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Iran

International Religious Freedom Report 2003

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

The Constitution declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." The Government restricts freedom of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.[1] Members of the country's religious minorities—including Baha'is, Jews, Christians, and Sunni and Sufi Muslims—reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs.

Non-Muslim communities, some of which predate Islam, are present; however, government actions create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities, especially Baha'is, Jews, and evangelical Christians.

The U.S. Government makes clear its objections to the Government's treatment of religious minorities in public statements, through support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, and through diplomatic initiatives among all states concerned about religious freedom in Iran.

In March 2003, the Secretary of State designated the country as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. This action followed three similar designations in 1999, 2000, and 2001.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of approximately 631,663 square miles, and its population is approximately 68 million. The population is approximately 99 percent Muslim, of which 89 percent are Shi'a and 10 percent Sunni (mostly Turkomen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest). Sufi Brotherhoods are popular, but there are no reliable figures available regarding the size of the Sufi population.

Baha'is, Christians, Zoroastrians, Mandaeans, and Jews constitute less than 1 percent of the population. The largest non-Muslim minority is the Baha'i community, which has an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 adherents throughout the country. Estimates on the size of the Jewish community vary from 20,000 to 30,000. These figures represent a substantial reduction from the estimated 75,000 to 80,000 Jews who resided in the country prior to the 1979 Iranian revolution. There are approximately 300,000 Christians in the country, according to U.N. figures, the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians and Assyro-Chaldeans. There also are Protestant denominations, including evangelical churches. The U.N. Special Representative (UNSR) reported that Christians are emigrating at an estimated rate of 15,000 to 20,000 per year. The Mandaeans, a community whose religion draws on pre-Christian gnostic beliefs, number approximately 5,000 to 10,000 persons, with members residing primarily in Khuzestan in the southwest.

The Government estimates the Zoroastrian community at 35,000 adherents; however, Zoroastrian groups cite a larger figure of approximately 60,000. Zoroastrians mainly are ethnic Persians and are concentrated in the cities of Tehran, Kerman, and Yazd. Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire and thus played a central role in the country's history.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The Constitution declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." All laws and regulations must be consistent with Islamic law (Shari'a). The Constitution also states that other Islamic denominations are to be accorded

full respect, and recognizes only Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians as religious minorities, guaranteeing their right to religious practice in personal affairs and religious education. The Constitution forbids harassment of individuals according to their beliefs; however, the adherents of religions not specifically protected under the Constitution do not enjoy the freedom to practice. This restriction most acutely affects adherents of the Baha'i Faith, which the Government regards as a misguided or wayward Islamic sect with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the Iranian revolution; however, Baha'is view themselves as an independent religion with origins in the Shi'ite Islamic tradition. Government officials reportedly have stated that, as individuals, all Baha'is are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under other articles of the Constitution as citizens.

The Government rules by a religious jurisconsult. The Supreme Leader of Iran, chosen by a group of 83 Islamic scholars, oversees the state's decision-making process. All acts of the Majlis (legislative body) must be reviewed for conformity with Islamic law and the Constitution by the Council of Guardians, which is composed of six clerics appointed by the Supreme Leader and six Muslim jurists (legal scholars) nominated by the Head of the Judiciary and elected by parliament.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance ("Ershad") and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) monitor religious activity closely. Adherents of recognized religious minorities are not required to register individually with the Government; however, their community, religious, and cultural events and organizations, including schools, are monitored closely. Registration of Baha'is is a police function. The Government has pressured evangelical Christian groups to compile and submit membership lists for their congregations, but evangelicals have resisted this demand. Non-Muslim owners of grocery shops are required to indicate their religious affiliation on the fronts of their shops.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Religious minorities, by law and practice, are barred from being elected to a representative body (except to the seats in the Majlis reserved for minorities, as provided for in the Constitution) and from holding senior government or military positions. Members of religious minorities are allowed to vote, but they may not run for President. All religious minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing.

The Government does not guarantee the right of citizens to change or renounce their religious faith. Apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, can be punishable by death.

