

Iran has "enemies" both

by Helgi Eyford

The release of the American hostages has not got Iran off the hook. Iran has yet to give any country, including Canada, any reason to believe diplomatic immunity and other conventions of international relations will be respected. Worse still, in many peoples eyes, is the continued disregard for even the most basic human rights in Iran. The most obvious and predictable of these rights to be ignored is religious minority rights, especially as witnessed by the persecution of the Baha'is, the largest religious minority in Iran with some 400,000 adherents.

The Baha'is have become the victims of a mounting campaign of harassment since the Ayatollah Khomeini took power in January 1979. Individual Baha'is have been summarily arrested and executed, Baha'i homes and businesses have been confiscated and large numbers of Baha'is have been sacked from government jobs. Baha'i holy places and cemeteries have been destroyed and desecrated and the members of the elected national administrative body of the Baha'is have been arrested and not heard from since. All this is perpetrated

under the charge of being a Baha'i and, as such, an "enemy of Islam." The Baha'is are considered heretics and "renegades" from Islam by the Islamic clergy because the founders of their religion, in the late century, were Persian Muslims (Shi'ite Muslim) and because their prophet, Baha'u'llah (1817 - 1892) was born after Muhammed who is considered by Muslims to be the last and the "Seal of the Prophets." However, Baha'is are today scattered around the world in some 88,000 localities and are, for the most part, neither of Persian origin nor converts



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from Islam. The Baha'is teach of the oneness of religion and the oneness of mankind and consequently operate and exist on an international scale.

The Baha'is vex the Islamic regime in Iran by teaching such un-Islamic concepts as the unity of religions and the equality of the sexes. They are accused by the regime of encouraging prostitution because the Baha'is favor female emancipation and also the Chador. They are accused of being agents of imperialism because of the number of wealthy Baha'is in Iran. The religion's liberalism and its emphasis on education has at-

tracted and helped many of the better off; but in fact the majority of the Iranian Baha'is are villagers, attracted for the same reasons.

They are accused of being "Agents of Israel"...

But far more effective has been the politicization of the accusations against the Baha'is. They are accused of being "agents of Israel" because their World Center is in Haifa, even though it

was established there in 1868, almost a century before the establishment of Israel. Baha'is are further accused of being supporters of the Shah's regime and of SAVAK. The accusation is questionable when one considers that the Baha'is are not allowed to become involved in politics and are obliged to support whatever regime is in power. This accusation becomes ludicrous when one considers that the Shah and SAVAK organized programs against the Baha'is, most notably in 1955 and 1963.

The Baha'i International Community has attempted to secure legal sanctions to protect the Baha'is in Iran. Their case was presented to the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, sitting in Geneva. As a result the Sub-Commission passed a resolution on September 15 stating the Sub-Commission's "profound concern for the safety of the Baha'is in Iran" and requesting the United Nations Secretary General to convey this concern to the authorities in Iran and call on the Iranian government to recognize the fundamental rights of the Baha'is.

...Have no recourse in international law...

The Iranians answered this by stating that the Baha'i faith is not a religion under the constitution of Iran (Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians are) and it is therefore not protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which Iran has signed and ratified. And while further legal action has been suggested by the "experts" at the U.N. this would seem futile considering the American government's attempt to obtain legal sanctions against Iran for holding the hostages and the attempt's dismal failure.

The Baha'is have also obtained a resolution by the European Parliament (September 10) which denounces the "systematic persecution of Iranian Baha'is" and calls on member countries to impose an embargo on all sales of



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