

Bahá'í International Community

Violence with Impunity: Acts of aggression against Iran's Bahá'í community



A special report of the
Bahá'í International Community
March 2013

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866 United Nations Plaza
Suite 120
New York, NY 10017-1833 USA
<http://bic.org>

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1 Introduction

For more than three decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has waged a widespread and systematic campaign of persecution against the country's Bahá'í religious minority. Since 1979, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been executed, hundreds more imprisoned and tortured, tens of thousands denied employment, education, freedom of worship, and other rights—all solely because their religion is declared to be a “heretical sect.”

This persecution has intensified in recent years. Since 2005, more than 660 Bahá'ís have been arrested, and, by the end of 2012, at least 115 Bahá'ís were languishing in prison. The increase in arrests has been accompanied by a rising tide of violence against Bahá'ís, marked by incidents that include arson attacks, anti-Bahá'í graffiti, hate speech, the desecration of Bahá'í cemeteries, and assaults on schoolchildren.

The focus of this report is to document the overall rise in violence against Iranian Bahá'ís and to connect it to another significant feature of Iran's persecution of Bahá'ís: the degree to which perpetrators—official and unofficial alike—act with complete impunity from prosecution.

The statistics are stark: Since 2005, we have documented 52 cases where Bahá'ís have been tortured or held in solitary confinement while in detention. Another 52 incidents where Bahá'ís have been physically assaulted—sometimes at the hands of officials and sometimes at the hands of plainclothes or unidentified attackers—have likewise been documented. Attacks have also been directed at Bahá'í-owned properties. There have been at least 49 incidents of arson against Bahá'í homes and shops, and more than 30 have been otherwise vandalized, such as with hateful graffiti. At least 42 Bahá'í cemeteries throughout the country have been desecrated or damaged. Moreover, hundreds of Bahá'í school children have faced insults and harassment from teachers and administrators, and hundreds of Bahá'í businesses have been closed at the sanction of local officials.

In all cases, whether the attacks have been sanctioned by an order from the intelligence ministry or come as a result of incitement, the government has refrained from investigating



A Bahá'í-owned shop in Rafsanjan that was one of a dozen hit by arsonists in late 2010. The attacks coincided with distribution of an anonymous letter warning Bahá'ís against association with Muslims.

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and prosecuting those who are responsible. Indeed, the Bahá'í International Community is not aware of a single instance of someone being prosecuted for such crimes—much less being convicted or imprisoned.

The impunity enjoyed by those who attack Bahá'ís is systemic. It seems to cover a wide range of actors, from government interrogators, who commonly use beatings, solitary confinement, or other forms of torture during detainments, to individuals in plainclothes, whether ordinary citizens or undercover agents.

The government has also sharply increased its efforts to deny Bahá'ís an adequate livelihood and to prevent their young people from obtaining higher education. Throughout Iran, hundreds of Bahá'í-owned shops and businesses have been closed by authorities, and thousands of Bahá'í youth have been denied access to or expelled from universities. Perhaps the most egregious among these incidents has been the arrest and imprisonment in 2011 of individuals associated with the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education, an ad hoc, informal effort initiated by Bahá'ís solely to provide deprived Bahá'í youth with a college education.

The government has fuelled hatred against Bahá'ís through a relentless campaign in the media. This campaign was documented by the Bahá'í International Community in a report released in October 2011. Titled *Inciting Hatred: Iran's media campaign to demonize Bahá'ís*, it offered a sampling of the official and semi-official anti-Bahá'í propaganda issued during a 16-month period from late 2009 through mid-2011, documenting more than 400 articles, broadcasts, or Web pages that falsely portrayed Bahá'ís as the source of every conceivable evil. As the report noted:

They are accused of being agents for various imperialist or colonialist factions; they face continuous but utterly unfounded allegations of immorality; they are branded as social pariahs to be shunned. The propaganda is shocking in its volume and vehemence, its scope and sophistication, cynically calculated to stir up antagonism against a peaceful religious community whose members are striving to contribute to the well-being of their society.

The main thrust of this anti-Bahá'í media campaign has been to brand Bahá'ís as the “other” — outsiders in their own land and enemies of the state, Islam, and the Iranian people. The goal has undoubtedly been to try to create such bias against Bahá'ís that the general population will shun them and look upon the Bahá'í teachings as anathema.

