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Islamic Republic of Iran

Joint Submission by Article 18, CSW and Middle East Concern to the Universal Periodic Review 34th session

Introduction

- 1 This is a joint submission by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), which has consultative status, and two non-governmental organisations without consultative status that share the same views, Article 18 and Middle East Concern (MEC).**
- 2 CSW is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Article 18 is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the protection and promotion of FoRB in Iran and advocating on behalf of its persecuted Christians. MEC seeks to promote freedom of religion or belief in the Middle East and North Africa, with a special focus on the Christian communities.**
- 3 This submission seeks to draw attention to violations targeting Christians, and particularly converts to Christianity, in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It also highlights the violations and discrimination experienced by the Baha'i community in the country.**

Commitments relating to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)

- 4** During the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Iran only accepted six recommendations directly related to FoRB and noted 23.
- 5** Iran accepted recommendations to fully respect FoRB for all citizens (Norway, Poland, Romania), to strengthen protection for religious minorities (South Africa), and to expand interreligious dialogue and tolerance (Armenia, Lebanon).
- 6** Iran did not accept nine recommendations to take steps to protect religious minorities from discrimination (Australia, Bahrain, Brazil, Denmark, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Slovakia), and rejected a further seven which specifically called for amendments to laws and legislation to achieve the same (Argentina, Austria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Sweden, Uruguay). Iran also rejected recommendations to release those imprisoned because of their beliefs (United States), to ensure access to education for religious minorities (Chile, Ireland, Italy), to ensure fair trials for religious minorities (Ireland) and to fully respect the human rights of religious minorities (Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru).
- 7** Iran has acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees the right to FoRB under article 18, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). However, laws approved by the Revolutionary Government and the practice of the courts oppose the principles embodied in these two covenants, including the right to freedom of religion or to have or adopt a religion of one's choice as expressed in Article 18(1) of the ICCPR (1966).
- 8** Iran's constitution restricts recognized religious minorities to the following: "Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education."¹
- 9** Although the constitution provides that "The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and

¹ Iran (Islamic Republic of)'s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989, Article 13
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en

no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief,”² ongoing harassment of members of minority faiths is evidence that the government consistently fails to uphold this provision.

- 10 During the previous UPR cycle, Iran accepted two recommendations to ensure freedom of opinion and expression (Norway, Senegal). Despite this, religious minorities are exposed to multiple restrictions of freedoms of expression, opinion and assembly. Arrest, detention, physical and emotional abuse during interrogation and other oppressive actions are commonplace for religious minorities, especially those not recognised within the constitution, and including Christian converts.
- 11 In 2014, Iran’s Supreme Leader communicated the general policies of the Fifth Development Plan, including paragraph 12 on the need to fulfil the legal and religious rights of women and paragraph 38 on the protection of legitimate freedoms and the protection of the nation’s fundamental rights. Unfortunately, the government has failed to implement such policies with regard to religious minorities, and instead has actively sought to restrict their freedoms of expression, opinion and assembly.

Apostasy and Blasphemy Laws

- 12 Apostasy (in this instance, renouncing Islam) is not permitted under Islamic Law, and there are no provisions under Iran’s legal system permitting conversion from Islam.
- 13 An amendment to Iran’s Penal Code, approved by the Parliament in September 2008, would have made apostasy a capital offence for male apostates, and carry life imprisonment for female apostates. The revised Penal Code, finally adopted in January 2012, did not contain direct provisions relating to apostasy. However, the long-standing situation whereby judges have recourse to Islamic law in the

absence of codified provisions was established more formally within the new Penal Code.

