Iranian authorities are escalating their attacks on the human rights of Iran's persecuted Baha'i minority. Since 31 July 2022, the authorities have raided and seized valuable belongings from dozens of Baha'i houses, arbitrarily detained at least 30 people, and subjected many more to interrogations, electronic ankle bracelets and threats of imprisonment solely due to their Baha'i faith. The Ministry of Intelligence announced on 1 August that those arrested were "core members of Baha'i espionage party" who "propagated Baha'i teachings" and "sought to infiltrate ... the educational sector across the country, especially kindergartens." According to the Baha'i International Community (BIC), at least 68 individuals are currently imprisoned on account of their faith including those in prison from as early as 2013. According to the UN, over 1000 Baha'i individuals are currently at risk of imprisonment, including 26 people in Shiraz who were sentenced to up to five years in prison in June 2022 after an unfair mass trial.

The authorities have also ramped up confiscation of Baha'i properties. On 2 August, authorities bulldozed six Baha'i houses and confiscated over 20 hectares of land owned by 25 Baha'i individuals in Roshankouh village, Mazandaran province. As a result, at least 18 Baha'i farmers have been denied their source of livelihood. According to state media, the demolitions were carried out in the presence of several senior prosecution and executive officials. Three victims told Amnesty International that over 200 security officials, including plainclothes intelligence agents and riot police, sealed off the village and its access road from 6am to 4pm. Victims said security forces confiscated the mobile phones of villagers to prevent filming, and beat and/or pepper sprayed over 20 people, including several older men, who had peacefully gathered to protest the bulldozing. Security forces fired into the air to disperse crowds and detained two men for several hours after beating them severely. Since 2016, authorities have been attempting to appropriate Baha'i properties in Roshankouh under the false pretext that they have encroached on protected landscapes. In another case, an appeal court upheld a verdict on 25 June, authorizing the confiscation of 18 Baha'i properties in Semnan province on grounds that the owners are leading figures of the "Baha'i sect" which "engages in illegal activities and espionage to the advantage of foreigners."

Write to the Head of the Judiciary and the Prosecutor's urging them to:

- immediately and unconditionally release all the Baha'i individuals who were recently detained as well as those in prison from before who are targeted solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion
- quash all convictions and sentences imposed on this basis
- immediately stop the destruction and confiscation of Baha'i properties, provide effective redress to all those harmed, and ensure that Baha'i people in Roshankouh, Semnan and elsewhere have access to their properties without obstruction
- end discrimination against the Baha'i minority in law and practice, including in access to employment, housing, and agricultural, industrial, trade and other activities necessary for the enjoyment of social, economic and cultural rights

Write to:

Head of the Judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,
Prosecutor of Sari, Mohammad Karimi & Prosecutor of Semnan, Mohammad Sharif Ebrahimi
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15
1050 Bruxelles
Belgium

Email: secretariat@iranembassy.be

Salutation: Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, Mr Mohammad Karimi and Mr Mohammad Sharif Ebrahimi,

Additional information

Of the 30 Baha'i individuals arbitrarily arrested by Ministry of intelligence officials since 31 July 2022, nine were subsequently released on heavy bail amounts and another nine were subjected to electronic ankle bracelets restricting their freedom of movement. The remaining 12 continue to be detained. The arrests were carried out in various cities including Ghazvin, Karaj, Mahshahr, Roshankouh, Sari, Shiraz, Tehran and Yazd. Those arrested on 31 July include prominent members of the Baha'i community and former prisoners of conscience Mahvash Sabet, Fariba Kamalabadi and Afif Naimi, who remain detained.

The names of the 26 Baha'i men and women in Shiraz who are at risk of unjust imprisonment after a court convicted them on charges related to their identity as Baha'i adherents are Saeed Hasani, Shadi Sadegh Aghdam, Shamim Akhlaghi, Sahba Farahbakhsh, Parisa Ruhizadegan, Esmail Rusta, Bahareh Norouzi, Behnam Azizpour, Samareh Ashnaie, Farbod Shadman, Farzad Shadman, Ramin Shirvani, Rezvan Yazdani, Soroush Iqani, Sahba Moslehi, Ahdieh Enayati, La'la Salehi, Mozhgan Gholampour, Marjan Gholampour, Maryam Eslami Mahdiabadi, Mahyar Sefidi Miandoab, Nabil Tahzeeb, Noushin Zanhari, Yekta Fahandej Saadi, Varga Kaviani and Nasim Kashaninejad.

According to state media, state entities involved in the demolitions of 2 August 2022 included the

Office of the Prosecutor of Sari in Mazandaran province, the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad, the Natural Resources Organization, the Department of Justice, and the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran. According to victims interviewed by Amnesty International, for decades, the village of Roshankouh had around 70 Baha'i houses and less than 10 houses which are owned by Muslim families. In 2016, local authorities defined the boundaries of the village and ruled that over half of the 70 Baha'i houses were within protected landscapes belonging to the state, despite property deeds and aerials maps showing the contrary. Since then, the authorities have repeatedly denied building permits to families who own land within the village's historic residential area and want to either construct new houses or renovate and extend their old derelict homes. The authorities have also refused to connect between 30 and 40 Baha'i homes to the gas network. In October 2020, local authorities marked as protected forests around 12 hectares of land, which sustained the livelihood of about eight Baha'i farmers, and erected a sign which warned that any cultivation of the lands concerned was banned and offenders would be prosecuted. In August 2021, the authorities demolished two Baha'i houses that were under construction. In November 2021, they confiscated about one hectare of land, which was the source of livelihood for two farming Baha'i families.

In a separate case, Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court in Semnan issued a verdict on 30 January 2022 that approved a request by the Headquarters for the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, an institute controlled by Iran's Supreme Leader, to confiscate 18 properties in Semnan province, which belong to six Baha'is. The verdict, which has been reviewed by Amnesty International, justified the confiscation on grounds that the owners were prominent Baha'i figures who intended to sell or rent the properties to financially support "the unlawful organizational objectives ... of the perverse Baha'i sect." Branch 54 of the Appeal Court in Tehran province upheld the verdict on 25 June 2022. Over the past decade, local authorities in Semnan have forcibly closed at least 20 Baha'i stores, shut down and confiscated the equipment of two Baha'i manufacturing units and confiscated or blocked access to the lands of two Baha'i businesses involved in agriculture and animal farming.

For decades, Iranian authorities have laid unfounded accusations of espionage for Israel against members of the Baha'i community solely due to the fact the Baha'i World Centre is near Haifa in Israel, where the shrines of the founders of the Baha'i faith are located. Confiscation of Baha'i properties and forcible closure of Baha'i businesses are carried out pursuant to an official policy, adopted by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Supreme Leader in 1991, which provides "regarding the Baha'i question ... that the government's dealings with them must be such that their progress and development are blocked". The policy adds that individuals "shall be denied employment if they identify as Baha'is" and "denied any position of influence, such as in the educational sector."