

ONE COUNTRY

“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens” – Bahá’u’lláh

Newsletter of the
Bahá’í International Community
March 2012-May 2012
Volume 22, Issue 2

HUMAN RIGHTS

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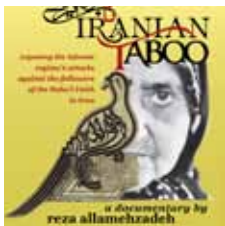
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Iran’s justice system deeply flawed, says UN special investigator

GENEVA — Last year, the UN Human Rights Council decided to appoint a new independent investigator to monitor human rights in Iran, after nine years without one.

This March that investigator made his first full report to the Council, offering not only a sharp critique of Iran’s failure to meet international human rights standards, but also a stern indictment of the country’s justice system.

“Violations of due process rights are chronic, reducing the likelihood of a fair trial,” wrote Ahmed Shaheed, the new Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. “A number of vaguely defined security provisions within the Islamic Penal Code are applied in ways that contravene international human rights law and unduly limit freedom of expression, association and assembly,” he said.

About two weeks later, on 22 March, the Council voted overwhelmingly to extend Dr. Shaheed’s mandate, by a vote of 22 to 5, with 20 abstentions.

“This result is a clear indication of the Council’s concern over Iran’s abysmal record on human rights,” said Diane Ala’i, the Bahá’í International Community’s representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

As the new Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, Dr. Shaheed’s opinion carries considerable weight with the international community. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Maldives, Dr. Shaheed has been a strong advocate for human rights throughout the world.

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Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. A former foreign minister of the Maldives, Dr. Shaheed was appointed to his post in June 2011. (UN photo/Rick Bajornas)

The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges

IN BRIEF

- **Women's empowerment begins with the understanding that the equality of women and men is more than a desired condition to be achieved for the common good; it is a dimension of human reality.**
- **Current world economic and political structures tend to divide the world into producers and users of knowledge.**
- **Yet, as the right of every human being, access to knowledge promotes meaningful and informed participation in decision-making.**
- **It is imperative that educational processes assist rural women and girls to see themselves as active agents of their own learning.**

[Editor's note: The following Perspective is adapted from the statement of the Bahá'í International Community to the 56th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which was held 27 February-9 March 2012.]

The critical role of women in advancing agricultural and rural development, and in ensuring food security, has been widely acknowledged. Member States have committed to providing rural women with equal access to productive resources and to markets — recognizing their agency in rural and agricultural development. Despite progress made, rural women continue to have low levels of income, sparse access to education and health services, limited job security as well as limited land and inheritance rights. Again and again, their needs as well as their contributions are relegated to the margins of policy development and budgetary considerations. In addition to the entrenched patterns of discrimination, unsustainable development practices, climate change, and violence against women intensify the burden placed on women and their families.

When viewed in the broader context, the situation of rural women is but one of the symptoms of a social order characterized by inequity, violence and insecurity. As such, the vision of women's empowerment must go beyond making room for women to participate in society within the present social order, as this will not suffice to end the marginalization of rural populations and the entrenched patterns of discrimination against women. The

empowerment of women requires profound changes in the minds and hearts of people and in the very structures of society. It begins with the understanding that the equality of women and men is more than a desired condition to be achieved for the common good; it is a dimension of human reality. In those aspects that make human beings human, women and men are fundamentally equal. The goal at hand, then, is not only the empowerment of women for the advancement of agriculture and rural life; it is the full engagement of women with men in the construction of a new social order. Though marginalized by present-day economic and development frameworks, women are neither victims nor simply under-resourced members of society. In fact, they represent the greatest source of untapped potential in the global effort to eradicate poverty and advance collective prosperity.

How, then, can we conceive of empowerment in a way that will begin to transform the current economic order and the condition of its rural women? We offer three considerations, which address access to knowledge, the nature of full participation, and the importance of exploring diverse economic arrangements.

First, access to knowledge is the right of every human being. Yet the patterns of knowledge generation and diffusion in the current world order tend to divide the world into producers and users of knowledge. This has deep implications for the quality and legitimacy of education, technology, decision-making, and governance. For example, despite the fact that most agricultural work in developing countries

is carried out by low-income women, the primary shapers and users of agricultural technologies have been men. A key challenge is how to strengthen women's capacities to identify technological needs, and to create and adapt technologies in light of social needs and resource constraints. Reforming the present flow of knowledge — from “North” to “South”; from urban to rural; from men to women — will free development from narrowly conceived conceptions of “modernization.”

Patterns of knowledge generation and diffusion in the current world order divide the world into producers and users of knowledge. This has deep implications for the quality and legitimacy of education, technology, decision-making, and governance.

Second, access to knowledge promotes meaningful and informed participation in decision-making at the family, community and higher levels of social administration. Thus, while social action may involve the provision of goods and services in some form, its primary concern must be to build capacity within a given population to participate in creating a better world. It is imperative, then, that the educational process associated with such capacity-building assist rural women and girls to see themselves as active agents of their own learning, as the driving force of an ongoing effort to apply knowledge to improve their own material and spiritual condition and to contribute to the betterment of their communities.