- 14 The conviction of a Christian pastor, Yousef Nadarkhani, for apostasy in September 2010 at the Gilan Provincial Court, and his sentence to death demonstrate the authorities’ readiness to utilise apostasy provisions in Shari’a law even in the absence of codified laws proscribing apostasy. The overturning of the apostasy conviction and revoking of the death sentence on 8 September 2012 followed a high-profile international campaign in support of Nadarkhani.³
- 15 As a Shi’a theocracy, Iran appears to deem unsanctioned religious views and expressions of political dissent to be blasphemous. Those arrested for blasphemy are generally charged with mofsed-e-filarz (“spreading corruption on earth”), a broadly defined crime encompassing anything deemed undesirable by the state. There is no set penalty for such a wide-ranging crime, and punishments can range from a few months in jail to execution. In addition to suppressing political dissent and calls for reform within the established tradition of Shi’a Islam, blasphemy charges are also used to persecute religious minorities, including Bahá’ís, Sunnis, Sufis, and Christians.⁴

Recommendations

- 16 **Amend article 13 of the constitution to ensure that all religious minorities are recognised and able to fully enjoy the right to freedom of religion or belief.**
- 17 **Ensure that Article 18 of the ICCPR is upheld and not contravened by national laws or practices that penalise apostasy or legislate against changing ones belief.**
- 18 **Immediately and unconditionally release all those detained on charges of blasphemy or apostasy, and on national security charges related to their religion or belief.**

² Ibid, Article 23

³ Amnesty International, ‘Iranian Christian pastor accused of ‘apostasy’ must be released,’ 30 September 2011 www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/iranian-christian-pastor-accused-apostasy-must-be-released-2011-09-30

⁴ Berkley Center, ‘National Laws on Blasphemy: Iran,’ <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/national-laws-on-blasphemy-iran>

National security charges

- 19** The charge of apostasy is rarely issued by the courts. Instead, converts from Islam often face charges of ‘action against national security.’ For example, in January 2018 Naser Navard Goltapeh was detained and began serving a 10-year prison sentence in Evin Prison for ‘acting against national security through forming and establishing illegal house churches.’⁵
- 20** On 13 May 2016, Yousef Nadarkhani,⁶ Yaser Mosibzadeh, Zaman (Saheb) Fadaie and Mohammadreza Omid⁷ were arrested in Rasht. On 14 June 2017 they were given ten-year prison sentences by the 26th Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran for “acting against the national security through propagating house churches and promoting Zionist Christianity.”⁸
- 21** They were released on bail pending an appeal, but on 2 May 2018, the four men were informed the sentences had been upheld.⁹ They were subsequently arrested in a series of raids between 22-25 July 2018 and taken to begin serving their sentences in Evin prison.¹⁰

Recommendations

- 22 Refrain from targeting members of religious minorities with excessive national security-related charges, and end the criminalisation of the peaceful expression of faith.**
- 23 Immediately and unconditionally release Nasser Navard Goltapeh, Yousef Nadarkhani, Yaser Mosibzadeh, Zaman (Saheb) Fadaie and Mohammadreza Omid, and all others detained on similar unfounded charges.**

⁵ MEC, ‘Iran: Christians recently imprisoned in Tehran and Tabriz,’ 19 February 2018

<https://www.meconcern.org/2018/02/19/iran-christians-recently-imprisoned-in-tehran-and-tabriz/>

⁶ CSW, ‘Pastor Nadarkhani arrested,’ 13 May 2016

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2016/05/13/news/3099/article.htm>

⁷ CSW, ‘High bail set for three imprisoned Christians,’ 25 May 2016

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2016/05/25/news/3121/article.htm>

⁸ CSW, ‘Iran: Four Christians receive 10 year sentences,’ 4 July 2017

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2017/07/04/press/3610/article.htm>

⁹ MEC, ‘Iran: appeal unsuccessful for Rasht Christian converts,’ <https://www.meconcern.org/2018/05/03/iran-appeal-unsuccessful-for-rasht-christian-converts/>

