

**Summary Report on Attacks Against Bahá'í School Children in Iran
June 2007–January 2008**

- In Marvdasht, principals of all schools in the district have been asked to forward to the Security Office of the Department of Education on a confidential basis all enrolment forms “on students from religious minorities and the perverse Bahaist sect”. In addition, they are instructed to submit, in January and again in May, confidential reports on the activities of students who express an interest in religions other than Islam or who ask whether they have to attend classes on the Qur’án and Islamic ceremonies held at the school. While the activities of these students are to be monitored closely, the principals are cautioned that this information is to be obtained without the knowledge of the students concerned, their parents, or their teachers, as teachers and other staff have no right to ask students about their beliefs, and students are within their rights to refuse to respond to teachers who ask them such questions. These twice yearly reports are to indicate what may have contributed to a student’s interest in these other religions or sects; the methods these students use to “teach” (“Tabligh”, the term used in the document is commonly associated with teaching the Bahá’í Faith); and the extent of the student’s influence on other students. Although the foregoing description is of action being taken specifically in Marvdasht, the Bahá’ís in Iran have indicated this kind of surreptitious identification and monitoring of Bahá’í students is taking place in every region of the country.
- At the beginning of the school year, at least fifty Bahá’í students were refused enrolment for wholly unjustified reasons, such as having referred to the Faith in classes in the previous year; in some cases religious staff simply refused to enrol any student who is not a Muslim. Many families were therefore forced to enrol their children in schools much further away from their homes than the schools they could have attended if not for the discriminatory treatment of school officials.
- Ten Bahá’í students were expelled from schools in Vilashahr, Najafabad, and Shahinshahr in the province of Isfahan for having chosen to specify “Bahá’í” in the space provided for religion on forms the school authorities gave them to complete some two months after school had begun. The students and their parents, having sought legal counsel, sent letters of complaint to the relevant school officials. A few days later, the parents and their children went to one of the schools to ask that their children be allowed to return to their classes. The principal evaded this request and instead called the police. Although the police never appeared at the school, soon after this call approximately thirty Islamic Revolutionary Guards arrived in a blatant attempt to intimidate the students and their parents, followed shortly thereafter by some one hundred women from the School of Theology in Vilashahr. When the Bahá’ís declined to leave the schoolyard, the Guards physically assaulted a couple of them and then carried a bench, with the Bahá’ís still sitting on it, outside the schoolyard. Throughout, the Guards were chanting anti-Bahá’í slogans.

As a result of the foregoing incident, the Bahá’ís contacted the office of the Ministry of Education in Isfahan province, where they were asked once again by the head of the Security Office in Isfahan to enter two strikes in the space for religion on the school registration form, which the Bahá’ís were not prepared to do. The head of the Security Office then explained, “We do not wish to harm anyone, and our intention in identifying religion is to know the principal belief on which the student wishes to be tested.” Eventually the Bahá’ís suggested that “Islamic Studies” be stated in the form, and the authorities accepted this. The Bahá’ís, who had refused to bow to pressure that they pledge not to mention their Faith at school, wrote on the form, “If we are not asked and our beliefs are not insulted, we will not volunteer our religion.” The authorities accepted, and the students were finally able to return to school. The following day, however, the school principal expelled them from school again and

indicated that if they wished to continue their studies, they would have to leave the space on the forms blank, or strike it through, or write “Muslim”. Three of the Bahá'ís did choose to strike through the space and were able to return to school; the remaining Bahá'í students have still not been permitted to return. Throughout this process, a considerable number of non-Bahá'í students and teachers defended the Bahá'ís, some also visiting the homes of expelled students to convey sympathy.