Third, the increased flows of goods, services, capital and labor within existing structures and processes benefit only a very few at the expense of many. This has given rise to the impoverishment of rural communities, the exploitation of vulnerable populations — women and children in particular — and the devastation of the environment. Such economic pressures have also led to the disappearance of diversified, ecologically sustainable



A woman farmer at the farmer's market in Cappadocia, Turkey. The image was taken by photographer Mick Minard as part of an effort, known as Suzanne's Project, that seeks to train Turkish women farmers on the best practices and basic skills to sustain and scale profitable agricultural businesses. Ms. Minard presented the project and a visual narrative to report on the project's social impact on 1 March 2012 at the offices of the Bahá'í International Community as part of a side event to the 56th UN Commission on the Status of Women. For more, see "Forum at UN discusses role of rural women farmers," page 5. (Photograph © Mick Minard)

small-scale agriculture, mostly found in rural areas, greatly impacting women who carry out the bulk of the work. Local economies that have historically valued collective well-being over competition and individuals have grown increasingly insecure. To note these realities is not to present a naïve idea of local economies but rather to stress that diverse economic arrangements need to be given space to develop.

This statement has tried to highlight three challenges that need to be addressed in the effort to empower rural women. While many more challenges remain, the Bahá'í International Community hopes that exploration of these issues can further the discourse on the role of rural women in advancing their own development and that of their communities. Moreover, it is hoped that such exploration will help to link these issues to the broader aim of promoting rural women's full engagement — shoulder to shoulder with men — in the construction of a more just social order.

In Morocco, symposium explores religion, spirituality and education

IN BRIEF

- **An International Symposium on Religion, Spirituality, and Education for Human Flourishing brought together representatives from the world's religions — including the Bahá'í Faith.**
- **Co-convened by the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the symposium focused on how young people can be better educated about religion and spirituality, in order to address such issues as economic injustice and environmental degradation.**

MARRAKECH, Morocco — What is spirituality? How can religious education encourage it? And what role do both religion and spirituality play in fostering human well-being?

Those were among the questions considered by representatives from the world's religions — including Ming Hwee Chong of the Bahá'í International Community — at the “International Symposium on Religion, Spirituality, and Education for Human Flourishing,” held here 24-26 February 2012.

The event — co-convened by the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP) and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations — encouraged discussion about how young people can be better educated about religion and spirituality, in order to address such present-day issues as

economic injustice and environmental degradation.

“The world today is facing a series of unprecedented challenges,” said Scherto Gill, secretary general of GHFP and convener of the symposium. “At the same time, we are also faced with tremendous opportunities, where humans can unite and live together in global solidarity with each other, within a greater global community that works towards the common good.”

To meet such challenges and maximize opportunities, she said, the world needs to redefine its concept of “human flourishing” away from a purely economic growth model to one that includes concepts of justice, spirituality and an understanding of wider community.

“Meaning, connectedness, and moral ethics are derived from the spiritual



Participants from the world's religions attended the “International Symposium on Religion, Spirituality, and Education for Human Flourishing,” held in Marrakech, 24-26 February 2012.

Forum at UN discusses role of rural women farmers



Alice Kachere of the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (left) and Cesarie Kantarama, a Rwandan farmer, participated in an interactive forum on "Building Capacity among Global Rural Women," held 1 March at the United Nations offices of the Bahá'í International Community in New York.

dimension of being human," said Dr. Gill. "So there is a pressing need to educate in order to develop a deeper awareness of the spiritual dimensions of our lives."

Participants described the symposium as thought-provoking and inspiring. Among them, Jocelyn Armstrong — a New Zealand-based educator — said it helped her to understand the importance of taking a holistic approach to religious education.

"You can discuss issues like honesty and integrity in the classroom, and then look at how religions encourage those virtues," she said, "or how religions value the environment."

Diane Evans, a chaplain at Hereford Sixth Form College in the United Kingdom, said correct knowledge is often lacking about religious beliefs. "The more we can come together to talk about how to improve religious education, the more we can hopefully put into place programs that can eradicate a lot of the tensions," she said.

The deliberations were inspired by 20 papers submitted by the participants, including a working document from the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) which explored how concepts of religion and "human flourishing" can be better integrated into education.

"This led to a discussion about the difference between religious education and spiritual education," said the BIC representative, Ming Hwee Chong.

"It is only through education that the latent potential of every human being can develop, be expressed, and ultimately serve to benefit the individual and his or her community," said Mr. Chong.

NEW YORK — Listening to and supporting rural women is fundamental to ending poverty and hunger, and achieving peace and development that is sustainable.

That was the message from Michelle Bachelet, executive director of UN Women, who opened the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women here on 27 February 2102.

The main theme of the 56th Commission was "the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges."

To support the theme, the Bahá'í International Community issued a statement [see page 2] and hosted a forum on 1 March, co-sponsored by the World Farmers Organization (WFO), offering a space for rural women farmers to share their experiences.

The story of one — Cesarie Kantarama from Rwanda — was typical of the challenges that face many of

them. When she started out she had little land and no capital or support. "But once I joined the women farmers' association, I started to get training and knowledge which reinforced my confidence," said Ms. Kantarama. "It really starts when you are a member of an organization that gives you the confidence to seek out other opportunities and feel productive."

The importance of access to knowledge was reinforced by Alice Kachere of the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi. "You can give women better seeds, but if they don't know how to use those seeds, it means nothing," she said.

WFO president Robert Carlson emphasized Michelle Bachelet's point about the importance of careful listening. "We can't impose our views of what rural women farmers need," he said. "There has to be some local involvement that gives direction on how their needs are to be assisted. They need to set their goals."