Members of religious minorities are barred from serving in the judiciary and security services and from becoming public school principals. Applicants for public sector employment are screened for their adherence to and knowledge of Islam. Government workers who do not observe Islam's principles and rules are subject to penalties. The Constitution states that the country's army must be Islamic and must recruit individuals who are committed to the objectives of the Islamic revolution.

University applicants are required to pass an examination in Islamic theology, which limits the access of most religious minorities to higher education, although all public school students, including non-Muslims, must study Islam. The Government generally allows recognized religious minorities to conduct religious education for their adherents. This includes separate and privately funded Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian schools but does not include official Baha'i schools. The Ministry of Education, which imposes certain curriculum requirements, supervises these schools. With few exceptions, the directors of such private schools must be Muslim. Attendance at the schools is not mandatory for recognized religious minorities. The Ministry of Education must approve for use all textbooks used in coursework, including religious texts. Recognized religious minorities may provide religious instruction in non-Persian languages, but such texts require approval by the authorities for use. This requirement sometimes imposes significant translation expenses on minority communities.

The legal system also discriminates against religious minorities, who receive lower awards than Muslims in injury and death lawsuits and incur heavier punishments. The Guardian Council rejected a bill passed by the Majlis in November 2002 to equalize the payment of "blood money" between Muslim and non-Muslim men. All women and Baha'i men were excluded from the equalization provisions of the bill.

Although the Constitution provides Sunni Muslims religious freedom, some groups claim that the Government discriminates. In particular, Sunnis cite the lack of a Sunni mosque in Tehran and claim that authorities refuse to authorize construction of a Sunni place of worship in the capitol. Sunnis also have cited obstacles to reaching senior governmental positions and accused the state broadcasting company of airing programming insulting to Sunnis.

The Baha'i Faith originated in the country during the 1840's as a reformist movement within Shi'a Islam. Baha'is are considered apostates because of their claim to a valid religious revelation subsequent to that of Mohammed, despite the fact that Baha'is do not consider themselves to be Muslim. The Baha'i Faith is defined by the Government as a political "sect," linked to the Pahlavi regime and, hence, counterrevolutionary.

In 1993 the UNSR reported the existence of a government policy directive regarding the Baha'is. According to the directive, the Supreme Revolutionary Council instructed government agencies to block the progress and development of the Baha'i community, expel Baha'i students from universities, cut Baha'i links with groups outside the country, restrict employment of Baha'is, and deny Baha'is "positions of influence," including in education. The Government claims that the directive is a forgery.

A 2001 Ministry of Justice report demonstrates that government policy continued to aim for the eventual elimination of the Baha'is as a community. It stated in part that Baha'is would only be permitted to enroll in schools if they did not identify themselves as Baha'is, and that Baha'is preferably should be enrolled in schools that have a strong and imposing religious ideology. The report also stated that Baha'is must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is.

Baha'is may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with co-religionists abroad. The fact that the Baha'i world headquarters (established by the founder of the Baha'i Faith in the 19th century, in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine) is situated in what is now the state of Israel, exposes Baha'is to government charges of "espionage on behalf of Zionism," in particular when caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Baha'i headquarters.

Baha'is are banned from government employment. In addition, Baha'is regularly are denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization.

The Government allows recognized religious minorities to establish community centers and certain cultural, social, athletic, or charitable associations that they finance themselves. However, the Government prohibits the Baha'i community from official assembly or from maintaining administrative institutions. Because the Baha'i Faith has no clergy, the denial of the right to form such institutions and elect officers threatens its existence in the country.

Broad restrictions on Baha'is undermine their ability to function as a community. Baha'is repeatedly have been offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith. Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, and other assets were seized shortly after the 1979 Revolution. None of the properties have been returned, and many have been destroyed.

Baha'is are not allowed to bury and honor their dead in keeping with their religious tradition. In 2002 the Government offered the Tehran Baha'i community a plot of land for use as a cemetery; however, the land was in the desert, with no access to water, making it impossible to perform Baha'i mourning rituals. In addition, the Government stipulated that no markers be put on individual graves and that no mortuary facilities be built on the site, making it impossible to perform a ceremonial burial in the Baha'i tradition.