- Two students have been expelled in Shahinshahr and another nine in Shiraz, for having chosen to identify themselves as Bahá'ís on the school registration form, for refusing not to be silenced when their Faith was maligned, or for asking to be excused from having to take part in Muslim religious ceremonies.
- On 31 October 2007, Miss Fá'iqih Há'í Najafábádí [Faegheh Ha'i Najafabadi] was expelled from a university preparatory college for having sought to correct defamatory statements about the Faith by members of the clergy who had on two occasions addressed her religious studies class. Following the first such session, school authorities tried to get her classmates to agree to report to the administration any time that Miss Najafábádí referred to the Faith in class. The students refused to do so and intervened when a teacher in this same class tried to silence her from sharing her personal views in an open discussion about women and the veil. When Miss Najafábádí demanded to see the expulsion order from the Department of Education, the college principal claimed that he had no idea what had happened and was only acting on the instructions of his superiors, stating also that he was informed by telephone that she had been provoking the pupils by disturbing the religious studies class. The following day, Miss Najafábádí's parents went to the Department of Education in Shahinshahr to attempt to follow up the matter. They finally managed, after three and a half hours, to meet with the director of the Department of Education, who stated that Miss Najafábádí had been expelled because she had attempted to undermine Islamic mores and because she had identified herself as a Bahá'í; on this latter point, the director indicated that according to a communiqué from higher authorities, Bahá'í students are allowed to continue their studies only if they do not state that they are Bahá'ís, and as soon as they do so, they are to be expelled. The director refused to provide the family with any documentation to support his statement. When the Bahá'ís stated that they could not remain silent when misinformation was presented or questions arose about their Faith in their classes, the director asserted that even if 1,000 Bahá'í students did this, he would expel them all.
- In Kerman, Miss Rúminá Ziynlí (Romina Ziylnli) a student at a university preparatory college was accused of teaching the Faith when she responded to questions from some of her classmates. She was called to the office and ordered to sign an undertaking not to “teach” the Faith within the school premises, with which she refused to comply, indicating that if she was asked about her beliefs or anyone offended her religion, she would have to provide explanations. Despite efforts by three officials from the Security Office of the Education Department, who tried for an hour and a half to make her sign the undertaking not to teach, Miss Ziynlí courageously resisted their demand. Consequently, they gave her two options from which to choose: either her education or her Faith. She told them that she would not replace her Faith with anything. When the school headmaster then told her forcefully to leave the school, eight hundred students caused a commotion in protest. In a telephone call to the headmaster, Miss Ziynlí's mother pointed out that as a result of her daughter's speaking to a few of her classmates about the Faith, the school management caused the whole school to hear about the Faith. Following lengthy discussions between the headmaster and the officials in the Security Office, it was decided that Miss Ziynlí should be transferred to another school. Her mother commented that doing so would only provide another opportunity for more people to hear about the Faith. Consequently,

Miss Ziynlí was allowed to return to her original school on the condition that she would not initiate any discussion about her belief and would not cause an uproar about her return to the school.

- In another case in Kerman, a few weeks after the commencement of university preparatory classes, the parents of a Bahá'í student were summoned to the school. The principal told them that when the founder of the school realized that a Bahá'í had enrolled, he or she had expressed dissatisfaction and requested that the student be transferred to another school.
- In the city of Andisheh, a young woman, sixteen years of age, was accosted several times by individuals, one of whom had picked her up in the guise of a taxi driver and, refusing to let her off at her school, said to her, “[You are a] Bahá'í child, and you teach. I will kill you.” This same person also made threatening calls to her home, in one instance stating, “You will never be able to find me. We will start with you and gradually reach the rest. We are a group who wants to cleanse the schools.” The family reported the incidents to the police, who told them to return the following day and ultimately were of no help to them. Some days later, while at her sister's shop, another man tried to assault the young Bahá'í woman with a knife, but she pushed him away and he ran out. Several days after this, a smartly dressed woman approached her in the schoolyard and, greeting her with “Alláh-u-Abhá”, asked where the Bahá'ís would be meeting that night. Since the Bahá'í community would be commemorating a Bahá'í Holy Day that evening, the young woman directed her to obtain the details from whoever had invited her to the community's activities. The woman responded by suggesting that they leave immediately to see the young woman's mother, at which point the Bahá'í student returned to her classroom. Several days later, at the end of the school day the young woman sensed someone was following her as she left the school. She fainted, and when she regained consciousness, she was in a car with the same man who had originally driven her to school in the guise of a taxi driver. Two other men were in the car, one of whom was the one who had tried to attack her in her sister's shop. The woman who had spoken to her in the schoolyard was also in the car with them. When one of the men reached out to grasp her, she tried to defend herself and was slapped in the face by the woman. They also broke her eyeglasses and pulled her hair. They then pushed her out of the car and drove away. She was able to reach her parents, and they went to the police station to report the incident and were told to return the next day. They did so, and, as a result, one of the senior officers then went to the school and spoke to the principal. He stayed in the vicinity of the school until the end of the day. During a private conversation with the principal, the young woman was told, “These people are a group who want to cause differences between the two religions [i.e., Muslims and Bahá'ís].” The principal assured the student that these people would not be allowed into the school.
- In a school in Babulsar, a teacher distributed a booklet to encourage the students to attend the Muḥaddithín mosque to prepare for their encounters with Bahá'ís. The booklet states that the mosque was established as a centre for anti-Jewish and anti-Bahá'í activities.
- A third-year student at a middle school was vilified by her classmates when she tried to correct misrepresentations of the Faith in the class's history book. (“What kind of place is this that any donkey can go and teach its religion?” “These unclean Bahá'ís are using our water fountains, and we cannot drink out of them.” “What right do you have to talk about your religion? You are teaching, and you do not have any right to teach, and if the principal finds out, you will be expelled from school.”) The teacher responded by telling the students, “We have to follow our Prophet and the Imams, who were kind to people who threw stones at them.” After the class the teacher advised the Bahá'í student not to talk about her religion in the class or she would be