Inequality between rich and poor highlighted by UN roundtable

Ming Hwee Chong, pictured center, representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, addresses a panel discussion held at the UN as part of this year's session of the Commission for Social Development. Pictured far left is Jomo Kwame Sundaram, UN Assistant Secretary General for Economic Development.



IN BRIEF

- **Inequalities between the rich and poor have grown worldwide, demanding a critical re-thinking of traditional approaches to poverty eradication.**
- **At a side event to the 2012 UN Commission for Social Development, panelists discussed structural causes of such inequities, including the “commodification of man and nature.”**
- **A BIC statement on the issue said relationships of dominance in the world contribute to such inequalities.**

UNITED NATIONS — While the economic crisis has led many to focus on inequalities at the national level, the gap between rich and poor internationally has widened — and also needs to be examined.

That was among the themes raised at a roundtable discussion on 1 February 2012, held as part of the 50th session of the Commission for Social Development, which ran 1-10 February and focused on the priority theme of “poverty eradication.”

Titled “Equitable Societies: A Roundtable Discussion on the Underlying Assumptions of the Relationship between Poverty and Wealth,” the event was organized by the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) and co-sponsored by ATD Fourth World.

Held in UN Conference Room D, the discussion brought together top-level UN diplomats, officials from UN agencies, and representatives of non-governmental organizations.

Ambassador Jorge Valero — Permanent Representative for

Venezuela to the UN and Chair of the Commission for Social Development — blamed growing inequality on the excesses of global capitalism.

“Inequality and poverty, climate change and the destruction of ecosystems are outstanding issues on the international agenda,” said Ambassador Valero.

“These calamities can only be effectively addressed by attacking the structural causes that generate them: a consumerist, selfish and predatory global system that is based on the commodification of man and nature.”

Jomo Kwame Sundaram, UN Assistant Secretary General for Economic Development, said that while the issue of inequality is often examined from the national viewpoint, two-thirds of global inequality stems from differences between countries.

International differences are “very, very stark,” he said, noting that such inequalities have increased over the last three decades.

“The big promise of financial globalization was that if you ease restrictions, there will be a free flow

of capital, and it will flow from rich to poor. This didn't happen. Capital flowed uphill, from the poor to the rich," said Dr. Sundaram.

Other participants in the panel included: Isabel Ortiz, associate director of policy and practice at UNICEF; Christine Bockstal, chief of the technical cooperation and country operations group for the social security department of the International Labour Organization; and Sara Burke, a senior policy analyst at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Dr. Ortiz reported that the top 20 percent of the world's population has more than 80 percent of the world's income — but the poorest 20 percent have less than one percent of the global income.

"National redistribution is not enough to address inequality," she said. "There is a strong link between high income inequality and social unrest and economic instability."

"National redistribution is not enough to address inequality. There is a strong link between high income inequality and social unrest and economic instability."

— Isabel Ortiz, associate director of policy and practice at UNICEF

In his remarks, Ming Hwee Chong of the Bahá'í International Community drew attention to recent remarks made by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon about income inequality at all levels increasing over the last 25 years, posing a serious barrier worldwide to poverty eradication and social integration.

Mr. Chong said critical questions need to be asked regarding the relationship between poverty eradication and the economic extremes that now exist in the world.

Introducing a BIC statement prepared for the Commission, Mr. Chong noted that relationships of dominance



Among the top-level UN diplomats brought together for a discussion on Wednesday 1 February 2012 was Ambassador Jorge Valero, pictured left, Permanent Representative for Venezuela to the UN and chair of the Commission for Social Development. Also present were Christine Bockstal, center, of the International Labour Organization; and Sara Burke, right, senior policy analyst at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

— one nation over another, one race over another, or one class or gender over another — contribute to inequitable access to resources and knowledge.

The statement also expresses concern that a "materialistic worldview, which underpins much of modern economic thinking, reduces concepts of value, human purpose and human interactions to the self-interested pursuit of material wealth."

Mr. Chong said that while much attention has been paid to the political, policy and transactional dimensions of the current crisis, the aim of the discussion was to collaborate on "creating a space to dig deeper in order to bring to the surface some of the underlying assumptions that shape our economic and social reality."

[Note: the full BIC statement to the Commission can be read online at: <http://www.bic.org/statements/initial-considerations-regarding-elimination-extremes-poverty-and-wealth>]

In Chile, construction of House of Worship reaches important milestone



A computer-generated rendition of the Bahá'í House of Worship under construction in Santiago, Chile, simulating how it will appear at dusk. (Image © Hariri Pontarini Architects)

IN BRIEF

- **When completed, the Bahá'í House of Worship in Chile will be the last such temple erected to serve an entire continent.**
- **Its innovative design consists of nine translucent elements that rise from the ground, floating over a reflecting pool, to be set in the hills of Peñalolén, Santiago, at the foot of the Andes.**

SANTIAGO, Chile — A significant milestone has been reached in the building of the Bahá'í House of Worship here with the signing of contracts essential to its construction.

The innovative design for the Temple consists of nine translucent elements that rise from the ground — giving the impression of floating over a reflecting pool — and meet at a central oculus, 30 meters above.

The Temple is to be built in the hills of Peñalolén, Santiago, at the foot of the Andes. Excavation and grading work for the foundation and plaza, begun in November 2010, has been completed ahead of schedule.

