

sanctities” or “spying” for Israel and the United States.

When one adds up the instances of persecution of the Bahá'í faith in Iran – the vandalization of Bahá'í cemeteries, the refusal to allow Bahá'í youth to enter universities, the banning of Bahá'í literature, the refusal to recognize Bahá'í marriages, the demotion or firing of Bahá'ís working in public institutions, the execution of innocent Bahá'ís, the demolition of Bahá'í homes, its national centre, shrines, and sacred sites, and the outright violent attacks on individual Bahá'ís and their supporters – one is left to wonder whether this does not amount to cultural cleansing.

The current Iranian regime is exhibiting qualities of a genocidal mentality, to use a term made famous by Robert Jay Lifton and the late Eric Markuson in their book of that title. Bahá'ís in Iran are arrested and held without charge. Some have disappeared, never to be seen again. Formal Bahá'í administration has been outlawed and documents, books, and computers belonging to members of the Bahá'í community have been confiscated and in some cases destroyed.

These are not one-off incidents. In fact, they speak to a systematic attempt to sow fear within the Bahá'í community and to suffocate its intellectual, religious, economic, and social activity.

Evidence of this systematic and officially sanctioned government persecution came to light in 1993 when a secret government document titled "The Bahá'í Question" was leaked. This document was drafted by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and signed by Khamenei himself. It indicated that the government would do anything in its power to “block” the “progress and development” of the Bahá'í community in that country.

International protests against this slow cultural genocide are widespread. The United Nations has condemned Iran for its treatment of Bahá'ís, as has Amnesty International, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, the International Federation for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, and other human rights groups across the globe. The five million Bahá'ís living outside Iran have also condemned the repugnant action of the Iranian government. The Canadian government is joined by the governments of the U.S., Australia, France, and Germany in expressing outrage at the treatment the Iranian Bahá'í leadership has received. They are calling for the release of these Bahá'ís on bail and for Iran to demonstrate that the trial was fair and done in accordance with international standards.

If the Iranian government refuses to heed these calls, then the international community should treat Iran as the pariah state it has become and ostracize it from the community of civil nations. The actions of the Ahmadinejad regime against the Bahá'í community can be considered a crime against humanity.

When such crimes are committed by a national government, the international community has a responsibility to step in and protect the people living within that country who are at risk. And the leaders of that government should face trial at the International Criminal Court.

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