

Timeline of events in the Iranian government's effort to deprive Baha'is of higher education

1979

Shortly after the 1979 Islamic revolution, large numbers of Baha'i youth and children were expelled from school. The expulsions were not systematic, focusing mainly on children who were most strongly identified as Baha'is, but they ranged across the entire education system, from primary, through secondary, to the college level, where the ban was virtually total.

1987

In an effort to mitigate the effects of the ban on enrollment in universities, Baha'is established the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE). The Institute offered classes in private homes throughout the country, augmented by a scattering of specialized classrooms, laboratories and libraries. At its peak, the Institute enrolled more than 900 students. ([See "The Baha'i Institute for Higher Education."](#))

Early 1990s

Partly in response to international pressure, primary and secondary school children were allowed to re-enroll. However, the government maintained the ban on the entry of Baha'i youth into public and private institutions of higher education. The government used a simple mechanism to exclude Baha'is from higher education: it has simply required that everyone who takes the national university entrance examination declare their religion. Applicants who indicated other than one of the four officially recognized religions in Iran — Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism — were excluded.

1993

The United Nations released a [secret 1991 memorandum from Iran](#) that outlined a comprehensive plan to "block" the development and progress of the Iranian Baha'i community. It stated specifically 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." The memorandum was signed by Hujjatu'l Islam Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani, secretary of the Iran Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, and was endorsed by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, reflecting the highest-level policy of the government.

1998

In an effort to shut down the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, agents of the Iranian government staged a series of sweeping raids in late September and early October, arresting at least 36 members of the BIHE faculty and staff and confiscating much of its equipment and records, which were located in over 500 homes. ([See article.](#))

2003

In response to international pressure, the Iranian government officially announced in late 2003 that it would drop the declaration of religious affiliation on the application for the national university entrance examination.

2004

Believing that this announcement cleared the way for them to freely enroll in universities, more than 1,000 Iranian Baha'i youth took college entrance examinations, which, indeed, had no field requiring declaration of religion. Many passed, with very high scores.

Later that same year, however, in an action that Baha'i International Community representatives characterize as a ploy, exam results were sent back to Baha'is with the word "Muslim" written in, something that officials knew would be unacceptable to Baha'is. As a matter of religious principle, Baha'is refuse to deny their beliefs.

Government officials argued that since, in the religious studies section of the test, the Baha'is had opted to take the set of questions on Islam, they should be listed as Muslims. Baha'is contested the action and were rebuffed; no Baha'i students entered university that year.

2005

The pattern established in 2004 repeated itself. Hundreds of Baha'i students took and passed the national examination, only to find that the government had listed them as Muslims. Baha'is again were unsuccessful in contesting the action, and no Baha'is matriculated in 2005.

2006

Once again, acting on good faith, hundreds of Baha'is took the national university entrance examination. As before, hundreds received passing scores or higher. After assurances from the government that identification with the Islamic studies section of the test did not reflect an official statement that the students were considered Muslims, the Baha'i community accepted this clarification and about 200 Baha'i students were admitted.

Over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year, however, over half that number – at least 128 – were expelled as university officials discovered they were Baha'is.

2007

In August, the Baha'i International Community said it had received, among other documents, a copy of a confidential 2006 letter from Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology instructing Iranian universities to expel any student who is discovered to be a Baha'i. The letter, which was issued to 81 Iranian universities, also made a clear reference to the 1991 Golpaygani memorandum, indicating that it remains official policy 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." ([See article.](#))

In addition, of the more 1,000 Baha'i students who took the national university entrance examination in 2007 at least 800 have not received test results, under the pretext of having an "incomplete file," and so they have not been able to apply to a university for the 2007-2008 academic year.