The building's skeletal framework will support 500 tons of exterior and interior cladding. The outer surface will consist of 3,000 square meters of panels made with an entirely new

method of casting glass. Some 2,000 square meters of robotically cut and carved translucent marble will create a luminous interior ceiling.

When completed, the Bahá'í House of Worship in Chile will be the last such temple erected to serve an entire continent. There are seven other Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the world, in Australia, Germany, India, Panama, Samoa, Uganda, and the United States, each designated to serve a continental region.

After 10 months of tendering and negotiation, the contract for the superstructure and cladding was awarded on 16 February to Gartner Steel and Glass GmbH. Based in Germany, the company is well-known for developing and constructing complex three-dimensional structures.

"We have reached a wonderful moment," said Siamak Hariri of

the Canadian firm Hariri Pontarini Architects. “The fulfillment of eight years of research, design development, engineering, the preparation of complete tender documents in both Spanish and English, inventing and casting the glass — all of this alongside finding and purchasing a marvelous site and preparing the necessary permits.”

“We had to prove to ourselves and the fabricators that constructing this building was not only achievable, but that it was achievable under very complex design constraints, budgetary limitations and severe seismic conditions,” said Mr. Hariri.

State-of-the-art computational modeling and analysis had to be used to enhance the resistance of the temple to severe earthquakes.

“The geometry and the curvature make this building very complex, each element acting together with the others,” he said. “Glass and stone are so brittle and the tolerances are so tight. All the joints are recessed which means the system has to be very stiff and completely water-tight. But the foundation has to deal with any rapid movements in the earth.”

Along with the contract for the superstructure and cladding, other important contracts have also recently been signed. The construction of the foundation of the building and all concrete work was awarded on 30 January to Chilean contractor, Fernández Wood Constructora S.A. On 17 February, Paris-based EDM-Projets was signed to provide the interior cladding.

Siamak Hariri attributes the progress made so far to “an excellent team dynamic at play on the project.”

New book and website

In a related development, a new book and website have been launched to meet growing interest in the Temple and what it represents.

The book, *Donde Brilla La Luz* (“Where the Light Shines”), includes reflections on the impact that the House of Worship is intended to make on the surrounding society. It has been written by Daniel Duhart of Chile,



On 23 January 2012, the Bahá'í House of Worship Project Team was joined at the construction site by project consultants from Canada and Chile, as well as the contractors from Gartner Steel and Glass GmbH., and Fernández Wood Constructora S.A.

Helen Mirkovitch-Kohm of Costa Rica and Jairo Roldan of Colombia.

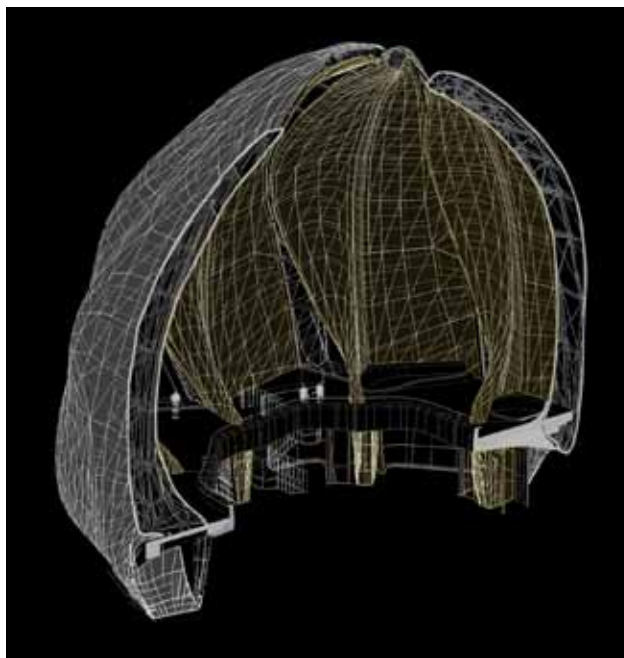
“All three of us have a common love for Latin America and its destiny,” said Mr. Duhart, noting that the book reflects on the needs of the continent and how the Bahá'í teachings can contribute towards endeavors in Latin America aimed at building a just and unified society.

Also providing information is a new website in Spanish, Portuguese and English at <http://templo.bahai.cl>

The site provides facts about the building's design and construction,

offers a contact page and a section about the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings, and answers frequently asked questions about the Temple and the concepts that inspire it.

“There is a growing realization that the construction of this Temple represents more than just an extraordinary building,” said Mr. Duhart. “Parallel to this, there is another construction process going on — of community building, in which increasing numbers of all ages are advancing together on a path of service to humanity.”



A computer-generated sectional view of the Bahá'í House of Worship, under construction in Santiago, Chile, showing the relationship between the building's superstructure and cladding. (Image © Hariri Pontarini Architects)

Persecution intensifies as anniversary of imprisonment of Bahá'í leaders is marked

In London, a mobile billboard calling for freedom for Iran's seven Bahá'í leaders approaches the historic Westminster Abbey on 1 April 2012. The display was part of a worldwide campaign, sponsored by United4Iran, to mark the combined total of 10,000 days that the seven Bahá'í prisoners had altogether spent in confinement since their arrests in 2008. Mobile billboards were also displayed in 11 other major world cities.