Baha'i group meetings and religious education, which often take place in private homes and offices, are curtailed severely. Public and private universities continue to deny admittance to Baha'i students.

Over the past several years, the Government has taken a few positive steps in recognizing the rights of Baha'is, as well as other religious minorities. For example, in recent years the Government has eased some restrictions, permitting Baha'is to obtain food-ration booklets and send their children to public elementary and secondary schools. In 1999 President Khatami publicly stated that no one should be persecuted because of his or her religious beliefs. He vowed to defend the civil rights of all citizens, regardless of their beliefs or religion. Subsequently, the Expediency Council approved the "Right of Citizenship" bill, affirming the social and political rights of all citizens and their equality before the law. In February 2000, following approval of the bill, the head of the Judiciary issued a circular letter to all registry offices throughout the country allowing couples to be registered as husband and wife without being required to state their religious affiliation. The measure effectively permits the registration of Baha'i marriages. Previously, Baha'i marriages were not recognized by the Government, leaving Baha'i women open to charges of prostitution. Children of Baha'i marriages had not been recognized as legitimate and were therefore denied inheritance rights.

While Jews are a recognized religious minority, allegations of official discrimination are frequent. The Government's anti-Israel policies, along with a perception among radical Muslims that all Jewish citizens support Zionism and the State of Israel, create a threatening atmosphere for the small community. Jewish leaders reportedly are reluctant to draw attention to official mistreatment of their community due to fear of government reprisal.

In principle, but with some exceptions, there is little restriction of, or interference with, the Jewish religious practice. However, education of Jewish children has become more difficult in recent years. The Government reportedly allows Hebrew instruction, recognizing that it is necessary for Jewish religious practice. However, it strongly discourages the distribution of Hebrew texts, in practice making it difficult to teach the language. Moreover, the Government has required that several Jewish schools remain open on

Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath, in conformity with the schedule of other schools in the school system. Because working or attending school on the Sabbath violates Jewish law, this requirement has made it impossible for observant Jews to both attend school and adhere to a fundamental tenet of their religious law.

Jews are permitted to obtain passports and to travel outside the country, but often are denied the multiple-exit permits that normally are issued to citizens. With the exception of certain business travelers, the authorities require Jews to obtain clearance (and pay additional fees) before each trip abroad. The Government appears concerned about the emigration of Jews and permission generally is not granted for all members of a Jewish family to travel outside the country at the same time. One seat in the Majlis is currently reserved for a Jewish representative.

According to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) Background Paper on Iran, the Mandaean are regarded as Christians and are included among the country's three recognized religious minorities. However, Mandaeans regard themselves not as Christians, but as adherents of a religion that predates Christianity in both belief and practice. Mandaeans enjoyed official support as a distinct religion prior to the Revolution, but their legal status as a religion since then has been the subject of debate in the Majlis and never has been clarified. The small community faces discrimination similar to that faced by the country's other religious minorities.

Sufi organizations outside the country remain concerned about government repression of Sufi religious practices.

The Government enforces gender segregation in most public spaces and prohibits women from interacting openly with unmarried men or men not related to them. Women must ride in a reserved section on public buses and enter public buildings, universities, and airports through separate entrances. Women are prohibited from attending male sporting events, although this restriction does not appear to be enforced universally. Conservative Islamic dress rules have eased somewhat in recent years; however, women are not free to choose what they wear in public. Women are subject to harassment by the authorities if their dress or behavior is considered inappropriate and may be sentenced to flogging or imprisonment for such violations. The law prohibits the publication of pictures of uncovered women in the print media, including pictures of foreign women. There are penalties for failure to observe Islamic dress codes at work.

The law provides for segregation of the sexes in medical care. Only female physicians can treat women; however, women reportedly often receive inferior care because of the imbalance between the number of trained and licensed male and female physicians and specialists.

The testimony of a woman is worth only half that of a man in court. A married woman must obtain the written consent of her husband before traveling outside the country. The law provides for stoning for adultery; however, in 2002 the Government suspended its practice.

