

22 March 2006

To the Iranian believers living outside Iran

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As you may be aware, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief has recently issued a statement raising grave apprehension regarding government actions being taken against the believers in the Cradle of the Faith, which she characterizes as "impermissible and unacceptable". There can be no doubt that the Blessed Beauty watches over His oppressed followers in Iran and enfolds them in His tender embrace. For our part, we are directing systematic action at the international and national levels to place before the world our concern over this heightened threat to that much-cherished Bahá'í community. As a result of the swift efforts of those who have been assigned responsibility for this work, the plight of the Bahá'ís in Iran is receiving attention from United Nations agencies, national governments, non-governmental organizations, and the media in many countries around the world. May a mighty outcry be raised everywhere to stay the hands of the aggressors.

These current developments mark another moment of intensity in the persecution besetting the Bahá'ís of Iran, an unending adversity that has ebbed and surged ever since the inception of the Faith in that land more than a century and a half ago. The Islamic Revolution in 1979 opened a new phase of this oppression. When in recent years the pressures on the friends seemed to lessen, they decided to join with their fellow believers throughout the rest of the world in establishing the institute process in their country. In November 2003, we addressed a message to the Bahá'ís of Iran in which we expressed our admiration and that of the Bahá'í world for their steadfastness in the face of continuous persecution and focused their attention on the spiritual enterprise Bahá'u'lláh Himself has assigned to them. A year later, they addressed a letter to the former president seeking redress for the long-standing infringement of their human and civil rights. The response of the authorities to all of this was to instigate a spate of arbitrary arrests and detentions.

With the most recent political changes in the country, the situation has further deteriorated. The government demanded the institute be suspended—an order with which the community complied. Yet the believers cannot submit to unacceptable demands nor succumb to the pressure of the enemies of the Faith to entirely suspend their personal teaching efforts. Teaching is, after all, an indispensable duty enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh on His followers. Moreover, on the exigency of teaching, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that "no complete cessation of effort is permissible, for in that case the divine assistance shall be entirely cut off." Indeed, proclaiming one's religious beliefs to others is an individual right upheld by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Teaching efforts are the only way to combat the distortions circulating about the Faith and to preserve the community. Of course, in carrying out this duty, the believers are conscious of the need to act with wisdom and are naturally using the spiritual insights and skills they have gained through the institute process.

The peril surrounding the believers has mounted to a scale not witnessed since the early 1980s. All signs indicate that the authorities are redoubling efforts to strangle the Bahá'í community by implementing the nefarious strategy originally set forth in a secret document issued in 1991 by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was signed by Hujjatu'l-Islam Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani, Secretary of the Council, and approved by the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. From late October to the end of November 2005 alone, the influential Tíhrán newspaper "Kayhan" ran dozens of articles attacking the Bahá'í Faith. During this same period, the national radio network began a weekly series of programmes with similar focus and intent. The Faith was likewise attacked in television broadcasts and on the Internet. The odious fabrications about the Faith, its Central Figures, and its adherents disseminated through these media could have no purpose but to foment suspicion and hatred. The campaign of propaganda against the Faith, recent reports of an escalation in the harassment of individual Bahá'ís throughout the country, efforts undertaken by the Association of Chambers of Commerce (Ettahadiyeye Asnaf) to compile a list of Bahá'ís in every type of trade and employment, and the fears voiced by the Special Rapporteur that instructions "to identify persons who adhere to the Bahá'í faith and monitor their activities ... will be used as a basis for the increased persecution of, and discrimination against, members of the Bahá'í faith, in violation of international standards", when viewed together, heighten apprehension about the intentions of the perpetrators of these acts.

For three decades now, the Iranian Bahá'ís have received unfailing encouragement and support from the Friends in Iran, who have managed the affairs of the Bahá'í community wisely and effectively in the absence of a National Spiritual Assembly and have bolstered the spirits of the believers in a manner that has earned our profound appreciation. The believers' steadfast loyalty to the Cause in the face of the tumult that engulfs their community is a deep source of pride for the Bahá'í world. Confident in the protection that envelops them, the Bahá'ís continue to discharge their spiritual obligations with courage, determination, and a depth of commitment that evokes our highest praise. Their willingness to endure untold hardship for the sake of upholding divine principles and the rights of the Bahá'í community in the Cradle of the Faith propels that land onward towards the glorious destiny foreshadowed in our Sacred Writings. They are the fitting heirs of their spiritual forebears, who were extolled by the Blessed Beauty in words such as these:

All these stainless hearts and sanctified souls have, with absolute resignation, responded to the summons of His decree. Instead of complaining, they rendered thanks unto God, and amidst the darkness of their anguish they revealed naught but radiant acquiescence to His will.... Methinks patience was revealed only by virtue of their fortitude, and faithfulness itself was begotten only by their deeds.

The ordeals afflicting the believers in Iran must, however, be seen within a larger context, for the convulsions that beset that nation are the consequence of forces at work throughout the entire planet. The inexorable advance of the world towards the unification of the human race is driven by irrepressible processes of integration and disintegration. On all sides can be heard "the call of humanity itself crying out for deliverance at a time when the tide of mounting evils has destroyed its equilibrium and is now strangling its very life."

In the midst of this turbulence, the believers in Iran are giving their all for the Cause, and the institutions of the Faith in other countries are exerting every effort to defend them. The response each of you can make, wherever you reside, is to renew your determination to serve

the manifold needs of the Cause and particularly rededicate yourselves to the major aim of the Five Year Plan. Through the core activities of the Plan you have the possibility to intimately engage receptive souls, including, as appropriate, those among your trusted compatriots, expose them to the Word of God, confirm them in the Faith, and guide their steps in initial acts of service. Consider how apt is the Blessed Beauty's promise that should the progress of His Cause be restrained in one land, it would raise its head elsewhere to proclaim His life-giving Message.

Through the workings of the Major Plan of God a spotlight now shines on Iran. In prior ages, through the impetus of the teachings of Zoroaster and Muḥammad, her citizens applied spiritual principles to build a nation, whose "power and glory", 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains, "shone out like the morning above the world's horizons".

She was as the pivot of the world, she was the source and centre of sciences and arts, the wellspring of great inventions and discoveries, the rich mine of human virtues and perfections. The intellect, the wisdom of the individual members of this excellent nation dazzled the minds of other peoples, the brilliance and perceptive genius that characterized all this noble race aroused the envy of the whole world.

How regrettable, then, is Iran's plight today! Its current state can hardly be reconciled with its glorious past. Notwithstanding the suffering inflicted on them, the Bahá'ís of that land are determined to contribute towards building a society founded on enlightened spiritual and social principles, a society destined to reclaim and indeed outshine that nation's noble antiquity.

Dearly loved co-workers: the machinations of those who believe themselves capable of obliterating that community will, inevitably, come to naught. Your own efforts undertaken on behalf of your cherished sisters and brothers in Iran will hasten the day when this "perspicuous and luminous Revelation" banishes forever the deep gloom that now encompasses the land of its birth. There is no time to lose. "The fleeting hours of man's life on earth pass swiftly by and the little that still remaineth shall come to an end, but that which endureth and lasteth for evermore is the fruit that man reapeth from his servitude at the Divine Threshold."

We are fervently supplicating at the Sacred Threshold on your behalf.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]