IN BRIEF

- **This May marked the fourth anniversary of the wrongful arrest and imprisonment seven Iranian Bahá'í leaders.**
- **Their 20-year sentences are the longest for any prisoner of conscience in Iran.**
- **Governments, human rights groups, prominent persons, and people of good will worldwide have expressed concern over their plight, and that of six imprisoned Bahá'í educators and the other 90-some Bahá'ís currently in Iranian jails.**

GENEVA — In May, seven former leaders of the Iranian Bahá'í community began their fifth year in prison amid an intensification of the persecution of their co-religionists.

The seven prisoners each face the bleak prospect of 16 more years in jail for crimes they did not commit.

The month of May also marked the first anniversary of raids on homes of Bahá'ís associated with an informal initiative offering higher education to community members barred from university by the government because of their religious beliefs. Nine educators later received harsh prison sentences.

The detention and conviction of these and other Bahá'ís is a reflection of the oppression facing all Iranians who desire freedom and the progress of their country, said the Universal House of Justice in an 11 May 2012 letter to the Bahá'ís of Iran.

In the letter, the international governing body of the worldwide Bahá'í community noted how the intensifying cruelty towards the Iranian Bahá'í community is now also engulfing children. Among recent attacks, the letter highlighted the confinement in prison for a

few days of a two-year old boy with his mother, the beating and burning of the hand of a school pupil by her teacher after the girl did not take part in congregational prayers, and the violent abduction by officials of a mother before the eyes of her two young children.

“From schoolchildren to the elderly, from the seven former leaders to ordinary villagers, no Bahá'í in Iran is spared the cruel and calculated persecution which the Iranian government and its agents are constantly devising,” said Diane Ala'i, the Bahá'í International Community's representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

The seven Bahá'ís have been given the longest sentences — 20 years each — of any of the prisoners of conscience currently held in Iranian jails, Ms. Ala'i said. “Conditions are harsh with poor food and bad sanitation and most of them have experienced significant health problems. Yet during these four years, not one of them has been granted any type of furlough — something to which a prisoner is entitled under Iranian law.”

The Universal House of Justice observed that, over the past year,

governments and organizations have continued to defend the rights of Bahá'ís and other oppressed Iranians. Among such supporters, statesmen and officials, including Muslim politicians in both the East and the West, civil agencies, universities and prominent personalities have declared the persecution of Bahá'ís to be unjust and have called for it to cease.

Continuing global outcry

Recent action has included the unanimous passing of a resolution in the United States Senate on 29 March calling for the release of the seven leaders.

Three days later, the plight of the prisoners captured the public's attention in 12 of the world's major cities, when widespread publicity organized by United4Iran marked the combined total of 10,000 days that the seven had spent behind bars.

On 14 May, the Canadian House of Commons held a debate on human rights in Iran, and many MPs focused on the case of the seven.

The seven former leaders, who were members of an ad-hoc national-level group that attended to the spiritual and social needs of Iran's Baha'i community, are Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz



On 18 September 2011, tens of thousands of people marched through the streets of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil — an example of the activities taken by ordinary people around the world in defense of the Bahá'ís of Iran and the principle of religious freedom.

Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm. Ms. Sabet was detained on 5 March 2008. Her six colleagues were arrested in raids on their homes on 14 May 2008.

During six brief court sessions, devoid of due legal process, the seven faced trumped-up charges that were all rejected completely and categorically by the defendants.

The five men are being held at Gohardasht prison, some 50 kilometers west of Tehran. The two women are in Evin prison in the capital.

In May 2011, some 39 homes of Bahá'ís associated with the Bahá'í

Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) were raided in a coordinated attack. Educator Kamran Mortezaie is now serving a five-year jail term. Mahmoud Badavam, Noushin Khadem, Farhad Sedghi, Riaz Sobhani and Ramin Zibaie are each serving four-year prison sentences. The judgments against them cast their activities in support of BIHE as crimes and as “evidence” of their purported aim to subvert the State. Two psychology teachers — Faran Hesami and her husband Kamran Rahimian — were also sentenced to four years but are out awaiting appeal. Another BIHE administrator, Vahid Mahmoudi, was released on 8 January 2012 after his five-year sentence was reportedly suspended.

In March, the Committee on International Freedom of Scientists of the American Physical Society appealed for their immediate release.

Since August 2004, some 556 Bahá'ís have been arrested in Iran. There are more than 100 Iranian Bahá'ís currently in prison because of their religion. The cases of more than 350 other Bahá'ís are still active with authorities.

“Blind prejudice and superstition pervades Iran today and irreparable damage has been done to the name and reputation of Islam,” said Ms. Ala'i. “We welcome and join with every effort made by people of good will — both in Iran and around the world — to condemn the extent and violence of the oppressions faced by the people of Iran.”



In New Delhi, campaigners from United4Iran, the Trans Asia Alliance and the Asian Center for Human Rights joined Bahá'ís in a peaceful march on Sunday 1 April across the city, calling for the release of Iran's jailed seven Bahá'í leaders. Following the march, the group gathered at the city's famous Red Fort.

First report of the new UN Special Rapporteur says Iran's justice system is deeply flawed

Shaheed, continued from page one

In 2009, Dr. Shaheed received the Muslim Democrat of the Year Award for his outstanding contribution in the field at the 10th Annual Conference of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy.

More than 140 witnesses

In his presentation to the Council, Dr. Shaheed noted that Iran had denied his request to visit the country as part of his investigation. Accordingly, his report relied on the testimony of more than 140 witnesses.

"In many cases, witnesses reported that they were arrested for activities protected by international law, and that they were detained in solitary confinement for prolonged periods with no access to legal counsel or family members, and in the absence of formal charges," Dr. Shaheed said on 12 March 2012, in a speech to the Council.