Closure of Churches and Persecution of House Gatherings

- 24** Since 2010, the Iranian regime has worked to end the use of Farsi in recognized churches and has forced churches which held services for Farsi-speaking Persian Christians to close. The Iranian intelligence service (MOIS) closely monitors the churches and regularly checks the identity documents of attendees to ensure that only members of Christian minority attend, and that Persian Muslims are excluded.¹¹
- 25** Churches which used to hold services for Farsi-speaking Persian Christians which have been closed down include St. Peter’s Presbyterian Church and Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Tehran, Assemblies of God Central Church, Tehran, and Assemblies of God churches in Janat-Abad, Ahvaz, and Shahinshahr among others. In addition, the Assemblies of God retreat centre in Karaj, the Garden of Sharron, was issued a confiscation order on 7 March 2018.¹²
- 26** As a result of the prohibition on the use of Farsi in church, Persian Muslims who convert to Christianity are forced to resort to informal meetings, frequently termed “house churches.” These private gatherings are considered illegal by authorities and are often raided. Attendees are arrested and personal property such as laptops and books are confiscated.
- 27** Leaders responsible for the house churches are often handed severe sentences. On 24th June 2017, four church leaders (see paragraph 20) were each sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment for “propagating house churches and promoting Zionist Christianity.”¹³

¹⁰ CSW, ‘Iranian Christians taken to serve sentences,’ 26 July 2018

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/07/26/press/4051/article.htm>

¹¹ Christian Post, ‘Farsi-Speaking Iranian Christians Banned From Attending Church,’ 3 January 2014

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/farsi-speakingiranian-christians-banned-from-attending-church-111986/>

¹² Mohabat News, ‘Christian retreat seized center in favour of the Executive Headquarters of Imam’s Directive,’ 11 March 2018

<http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=3931>

¹³ MEC, ‘Iran: Four Christian Converts Detained,’ 17 December 2018 <https://www.meconcern.org/2018/12/17/iran-four-christian-converts-detained/>

28 These cases symbolise the effective criminalisation of certain beliefs and illustrate Iran's failure to meet accepted recommendations to ensure that FoRB is fully respected for all minorities, as well as to meet national and international commitments to the promotion and protection of FoRB.

Recommendations

29 Reopen churches which were forcibly shut down for holding services for Farsi-speaking Persian Christians.

30 Remove restrictions on languages used during church services and refrain from persecuting peaceful gatherings in private homes or other premises and convicting church leaders on excessive charges.

State Oppression: Monitoring of Christians

31 Iran's internal security and intelligence operations are renowned for conducting surveillance, and the Christian convert community is under particular scrutiny. Therefore it is not only those who make overt statements or publicly proclaim or propagate their faith who face sanction by the authorities. Most converts maintain a low profile and yet face intense scrutiny.

32 Firstly, the authorities keep close watch on the families or associates of those already known to have converted. Following an arrest, family members are often summoned to security offices for interrogation and are at risk of arrest themselves.

33 Secondly, the security forces are known to target places where Christian converts meet for worship. On 2 December 2018 four Christian converts were arrested at a meeting in Ahvaz.¹⁴ Such raids have become routine and physical abuse is commonplace.

34 Thirdly, the security forces are known to monitor correspondence, telephone communication and internet activity to identify converts and those assisting them.

35 Fourthly, the security forces routinely seek to extract information from known converts about other converts. During interrogation, detainees are put under pressure to name all the Christian converts they know.

36 Fifthly, converts are sometimes detected during routine searches in which incriminating documents or materials are uncovered. For example, a particular convert was arrested when found to be re-entering Iran with Farsi-language Bibles in his possession. The Bibles were confiscated, and the person was warned to desist from all Christian activity.

37 The above examples indicate that even moderate forms of religious expression and routine association with like-minded persons can bring converts to the attention of the authorities. The rights denied to Christian converts include the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association, in addition to the right to hold and manifest a religious belief of one's choice.

