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Speaking Notes:

Religious intolerance, and the religious persecution which it spawns, are increasingly recognised as significant obstacles to the maintenance of human security - to the establishment of a just and peaceable society.

In October 1998, Minister Axworthy announced, at the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Conference held in Edmonton, Alberta, that religious intolerance had been adopted as a priority thematic concern. DFAIT/NGO consultations held March 4th and 5th 1999 provided a first opportunity for NGOs to explore this thematic area with officials of Foreign Affairs. Today we will take that consultation another step forward.

The persecution of the Bahá'í minority in Iran, is a clear example of the recrudescence of state sponsored religious persecution. Bahá'ís in Iran share the same language, ethnicity and culture as their co-citizens. They are persecuted simply because they are Bahá'í.

The Bahá'í Community of Canada and the Bahá'í International Community believe that it has been through the pressure of international attention, from the Commission on Human Rights resolutions to the General Assembly resolutions, as well as multilateral and bilateral interventions by governments such as Canada, that the persecutions have been moderated.

We will therefore, discuss the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran within the framework of the International Human Rights instruments and the mechanisms and special procedures that are invoked in an attempt to restore the human rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran and to bring about the emancipation of the Bahá'ís and other religious minorities in that country.

Hopefully the insights which this approach to the topic yields will be applicable to other similar situations and will help us to identify strategies and processes that we might recommend to the Department of Foreign Affairs for its consideration as it develops policies to address this area of growing concern.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Bahá'í Faith, a few words about its origin and central teachings.

Origins and History

- Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion- originated in Iran (Persia) in 1840's
- Founder and adherents persecuted as heretics and exiled - first to Baghdad, eventually to Akka in Palestine (1868), then part of the Ottoman Empire
- Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-founder of the Bahá'í faith, imprisoned or under house arrest in Akka until 1892