



Australian Bahá'í Community

Denial of Higher Education to Iranian Bahá'ís-- 2011 Update

Bahá'ís excluded from higher education since 1979: Since 1979 the government of Iran has systematically deprived Bahá'ís of higher education. The government has also obstructed Bahá'í efforts to establish their own institutions of higher learning, most recently through a coordinated series of raids and arrests on 21 May 2011. Its goal is the impoverishment and destruction of the Bahá'í community, Iran's largest religious minority.

Exclusion based on religious discrimination: The denial of education is based entirely on religious discrimination. Iranian authorities have made it clear that Bahá'ís would be allowed to attend universities if they recanted their faith, declaring themselves to be Muslims.

Declaration of religion: Following the 1979 Islamic revolution, the exclusion was enforced through the requirement that all students applying to take the national university entrance examination had to declare their religion. Applicants who did not indicate one of the four officially-recognised religions – Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism – were excluded from sitting the examination. Following concerted international pressure, the government announced in late 2003 that it would drop this requirement from the national university entrance examination. Instead it has used other methods for excluding Bahá'í students, such as falsely identifying them as Muslims, or claiming their files are “incomplete”.

Expulsions: In recent years, the small number of Bahá'í students who manage to gain admission to universities are expelled as it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís. For example, Vesal Momtazi was expelled from Qazvin International University of Imam Khomeini in June 2010. Mr Momtazi was in the final semester of his course in agricultural engineering, and needed only to take the final exams in order to complete the semester and graduate. Similarly in February 2010, two Bahá'ís who had reached their eighth semester at Tarbiyyat Moallem University in Tehran were expelled; one was told openly that by law, Bahá'ís have no right to post-secondary education. Other recent expulsions have occurred in Semnan, Zanjan, Yazd, Gonbad, Khoramshahr, and Chabahar.

Official policy exposed: The expulsion of Bahá'í students accords with a confidential letter addressed by the Central Security Office of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology to Iranian universities in 2006. The letter instructed universities to expel any student discovered to be a Bahá'í.

Secret Memorandum: The expulsions and exclusion of Bahá'í students are clearly being carried out under provisions of a confidential memorandum of the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, which provides a blueprint for the suppression of the Iranian Bahá'í community. Dated 25 February 1991 and signed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, it spells out various steps to block the progress and development of the Bahá'í community in Iran and stipulates that Bahá'ís “must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies”.

UN Resolution: In December 2010, with support from the Australian Government, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution expressing its deep concern at serious, ongoing and recurring human rights violations in Iran. The resolution noted increasing evidence of efforts by the State of Iran to prevent members of the Bahá'í faith from attending university.

Support and scrutiny needed: Ongoing international support and scrutiny is crucial to ensure that Iranian Bahá'í students can pursue education with the same treatment as students of other backgrounds.

Iran has recognised right to education: The right to education is enshrined in international covenants and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Iran is a party.

Exclusion is part of systematic persecution: Iran's denial of higher education to Bahá'ís is part of systematic persecution against Iran's 300,000-member Bahá'í community. For more information see www.bahai.org.au or www.news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/iran-update/