Recommendation

38 Cease the monitoring of citizens on account of their religious identity, and particularly of Christian converts.

State Oppression: Arrest, detention and sentencing of Christians

39 Christians, and Christian converts in particular, are frequently arrested without notice and often their whereabouts are often unknown to their families for days or even weeks before any news.¹⁵ Moreover, converts are often kept in detention without charge, and Christians have been known to embark on hunger strikes in protest at the lack of progress on their case.¹⁶

¹⁴ Mohabat News, 'Shima and Shokoofeh Zanganeh Released on Bail,' 1 January 2019 <http://mohabatnews.com/fa/?p=29247>

¹⁵ Mohabat News, 'Iranian Christian Mother and Son Arrested in Iran' 5 March 2017 <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=3381>

¹⁶ Mohabat News, 'Iranian Christian Prisoner On Hunger Strike in Critical Health Condition,' 13 February 2017 <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=3348>

- 40** In March 2018, twenty Christians associated with house churches were arrested in Karaj and six were detained.¹⁷
- 41** On 10 April 2018, Christian convert Mohammadali Yassaghi was arrested in Mazandaran Province and held in Babol Prison on charges of "propaganda against the establishment." On 25 June 2018, Mohammadali Yassaghi was brought before a judge in the 102 Revolutionary Court of Babol. The judge acquitted him, rejecting the charges.¹⁸
- 42** On 16 November 2018, two Christian converts were arrested after arranging to hold a meeting in Mashhad. Behnam Ersali was arrested in Mashhad and Davood Rasooli was arrested in Karaj.¹⁹
- 43** On 30 November 2018 Jamshid Derakhshan, a Christian convert from Karaj, was arrested as he went to a house gathering in Hashtgerd. His family was unaware of his whereabouts for nearly two weeks. He was released on bail on 16 December and charged with "propagation of Zionist evangelical Christianity."²⁰
- 44** In the last two months 2018, approximately one hundred and fifty Christian converts were arrested in a wide range of different cities.²¹
- 45** Some of those arrested have reported physical abuse during interrogation. In June 2018, Christian convert Fatemeh Mohammadi released a letter detailing the sexually abusive interrogation she had undergone when she was arrested and detained in Evin Prison.²²
- 46** On 2 December members of the Revolutionary Guard arrested Christian convert sisters Shima and Shokoofeh Zanganeh, detaining them in Amanayeh security offices in Ahvaz. They both reported having been beaten during interrogation.²³
- 47** The majority of converts who were arrested report being put under pressure to recant or to sign commitments to refrain from meeting other Christians. Those who did not comply were detained and generally faced charges related to evangelism, engaging in "illegal" house churches or acting against "national security." They were eventually released conditionally on payment of bail and pending a court summons.²⁴
- 48** Similar arrests have been observed since the start of 2019, particularly in the city of Rasht. On 29 January Hossein Kadivar (Elisha) and Khalil Dehghanpour were arrested in Rasht.²⁵
- 49** On 10 February, Pastor Matthias Haghnejad, was arrested in Rasht by Islamic Revolutionary Guard members who entered the gathering where he was leading a service, detaining him after it had concluded. The pastor has been arrested and tried on several occasions in the cities of Rasht, Shiraz and Karaj since 2006. Another Christian, Shahrooz Easlamdous was arrested on 15 February.
- 50** On the evening of 23 February two members of the Church of Iran, Babak Hosseinzadeh and Behnam Akhlagh, were arrested while attending a church service in Rasht. A third member, Mehdi Khatibi, had

¹⁷ Radio Farda, 'Christian Convert Arrested Earlier Still Detained Incommunicado,' 11 April 2018

<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-christian-convertmajidzadeh-detained/29159028.html>

¹⁸ MEC, 'Iran: Mohammadali Yassaghi freed from detention,' 5 July 2018

<https://meconcern.org/2018/07/05/iran-mohammadali-yassaghi-freed-from-detention/>

¹⁹ Mohabat News, 'Two Christian converts, Behnam Ersali and Dawood Rasooli, were arrested in Karaj and Mashhad,' 19 November 2018 <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=4121>

²⁰ Mohabat News, 'Iranian Christian Convert Charged with Unfounded Allegations Temporarily Released,' 2 January 2019 <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?%20p=4147>