All women, no matter the age, must have the permission of their father or a living male relative in order to marry. The law allows for the practice of *Siqeh*, or temporary marriage, a Shi'a custom in which a woman or a girl may become the wife of a married or single Muslim male after a simple and brief religious ceremony. The bond is not recorded on identification documents, and, according to Islamic law, men may have as many *Siqeh* wives as they wish. Such wives usually are not granted rights associated with traditional marriage.

Women have the right to divorce, and regulations promulgated in 1984 substantially broadened the grounds on which a woman may seek a divorce. However, a husband is not required to cite a reason for divorcing his wife. In 1986 the Government issued a 12-point "contract" to serve as a model for marriage and divorce, which limits the privileges accorded to men by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law. The model contract also recognized a divorced woman's right to a share in the property that couples acquire during their marriage and to increased alimony rights. Women who remarry are forced to give up custody of children from earlier marriages to the child's father. In 1998 the Majlis passed a law that granted custody of minor children to the mother in certain divorce cases in which the father is proven unfit to care for the child. The measure was enacted because of the complaints of mothers who had lost custody of their children to former husbands with drug addictions and criminal records.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, since 1979 more than 200 Baha'is have been killed and 15 have disappeared and are presumed dead. The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs.

The Government appears to keep a small number of Baha'is in arbitrary detention, some at risk of execution, at any given time. There reportedly were four Baha'is in prison for practicing their faith at the end of the period covered by this report, one facing a life sentence, two facing sentences of 15 years, and

one a 4-year sentence. In addition, the Government harasses the Baha'i community by arresting Baha'is arbitrarily, charging them, and then releasing them, often without dropping the charges against them. Those with charges still pending against them fear arrest at any time.

According to Baha'i sources in the United States, 23 Baha'is from 18 different localities were arbitrarily arrested and detained for a short time since June 2002, simply because of their Baha'i faith. None of these individuals are currently in prison.

Manuchehr Khulusi was arrested for unknown reasons in 1999 and imprisoned and sentenced to death in 2000. During his imprisonment, Khulusi reportedly was interrogated, beaten, held in solitary confinement, and denied access to his lawyer. In 2002 the Revolutionary Court of Mashad abrogated the suspension of his imprisonment and sentenced him to 4 years in prison, once again due to his participation in Baha'i activities. He was re-imprisoned in March 2003.

In May 2003, Musa Talibi, who had originally been arrested in 1994 and sentenced to death for apostasy, was released from prison in Isfahan. Upon his release, Talibi received no official explanation as to his status. As in the case of Khulusi, he may be subject to re-arrest at any time.

Two Baha'is, Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Hadayat Kashefi-Najafabadi, were tried in 1998 and later sentenced to death by a revolutionary court in Mashad for practicing their faith. In 2000 the sentences were reduced to 7 and 5 years, respectively. Kashefi-Najafabadi was released in October 2001, after serving 4 years of his sentence. Zabihi-Moghaddam, who originally was arrested in November 1997, was released in June 2002.

Government action against Baha'i education continued during the period covered by this report. In 1998 the Government raided more than 500 Baha'i homes and offices affiliated with the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education nationwide, arresting numerous members of the faculty and staff. Also known as the "Open University," the Baha'i community established the Institute shortly after the Revolution to offer higher educational opportunities to Baha'i students denied access to the country's high schools and universities. In mid-2002 the Institute's qualifying exams were disrupted when Revolutionary Guards raided eight exam sites in several different cities, including Shiraz and Mashhad. The exams and books of most students were confiscated. At the same time, 17 Baha'is attending a summer camp were arrested and questioned before being released.

