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**Bahá'ís raise alarm over destruction of cultural heritage in Iran**

WASHINGTON, September 13, 2004 – In recent months, government authorities in Iran have demolished historic sites of great artistic and cultural significance, which are also sacred to the country's Bahá'í religious minority. In response to the demolitions, the United States Bahá'í community has placed a statement in the September 12 edition of *The New York Times* calling on Iranians in particular to protest the destruction of their country's cultural heritage.

The recent destruction of Bahá'í sacred sites is the latest tactic employed by Iran's ruling clerics in their decades-long effort to destroy the country's Bahá'í community.

In June, a wrecking crew demolished a stately home in Tehran that had belonged to Mirza Abbas Nuri, the father of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Mirza Abbas, who was born and died a Muslim, was a renowned 19<sup>th</sup>-century statesman, scholar and calligrapher. His home had been preserved as an exquisite example of Iranian-Islamic architecture. Iranian newspapers carried articles expressing shock over the demolition. "How is it," one of them wrote, "that in the middle of the day... the very essence of our cultural heritage is being destroyed?"

In April, the gravesite of Quddús, a prominent figure in early Bahá'í history, was razed to the ground, despite protests from Bahá'ís at the local, national and international levels. The house-like structure marked the resting place of Mulla Muhammad-'Ali Barfurushi, known as Quddús (The Most Holy), the foremost disciple of the Báb, the Prophet-Herald of the Bahá'í Faith.

Destruction of the gravesite began in February but was temporarily halted after local Bahá'ís demanded to see a legal permit for the demolition work. It appeared that the demolition had been halted, but the dismantling of the gravesite continued surreptitiously over a period of days until the structure was entirely demolished.

Since the Islamic Republic of Iran was founded in 1979, the Iranian Government has confiscated Bahá'í cemeteries, holy places and historical sites. Many have been destroyed, including the House of the Báb in Shiraz, one of the most sacred sites in the Bahá'í world, and the House of Bahá'u'lláh in Takur, where the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith spent his childhood. Bahá'í cemeteries in Tehran, Shiraz and other cities have been desecrated. In Tehran alone, more than 15,000 graves in the Bahá'í cemetery were bulldozed to make way for construction of a municipal center in 1993.

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