²¹ World Watch Monitor, 'Iran: 'staggering' number of Christians arrested – 114 in a week,' 5 December 2018 <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/12/iran-staggering-number-of-christians-arrested-114-in-a-week/>

²² Christian Post, 'Christian Convert Describes Abusive Interrogation, Attempts to Force Her to Admit to 'Illicit Sex': Iran,' 28 June 2018

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/christian-convert-abusive-interrogation-admit-illicit-sex-iran-225485/>

²³ MEC, 'Iran: Four Christian Converts Detained,' 17 December 2018 <https://www.meconcern.org/2018/12/17/iran-four-christian-converts-detained/>

²⁴ The weakening Iranian currency means it is sometimes difficult to give accurate figures for bail demands from Iranian Christians, but typically the demands are between \$30,000 and \$120,000, and often house title deeds have to be submitted as collateral.

²⁵ CSW, 'Pastor arrested and Bibles confiscated by authorities,' 13 February 2019

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/02/13/press/4227/article.htm>

been arrested earlier that day, following a summons from the secret police.

- 51 Several of those detained in Rasht have since been released on bail; however, as of 26 March 2019 Pastor Haghnajad and Shahrooz Eslamados remain in detention.
- 52 As a result of pervasive and ongoing repression, Christians, especially converts, and those from ethnic minorities continued to flee the country during 2018.
- 53 An unknown number of Iranian Christians are either still serving or appealing prison sentences. However, the following Iranian Christians are known to have received prison sentences, in addition to the cases detailed in paragraphs 19-21.
- 54 In June 2017, Judge Ahmadzadeh sentenced Reverend Victor Bet Tamraz, an ethnic Assyrian, and Christian converts Kavian Fallah Mohammadi and Hadi Asgari to 10-years each for “conducting evangelism and illegal house church activities.” At the same time another Christian convert, Amin Afshar-Naderi, was sentenced to 15-years’ imprisonment for “conducting evangelism, illegal house church activities and insulting Islamic sanctities.”
- 55 Reverend Bet Tamraz, Kavian Fallah Mohammadi and Amin Afshar-Naderi were arrested at a private Christmas celebration on 26 December 2014. Amin Afshar-Naderi was re-arrested at a picnic in August 2016, together with Hadi Asgari and Reverend Tamraz’s son, Ramiel Bet Tamraz. On 25 April 2018

there was a preliminary appeal hearing for the four individuals.²⁶

- 56 On 6 January 2018, Shamiram Issavi Khabizeh, the wife of Reverend Victor Bet Tamraz, was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment for “membership of a group with the purpose of disrupting national security, and another five years in prison for “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security.”²⁷ An appeal is ongoing – the first session of the Court of Appeal was held on 9 May.²⁸
- 57 In May 2018, Majidreza Souzanchi Kushani, a Christian convert detained in Evin Prison, was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment for “membership of evangelistic groups and conducting evangelism.”²⁹ Majidreza Souzanchi and Fatimeh Mohammadi, another Christian convert, had been arrested in November 2017.³⁰
- 58 On 20 June 2018, 12 converts from Bushehr were given prison sentences of one year each for “propaganda activities against the regime through the formation of house churches.”³¹ They were also placed under intense pressure to recant their faith.
- 59 On 11 July 2018, Ramiel Bet Tamraz was sentenced to prison for four months for “spreading Christian propaganda.”³² The sentence is being appealed.
- 60 On 22 September 2018, Zaman (Saheb) Fadaie, already serving a 10-year sentence in Evin Prison as detailed in paragraph 20, received an additional 18-month prison sentence for “spreading propaganda against the regime.” Fatimeh Bakteri received a 12-month sentence on the same charges.³³

²⁶ Radio Free Europe, ‘Iranian Christians Appeal Convictions By Islamic Court,’ 4 February 2018 <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-christians-appeal-convictions-islamic-revolutionary-court/29017122.html>