The property rights of Baha'is generally are disregarded and they suffer frequent government harassment and persecution. Since 1979 the Government has confiscated large numbers of private and business properties belonging to Baha'is. According to Baha'i sources, an Islamic Revolutionary Court recently rejected the appeal of a Bahai for the return of his confiscated property on the grounds that he held Baha'i classes in his home and had a library of over 900 Baha'i books. Numerous Baha'i homes reportedly have been seized and handed over to an agency of Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Sources indicate that property was confiscated in Rafsanjan, Kerman, Marv-Dasht, and Yazd. Several Baha'i farmers in southern Iran were arrested, and one who was jailed for several days was only freed after paying a "fine." Authorities reportedly also confiscated Baha'i properties in Kata, forced several families to leave their homes and farmlands, imprisoned some farmers, and did not permit others to harvest their crops. In one instance, a Baha'i woman from Isfahan who legally traveled abroad found that her home had been confiscated when she returned home. The Government also has seized private homes in which Baha'i youth classes were held despite the owners having proper ownership documents. The Government's seizure of Baha'i personal property and its denial of Baha'i access to education and employment are eroding the economic base of the Baha'i community.

It has become somewhat easier for Baha'is to obtain passports. In addition, some Iranian embassies abroad do not require applicants to state a religious affiliation. In such cases, it is easier for Baha'is to renew passports. However, in February 2001, the Government denied Iranian entry visas to Baha'i delegation participants attending the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Conference for the World Conference on Racism, held in Tehran. The delegation was composed of American, Japanese, South Korean, and Indian nationals.

The Government vigilantly enforces its prohibition on proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians by closing evangelical churches and arresting converts. Members of evangelical congregations have been required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Worshipers are subject to identity checks by authorities posted outside congregation centers. The Government has restricted meetings for evangelical services to Sundays, and church officials have been ordered to inform the Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance before admitting new members to their congregations.

Conversion of a Muslim to a non-Muslim religion is considered apostasy under Shari'a law as enforced in the country, and non-Muslims may not proselytize Muslims without putting their own lives at risk. Evangelical church leaders are subject to pressure from authorities to sign pledges that they would not

evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services.

Mistreatment of evangelical Christians continued during the period covered by this report. Christian groups have reported instances of government harassment of churchgoers in Tehran, in particular against worshippers at the Assembly of God congregation in the capitol. Harassment has included conspicuous monitoring outside Christian premises by Revolutionary Guards to discourage Muslims or converts from entering church premises and demands for the presentation of the identity papers of worshippers inside.

Some Jewish groups outside the country cite an increase in anti-Semitic propaganda in the official and semiofficial media as adding to the pressure felt by the Jewish community. One example cited is the periodic publication of the anti-Semitic and fictitious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," both by the Government and by periodicals associated with hard-line elements of the regime.

In 2000 10 of 13 Jews arrested in 1999 were convicted on charges of illegal contact with Israel, conspiracy to form an illegal organization, and recruiting agents. Along with two Muslim defendants, the 10 Jews received prison sentences ranging from 4 to 13 years. An appeals court subsequently overturned the convictions for forming an illegal organization and recruiting agents, but upheld the convictions for illegal contacts with Israel with reduced sentences. One of the 10 was released in February 2001 and another in January 2002, both upon completion of their prison terms. Three additional prisoners were released before the end of their sentences in October 2002. In April 2003, it was announced that the last five were to be released. It is not clear if the eight who were released before the completion of their sentences were fully pardoned, or were released provisionally.

During and since the trial, Jewish businesses in Tehran and Shiraz have been targets of vandalism and boycotts and Jews reportedly have suffered personal harassment and intimidation.

In 2002 the group Families of Iranian Jewish Prisoners (FIJP) published the names of 12 Iranian Jews who disappeared while attempting to escape from the country in the 1990s. The families continued to report anecdotal evidence that some of the men are in Iranian prisons. The Government never has provided any information regarding their whereabouts and has not charged any of them with crimes. FIJP believes that the Government has dealt with these cases differently than it has with other similar cases because the persons involved are Jewish.

Numerous Sunni clerics have been killed in recent years, some allegedly by government agents.

There were no reports of government harassment of the Zoroastrian community during the period covered by this report.

The Government carefully monitors the statements and views of the country's senior Shi'a religious leaders. It has restricted the movement of several who have been under house arrest for years, including Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was released from 5 years of house arrest in January 2003.