"Several stated that they were subjected to prison conditions that fall well below the minimum standards defined by the UN, such as severe overcrowding, inadequate access to water, insufficient prisoner segregation practices, extremely poor quality and unhygienic facilities, hazardous ventilation conditions, insufficient access to medical services, paltry nutritional provisions," he said.

His report also noted a dramatic increase in the number of executions carried out in the Islamic Republic — more than 600 during the year 2011, many for crimes not considered serious under international law. Iranian authorities have also stepped up their detention of journalists and lawyers, he said, and continued their persecution of ethnic and religious minorities.

The Council's vote on 22 March also followed the release of a new report from

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the situation of human rights in Iran.

In that document, Mr. Ban set out a long list of new or recent violations, including allegations of the use of torture, summary executions, and the persecution of religious minorities.

"The Secretary-General is deeply troubled by reports of increased numbers of executions including in public, executions of juvenile offenders, amputations, flogging, arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials, torture and ill-treatment, and the crackdown on media professionals, film makers, human rights defenders, lawyers and opposition activists," the report said.

Mr. Ban also expressed concern over Iran's failure to cooperate with UN investigators. He reported that Iran had last year responded only once to 17 communications sent by Special Procedures mandate holders like Dr. Shaheed and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

The situation of Bahá'ís

Both reports highlighted the situation of Bahá'ís.

Dr. Shaheed said Bahá'ís continue to be arbitrarily arrested and detained for their beliefs, in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Bahá'ís are also subjected to "severe socio-economic pressure," facing deprivations of "property, employment and education."

Mr. Ban's report recounted efforts of UN officials like Dr. Shaheed to raise the issue of mistreatment and discrimination against Iranian Bahá'ís, noting in particular their "concern regarding the personal security of seven Bahá'í community leaders, who were sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2011."

The 12 March Council session also offered an interactive dialogue between the Special Rapporteur and Human Rights Council members. Dr.

IN BRIEF

- In his first full report to the UN Human Rights Council, the new Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran sharply criticized the country's justice system.
- Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, denied access to Iran, relied on some 140 witnesses, who described numerous legal injustices, such as extended solitary confinement, limited access to legal defense, and a lack of formal charges.
- His report and a new report from the UN Secretary-General helped convince the Council to extend Dr. Shaheed's mandate, by an overwhelming majority
- Both reports also mentioned extensive violations against Iranian Bahá'ís.

UK government launches “year of service” initiative at Bahá’í center



UK Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles MP, answers questions from a radio reporter about “A Year of Service,” a government-sponsored initiative to encourage voluntary service by the UK’s nine major faith communities. The launch and first volunteering day of the program was held at the national Bahá’í center in London on 28 February 2012.

Shaheed’s concerns were promptly echoed by a majority of the nations addressing the session. And some 15 countries specifically highlighted the situation of Iran’s Bahá’ís.

Brazil’s delegate, João Genésio de Almeida Filho, said his government was concerned about “allegations of the systematic persecution of members of unrecognized religious communities, particularly the Bahá’í community.”

Veronika Stromsikova, delegate of the Czech Republic, said her country concurred with Dr. Shaheed’s observation that “the government’s tolerance of an intensive defamation campaign against members of the Bahá’í community incites discrimination” in breach of international treaties, a reference to Iran’s state-sponsored campaign of demonizing Bahá’ís in the media.

Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations, told the Council on 12 March that Bahá’ís in Iran today face “multiple violations, across the entire spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights” running “literally from kindergarten to the grave.”

“We also agree with your presentation of the underlying obstacles,” she said, addressing Dr. Shaheed, “including elements of the legal framework and lack of adherence to the rule of law — none of which are being addressed by the government.”

“As you clearly state, impunity continues to prevail in Iran, and certain individuals are exempted from laws and regulations meant to restrain the abuse of power,” said Ms. Dugal.

On 22 March, just before the vote to extend Dr. Shaheed’s mandate, Iran’s ambassador had told the Council that his country has been wrongly accused of human rights violations, and that it only seeks to cooperate with the international community — statements that were clearly rejected when the Council voted.

“Very few countries would now dare to say there are not serious violations of human rights in Iran,” said Ms. Ala’i. “What the world wants is real answers from the Iranian authorities — not lip service about cooperation or baseless attacks against the Special Rapporteur.”

LONDON — A government-sponsored initiative to encourage people of all beliefs to help improve their local neighborhoods was launched at the national Bahá’í center here in February.

The program, titled “A Year of Service,” aims to recognize the role of faith in inspiring charitable work and promote collaboration between the United Kingdom’s nine major faith communities — Bahá’í, Buddhist, Christian, Jain, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian.

Twelve special volunteering days are being held during 2012, each of them coinciding with an existing religious festival and focusing on a distinct theme for community action.

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles MP, joined faith leaders and guests of all ages for the launch and first volunteering day on 28 February at 27 Rutland Gate in London — the

national Bahá’í center. The occasion also marked the annual Bahá’í Intercalary Days, a period specifically dedicated to service and hospitality.