²⁷ Center for Human Rights in Iran, ‘Iranian Pastor’s Wife Sentenced to Five Years in Prison for “Acting Against National Security,”’ 29 January 2018

<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/01/iranian-pastors-wife-sentenced-to-five-years-in-prison-for-acting-against-national-security/>

²⁸ MEC, ‘Iran: Update on appeal hearing for Shamiram Isavi Khabizeh,’ 9 May 2018 <https://www.mecconcern.org/2018/05/09/iran-update-on-appeal-hearing-for-shamiram-isavi-khabizeh/>

²⁹ Mellin Iran, ‘Determination of Branch and Time of Appeal for Majid Reza Suzanchi Kashan,’ 15 July 2018 <https://melliun.org/iran/177218>

³⁰ Hrana, ‘Two Detained Christians Still Held in Evin Prison,’ 28 April 2018 <https://www.en-hrana.org/two-detained-christians-still-held-evin-prison>

³¹ Mohabat News, ‘Prison sentence was issued for “Payam Kharaman”, another Christian convert in Bushehr,’ 11 August 2018 <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=4080>

³² World Watch Monitor, ‘Jail for Iranian pastor’s son found guilty of ‘acting against national security,’ 18 July 2018 <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/07/iranian-pastors-son-jailed-for-acting-against-national-security/>

³³ CSW, ‘Iranian Christians imprisoned for affirming Christian tenets,’ 2 October 2018 <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/10/02/press/4089/article.htm>

Recommendations

- 61 End the campaign of arrests, and the use of excessive charges and punitive and unwarranted sentences against Christians who peaceably practice their faith.**
- 62 Ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all who are currently detained in relation to their religion or belief, including of those arrested in the last months of 2018.**

Due process

- 63** During the previous UPR cycle Iran accepted a recommendation from Mexico to “Take measures to ensure due process and fair trial, particularly in any process that would lead to the application of the death penalty.” Somewhat contradictorily, Iran also chose not to accept other recommendations to ensure a right to fair trial (Norway, Romania), to guarantee due process in all proceedings (Germany), and to ensure continued access to legal counsel (Belgium, Denmark).
- 64** During the reporting period there has been evidence that due process has not been respected in the trials involving Christians and Christian converts. Former prisoners have reported violations perpetrated by judges, including the intimidation of defendants, denial of access to lawyers, breach of judicial independence by acting as prosecutors, and the holding of trials behind closed doors that often last just for several minutes and neglect necessary legal procedures.
- 65** The case of Yousef Nadarkhani, Yaser Mosibzadeh, Zaman (Saheb) Fadaie and Mohammadreza Omid detailed in paragraphs 20 and 21 has consistently been overseen by infamous and partial judges. The ten year sentences they received in July 2017 were handed to them Judge Ahmadzadeh, head judge of the 26th Branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran, who is accused of overseeing miscarriages of justice, and is subject to financial sanctions in the United Kingdom.³⁴

- 66** Their final hearing on 13 December 2017 took place before Judge Hassan Babaee and Judge Ahmad Zargar, both of whom are alleged to have played prominent roles in the crackdown on freedom of expression. Judge Zargar, a Hojjatolislam, was amongst several Iranian officials deemed responsible for or complicit in serious human rights violations in 2012. He was also one of six judges accused in 2014 of losing judicial impartiality and overseeing miscarriages of justice in trials involving journalists, lawyers, political activists and members of Iran’s ethnic and religious minorities. He is currently facing financial sanctions in the United Kingdom.
- 67** Judges Babaee and Zargar also presided over the final appeal hearing of Zaman (Saheb) Fadaie and Fatimeh Bakteri, whose case is detailed in paragraph 60. During the hearing, the judges asked the two defendants to renounce their faith, and upon refusing they were told to expect a verdict within the next few days.³⁵

Recommendation

- 68 Ensure due process in all cases involving religious minorities, and that judges found responsible for violations of human rights do not preside over trials, and are brought to justice accordingly.**