The Special Clerical Court (SCC) system, which was established in 1987 to investigate offenses and crimes committed by clerics, and which the Supreme Leader oversees directly, is not provided for in the Constitution, and operates outside the domain of the judiciary. In particular, critics alleged that the clerical courts were used to prosecute certain clerics for expressing controversial ideas and for participating in activities outside the area of religion, including journalism.

In November 1999, former Interior Minister and Vice President Abdollah Nouri was sentenced by a branch of the SCC to a 5-year prison term for allegedly publishing "anti-Islamic" articles, insulting government officials, promoting friendly relations with the United States, and providing illegal publicity to dissident cleric Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri in the pages of Khordad, a newspaper that was established by Nouri in late 1998 and closed at the time of his arrest. Nouri used the public trial to attack the legitimacy of the SCC. In November 2002, Nouri was pardoned by the Supreme Leader and released from prison after his brother, Member of Parliament Ali Reza Nouri, died in a car accident.

Laws based on religion have been used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines have been closed, and leading publishers and journalists were imprisoned on vague charges of "insulting Islam" or "calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic." In November 2002, Iranian academic Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death for blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed, based on a speech in June 2002 in which he challenged Muslims not to blindly follow the clergy, provoking an international and domestic outcry. His death sentence was revoked by the Supreme Court in February 2003, but the case was sent back to the lower court for retrial. No verdict was issued at the time of this report.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. However, a child born to a Muslim father automatically is considered a Muslim.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The continuous presence of the country's pre-Islamic, non-Muslim communities, such as Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, has accustomed the population to the participation of non-Muslims in society. However, government actions create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities.

The Jewish community has been reduced to less than one-half of its pre-revolutionary size. Some of this emigration is connected with the larger, general waves of departures following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, but some also stems from continued perceived anti-Semitism on the part of the Government and within society.

The Government's anti-Israel policies and the trial of the 13 Jews in 2000, along with the perception among some of the country's radicalized elements that Iranian Jews support Zionism and the State of Israel, created a threatening atmosphere for the Jewish community (see Section II). Many Jews have sought to limit their contact with or support for the State of Israel out of fear of reprisal. Recent anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations have included the denunciation of "Jews," as opposed to the past practice of denouncing only "Israel" and "Zionism," adding to the threatening atmosphere for the community.

Sunni Muslims encounter religious discrimination at the local level, and there were reports of discrimination against practitioners of the Sufi tradition during the period covered by this report.

In a March 2002 meeting at the Vatican with Pope John Paul II, Speaker of the Majlis Mahdi Karrubi called for the expansion of Tehran-Vatican ties and said that dialog among religions can promote the restoration of peace and the elimination of violence in the world. In June 2002, Mohammad Khamenei, brother of the Supreme Leader, told the Pope in a Vatican meeting that dialog among religions was an ideal means for establishing global peace and justice. In June 2003, an interfaith delegation of U.S. Christians, Jews, and Muslims traveled to Iran to meet with Iranian religious, political, and cultural leaders.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran and thus cannot raise directly with the Government the restrictions the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses that it commits against adherents of minority religions. The U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and reports, support for relevant U.N. and NGO efforts, and diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to Iranian government abuses.

From 1982 to 2001, the U.S. Government co-sponsored a resolution each year regarding the human rights situation in the country offered by the European Union at the annual meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). It passed every year until 2002, when the United States did not sit on the Commission and the resolution failed passage by one vote. The U.S. has supported a similar resolution offered each year during the U.N. General Assembly until the fall of 2002, when no resolution was tabled. The U.S. Government strongly supported the work of the UN Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on Human Rights for Iran and called on the Iranian Government to grant him admission and allow him to conduct his research during the period of his mandate, which expired with the defeat of the resolution at the Commission on Human Rights in 2002. There was also no resolution on Iran at the UNCHR in the spring of 2003.

The U.S. State Department spokesman on numerous occasions has addressed the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities. The U.S. Government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements and has urged those governments to raise the issue of religious freedom in discussions with the Iranian Government.

In March 2003, the Secretary of State again designated Iran as a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Secretary of State had similarly designated Iran in 1999, 2000, and 2001.

1. The United States does not have an embassy in Iran. This report draws heavily upon non-U.S. Government sources.

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