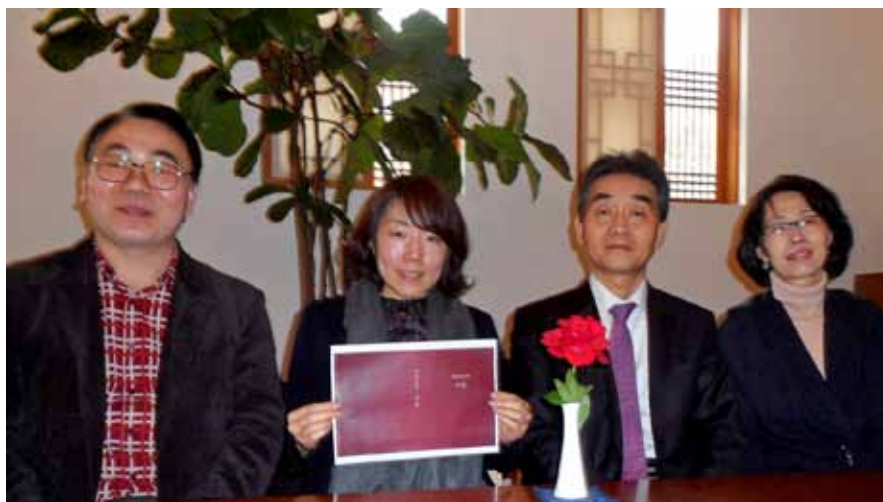
“A Year of Service is a wonderful celebration of the practical contribution that faith groups make to enrich their neighborhoods and improve the lives of those around them,” Mr. Pickles said ahead of the launch. “We would be poorer by far without their contribution...”

Some 50 guests of all faiths assisted in the decorating of cakes and the wrapping of donated clothing and toiletries, all of which were later distributed at a church-sponsored shelter for the homeless in the west of London.

Speaking on behalf of the Bahá’ís of the UK, Kishan Manocha said, “Faith should be a source of joy, of bringing people together in common purpose. We hope that the launch will give vivid expression to these special fruits of faith and inspire us all in our efforts to improve our neighborhoods.”

In South Korea, a new translation makes Bahá'í holy writings widely available

Among the Bahá'ís overseeing the publication of *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* in Korean are, left to right, Won Pill Jung, So Jeong Park, Young Kyung Kim and Hee Jin Koo.



IN BRIEF

- **The Korean Bahá'í community has now published a full translation of a major book of the Bahá'í sacred writings, the first such in Korean.**
- **The work — *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* — is a well-loved compilation that addresses such themes as the purpose of life, the unity of religion, and the spiritual requisites of peace and civilization.**
- **The Bahá'í sacred writings have been translated into more than 800 languages.**

SEOUL, South Korea — An ambitious project to translate a collection of Bahá'u'lláh's writings into Korean reached fruition with the book's publication in February 2012.

The volume, known in English as *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, is the first Bahá'í book in Korean to be widely available from bookshops and online retailers.

“The main reason for publishing Bahá'í literature in our language is to reach out to the whole of society with this new message for humanity,” said Hee Jin Koo, a member of the task force overseeing the publication.

First published in English in 1935, *Gleanings* is a well-loved anthology of some of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. The selection includes extracts on such themes as the purpose of life, the unity of religion, and the spiritual requisites of peace and civilization.

The Bahá'í sacred writings are extensive, amounting to more than 100 volumes in their original Arabic and Persian. Since their revelation in the 19th century, the Bahá'í writings have been translated into more than 800 languages, reaching individuals in virtually every country.

While earlier translations of extracts from *Gleanings* were previously available in Korean and used by individuals and at Bahá'í meetings, the need was for a more accurate version that could be made widely available to the Korean public.

Work began in 2003. A small group began meeting to discuss a few paragraphs or pages each week. “A particular challenge was the translation of certain religious terms,” said So Jeong Park, who worked on the book.

To find a standardized vocabulary, the task force drew on words commonly used in Korea's various religious traditions — including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. For other terms, an original translation had to be devised.

In addition to the 410 pages of Bahá'u'lláh's text, the new edition includes a preface on the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and a lengthy glossary. The new book will be available in major bookstores, through libraries and universities, and via online retailers — including as an e-book. “It means everybody can download it onto their own gadget,” said Hee Jin Koo.

Review: *Iranian Taboo*

Documentary, continued from page 16

he is banned from entering Iran, he managed to get his friends to film deep inside the country, risking their own safety — and presumably the safety of their subjects. Among the emotionally fraught stories they discover is that of a Bahá'í mother and her 14-year old daughter leaving their homeland because of the persecution, despite their love for — and preference to remain in — Iran. The film documents what awaits Bahá'í refugees arriving in Turkey — cramped and unsanitary living conditions, uncertainty about their future, and a longing for the land they loved but had little choice but to leave. A visit to Bahá'í graves in the city of Kayseri in central Turkey reveals that pneumonia, poisonous fumes and tragic accidents have prematurely claimed the lives of others who fled Iran, seeking freedom from persecution.

Allamehzadeh has also succeeded in getting interviews with a number of prominent Iranian politicians, authors and academics.

Allamehzadeh has also succeeded in getting interviews with a number of prominent Iranian politicians, authors, and academics. These include Abolhassan Banisadr — who served as the first president of Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. He recalls one episode in particular in which a banner was displayed in the main hall of the presidential palace that contained allegations about the “Bahá'í network... of foreign spies.” “So, let's say they have a network,” Banisadr tells the director. “Mullahs in Iran also have a network. This does not mean that they are spies.”