The Baha’i Community

- 69** Iran did not accept any of the ten recommendations that explicitly called for protections of the rights of the Baha’i religious minority (Australia, Austria, Chile, Czechia, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Sweden).
- 70** The Baha’i have continued to face discrimination during the reporting period. The community, along with the Dervishes, has increasingly been targeted with hate speech, and faces a raft of discriminatory and repressive policies, including with regard to education and burial sites.
- 71** On 1 May 2014 Revolutionary Guards began to excavate an historic Baha’i cemetery in Shiraz, despite lacking an appropriate permit from

³⁴ CSW, ‘Iran: Ten year sentences upheld for four Christian,’ 9 May 2018
<https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/05/09/news/3955/article.htm>

³⁵ CSW, ‘Christians asked to renounce their faith at appeal hearing,’ 18 January 2019
<https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/01/18/press/4209/article.htm>

municipal authorities. This was the second Baha'i cemetery to be desecrated by authorities since President Rohani came to power, and reports indicated the site was being destroyed to make way for a business centre and car park.³⁶

- 72** Research conducted by the UK Baha'i Community and CSW found that Baha'i children continue to be denied access to some schools, and are often totally denied access to higher education. Some Baha'i children have also suffered physical abuse in school, while others have been incarcerated with their parents.
- 73** Article 1 of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council's student qualification regulations (1991) states that students taking the national enrolment exam for university must be either Muslim or adherents of other recognised religions. Article 3 adds that a student must be expelled if found to be Baha'i after having enrolled in university.
- 74** At least 15 Baha'i students are reported to have been expelled from universities between December 2016 and January 2017,³⁷ and at least 100 Bahai's were reportedly rejected by universities, despite passing entrance exams, during 2017.³⁸
- 75** On 4 November 2017, Judge Mohammad Moghisseh of Branch 28 of the Tehran Revolutionary court sentenced three Baha'i students, who had complained to local officials in 2014 about being denied access to university, to five years in prison each.
- 76** In March 2017 the activist and politician Faezah Hashemi, the daughter of the late former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was detained and charged with "spreading falsehoods," "disturbing public opinion" and "propaganda against the state" after meeting with a Baha'i leader and other well-known civil rights activists, and sentenced to six months in prison.³⁹

³⁶ CSW, 'Christian prisoners beaten and tortured in prison,' 28 May 2018

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2014/05/28/news/2197/article.htm>

³⁷ Center for Human Rights in Iran, 'Iranian University Conceals Evidence of Expelling Baha'i Students for Religious Beliefs,' 26 January 2017

<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/01/bahai-deprived-of-education/>

Recommendations

- 77 Bring an end to all forms of religious discrimination including harassment, torture and hate speech.**
- 78 Allow Baha'i students full and equal access to state universities on the basis of academic merit.**
- 79 Address religious intolerance within the educational setting, which particularly affects Baha'is and is increasingly targeting second generation Christians.**

Conclusion

- 80** In the wake of Iran's rejection of many of the recommendations made to the government during the previous UPR cycle, particularly in relation to the rights of religious minorities, campaign targeting Christians, Baha'is and other minorities has continued.
- 81** Christians continue to face the forced closure of churches, arbitrary detention on spurious charges, harassment, surveillance, and excessive prison sentences delivered after legal processes that fail to respect due process.
- 82** As an unrecognised religious minority, the Baha'i community continues to be subjected to hate speech, and discrimination in law and practice.
- 83** It is essential that Iran engages with the UPR more constructively on this occasion, and accepts and enacts recommendations calling for the nation to honour its national and international obligations.

³⁸ Center for Human Rights in Iran, 'Three Baha'is Barred From University in Iran Sentenced to Five Years in Prison,' 10 November 2017

<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/11/three-bahais-barred-from-university-in-iran-sentenced-to-five-years-in-prison/>

³⁹ CSW, 'Verdict pending for four Church of Iran members,' 24 March 2017

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2017/03/24/press/3490/article.htm>