expelled; she also tried to prove to the young woman that the Faith is a false religion. Two days later, the principal told the Bahá'í student that all of the parents had been complaining that their children were fearful over this incident, that they did not feel safe at school, and if this happened again, the parents would take their children out of school. The principal asserted that what is written in the history books is correct and that she would not allow similar occurrences to take place in the classroom.

- A Bahá'í student in secondary school in Ghaem Shahr who had corrected misinformation about the Faith in a history class and whose comments the teacher was unable to counter, was the next day subjected to having to listen to a presentation by a clergyman who attributed to the Bahá'ís immoral acts so shameful that later the student could not even reveal to her mother what he had said. He concluded his foul remarks by stating “Their leader is a naked American lady.” The Bahá'í student stood up and asked for permission to speak. The head teacher ordered her to sit, but she remained standing and burst into tears. The head teacher then told her if she could not bear to hear what was said there, she should leave the room, so she did. The other Bahá'í students also followed her. The head teacher took the Bahá'í students to the office and reprimanded them, saying that they had been favoured so far and were not allowed to speak of their beliefs in school. She stated that if they were asked a question, they could only reply that they believed in God. She also asked the children not to speak about this incident with their parents. The Muslim students who remained in the classroom were very upset over this incident, many of them remarking that they knew the Bahá'ís, were friends with them, and what was being said about them was untrue. Some of these students cried in sympathy with their Bahá'í friends.

Following the incident, the mother of the Bahá'í student who had spoken out originally in history class went to see the head teacher, who said that she had acted harshly because of the instructions she had received; however, she was fearful of losing her job if she had allowed the Bahá'í student to speak out in the class.

- Two Bahá'í students in Abadeh were called to the office of the school principal and asked not to talk about their beliefs anymore, the day after they had engaged in a lively question and answer session about the Faith with their classmates, which had included the helpful involvement of their teacher who had indicated that she herself knew little about the Faith and had invited the two students to answer questions about it. The teacher indicated to the class that the Bahá'í Faith is a religion and the Bahá'ís, in obedience to Bahá'u'lláh, worship God. She also mentioned that Bahá'u'lláh had written beautiful poetry. In addition to providing accurate information regarding the teachings of the Faith, the students also spoke of the persecution suffered by the Bahá'ís in Iran, noting that this is continuing to this day, and referring to the barring of Bahá'ís from Iran's universities. One of the Bahá'í students told of the imprisonment of one of her grandfathers and the burning of her other grandfather's place of business. The teacher and the classmates were affected by the students' account of the injustices suffered by Bahá'ís.
- When seven high school students were expelled from school in Shiraz for refusing to sign an undertaking not to speak out in defence of the Faith in their classrooms, their parents accompanied them to school to request a written copy of the order for their expulsion. The headmaster contacted the Security Office and then turned the matter over to the father of one of the students, designating him to serve as the spokesperson for all of the parents concerned. The families were unsuccessful in their efforts to resolve the matter. Later that day, an official from the Intelligence Ministry came to the home of the parent who had served as spokesperson in the exchange with the Security Office, searched it for three hours; collected all books, booklets, and papers related to the Bahá'í community; and arrested the parent. Before

beginning their interrogation at the Intelligence Ministry's detention centre, they physically assaulted him. He was questioned three times. In each session, the questions focused mainly on the teaching activities of the Bahá'ís. On the third occasion, he was requested to state in front of a film camera, his name and family name, religion, occupation, the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, the reason for his child's expulsion from school, the meaning of teaching the Bahá'í Faith, and his expectation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He provided detailed responses on each of these points. With respect to the final point, he expressed his expectation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as follows: "I, as a Bahá'í, have only one expectation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and this, based on the law, as a citizen, to have the right of freedom of speech about my belief." He was then interrogated twice by the public prosecutor general of the Revolutionary Court of Justice, along the same lines as the questioning he had faced by Intelligence Ministry officials. He was told that he was accused of spreading propaganda on behalf of anti-regime groups and threatening the security of the country. His daughter was also summoned by the Revolutionary Court and accused of teaching the Faith in school. Both were charged by the court and set free but told they would have to appear when summoned.