Nobel Peace Prize-winning human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi has spoken out vociferously on behalf of Bahá'ís, acting as their defense lawyer. In the

film, she recounts reading the case files of the then seven Bahá'í leaders — who were arrested in 2008 — and realizing that there was nothing in the files to support the prosecutor's allegations against them. “If this case was brought before an impartial judge, he would surely have released them on the first day,” she says.

Recently, adds Mrs. Ebadi, her daughter has even been “branded” a Bahá'í in the media as a riposte to her mother's efforts to defend human rights.

Allamehzadeh ends his film by reflecting that anyone in Iran who steps out of line is accused of being a Bahá'í, a word that carries the same weight, he suggests, as the word “communist” did during the United States' “McCarthyite” witch hunts. Former president Banisadr points out the irony of the fact that the former Shah's secret police at one time even branded the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini a Bahá'í.

“To turn the name of a religion and a faith into an insult in my opinion is the biggest blow the Shiite clergy has delivered to a part of our society,” concludes Allamehzadeh.

Iranian Taboo does not set out to explain the history and beliefs of the Bahá'í Faith, nor its extraordinary geographic spread in the 20th century, nor the positive impact its teachings today have on the lives of millions of adherents, their friends and neighbors around the world. Neither does it attempt to uncover the roots of the persecution or unpack the numerous falsehoods and misconceptions by which Iran justifies its relentless campaign of oppression. Rather, Reza Allamehzadeh focuses on the scale and scope of this ongoing and often undiscussed violation of human rights. In doing so he is — along with the increasing numbers of his compatriots both inside Iran and abroad — beginning to break the taboo that is the film's premise. His only regret, he has said in interviews, is that he did not do it sooner.



ONE COUNTRY is published quarterly by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community, an international non-governmental organization which encompasses and represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith.

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Printed using soy-based inks on paper from sustainable forests.



The “most personal” and “most difficult” film the director has ever made

Iranian Taboo: a documentary film

By Reza Allamehzadeh

IN BRIEF

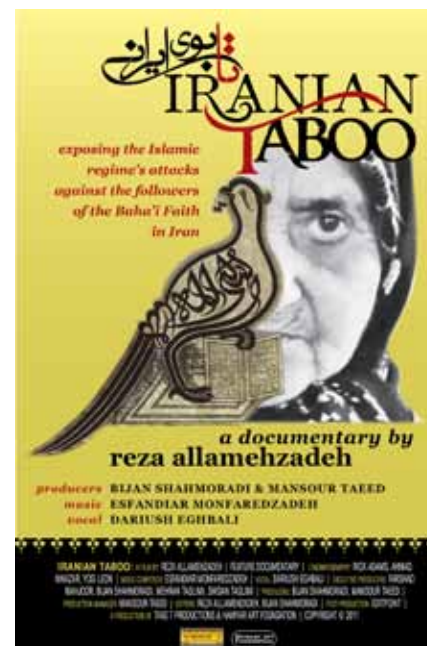
- A new documentary film by exiled Iranian filmmaker Reza Allamehzadeh explores the long running persecution of Iran’s Bahá’ís.
- The film’s title comes from the director’s realization that even those Iranians who believe Bahá’ís should be granted their rights often choose to remain silent.
- Because of this “taboo” surrounding the subject matter, he calls it one of the “most personal” and “most difficult” films he has ever made.

In his 40-year career, Reza Allamehzadeh has never shied away from exploring the darker side of life in Iran, making documentaries that have resulted in considerable personal risk for the filmmaker. In 1979, his film *Speak up, Turkmen* exposed the violent conflict between the army of the new Islamic Republic and poorly organized Turkmen tribesmen. After fleeing to Europe where he still resides, Allamehzadeh made *The Guests of Hotel Astoria* (1988), the story of a group of Iranian asylum seekers escaping to Turkey. It was selected for the Venice, Moscow, Montreal and Chicago film festivals. *The Night after the Revolution* (1989) reviewed Iran’s history of censorship, while in *Holy Crime* (1994), he investigated a wave of murders of Iranian opposition figures in Europe.

With his latest feature-length documentary, the director’s commitment to exposing subjects the Iranian regime would rather gloss over shows no sign of abating. In *Iranian Taboo*, he focuses his attention on the history of persecution faced by Iran’s Bahá’í minority, puzzling over the fact that even those Iranians who believe Bahá’ís should be granted their rights often choose to remain silent about the matter — hence the film’s title. The documentary, which is in English and Farsi with subtitles, has so far been screened in major North American cities and some European venues.

Describing it as the “most personal” and “most difficult” film he has ever made, the director ranges widely across seven decades during which sporadic outbursts of state-approved persecution culminated in the relentless oppression of Bahá’ís now meted out by the Islamic Republic. Among the incidents he recounts are: the

brutal murder in 1942 of a highly respected Bahá’í doctor, whose killers walked away free men, later hailed as heroes; the 1955 wave of violence against Bahá’ís instigated by a populist preacher with the permission of the Shah; years of attacks on the villagers of Ivel, where even the Bahá’í-owned cows were separated from those reared by Muslim farmers; the early days



of the current regime when the false charge that Bahá’ís were Zionist spies resulted in some 200 executions; the 2008 arrests of seven Iranian Bahá’í leaders, now each serving a 20-year jail term on trumped-up charges; and the recent attacks on the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education, a community initiative to assist young Bahá’ís barred from university because of their religion.

The courage of Allamehzadeh and his associates in making this film is to be applauded. In spite of the fact that

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