In October 2012, we issued a report documenting the impact of the government's anti-Bahá'í policies in one Iranian city: Semnan. There, since 2005, from a population of several hundred, at

Since 2005, Bahá'ís have been tortured or held in solitary confinement while in detention at least 52 times. In another 52 cases, Bahá'ís have been physically assaulted, sometimes at the hands of officials and sometimes at the hands of unidentified attackers. There have been at least 49 incidents of arson against Bahá'í homes and shops, more than 30 have been otherwise vandalized, and some 42 Bahá'í cemeteries have been desecrated or damaged.

least 34 Bahá'ís have been arrested, and many have been sentenced to long and harsh prison terms. At least 27 Bahá'í-owned businesses have been closed by authorities, and more than a dozen Bahá'í homes and businesses have been the targets of arsonists. Their cemeteries have been vandalized, and their beliefs attacked in the media and from the pulpits of mosques. Perhaps most ominously, their children have been denounced in the city's schools. Overall, the situation reflects a microcosm of the persecution inflicted upon Bahá'ís and other minorities throughout Iran in recent years.

Countrywide, the entire situation puts Bahá'ís in an impossible position. They must ask for justice and protection from the same authorities who are systematically inciting hatred against them and from a judicial system that treats virtually every Bahá'í who is arrested as an enemy of the state.

The Iranian authorities must now be held accountable for this rising tide of violence against Bahá'ís. They must answer not only for official acts of injustice and violence but also for their complete failure to halt unofficial or semi-official attacks.

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2 A rising tide of violence

In 2009, one night at a gas station in Shiraz, a Bahá'í man was attacked at knifepoint by unknown assailants. Thinking it a robbery, he offered them all of his money, but the criminals refused it. Instead they stripped off his clothes, threatened to hang him, and burned him with cigarettes in 16 places.

In 2007, a 16-year-old Bahá'í high school student in a suburb of Tehran found herself subject to repeated harassment by a group of religious fanatics who had apparently been monitoring her movements. During November and December 2007, these anonymous individuals threatened to kill her, made harassing phone calls, and then one day forced her into a car and assaulted her, breaking her glasses, before she managed to escape.

In October-November 2010, more than a dozen Bahá'í-owned properties were the target of arson attacks in the city of Rafsanjan. During the same period, a warning letter was sent to some 20 homes and businesses of Bahá'ís, stating that if their owners stopped associating with or employing Muslims, the firebombings would stop.

In November 2011, unknown individuals desecrated a grave in the Bahá'í cemetery in the city of Abadeh, taking the dead body of a Bahá'í out of a coffin and running it over with some kind of vehicle. This was the second time graves at the cemetery had been desecrated.

These above incidents are but a few examples of the hundreds of attacks, assaults, or threats made against Iranian Bahá'ís in recent years—all of which have gone unpunished. The attacks have come at the hands of unknown assailants, semi-official or non-official actors (such as school administrators or teachers, religious groups or associations), and, in all likelihood, covert government agents. These attacks have paralleled an overall increase in “official” assaults, which frequently involve beatings or torture that occur during arrests and detentions by clearly identified intelligence agents or police.

Taken altogether, this use of “plainclothes” violence makes up a significant part of Iran's overall policy of persecution against Bahá'ís. The rise in violence comes amid the intensification of a state-sponsored media campaign that has sought to vilify and demonize Bahá'ís in Iran.



Interior view of a Bahá'í home in Kerman that was hit by arsonists on 18 July 2008.

Precise numerical data on these types of attacks is difficult to obtain. Collecting and confirming data on human rights violations is by its nature a challenging task. Victims are, for obvious reasons, often reluctant to speak out. Transmitting information from a country where its citizens are closely monitored by the government compounds the problem.

Nevertheless, the Bahá'í International Community has managed to document the following from 2005 through 2012:

- In at least 52 cases, individual Bahá'ís have been physically assaulted by either government agents, mobs, or unknown assailants. At least four Bahá'ís have been murdered, and at least five have died under suspicious circumstances. Many of these attacks have come at the hands of low-level security officials or interrogators but others have come from unidentified or anonymous individuals or groups. In addition, there have been at least 52 cases where Bahá'ís in detention have been tortured or placed in solitary confinement in an effort to obtain confessions to false crimes, among other things.
- There have been some 49 incidents involving arson or firebombing directed against Bahá'ís or Bahá'í properties throughout the country. Most of these attacks have targeted Bahá'í-owned businesses; however there have also been cases of the use, or threatened use, of flammable liquids against individuals. Vandalism against Bahá'í-owned properties—including marking by hateful graffiti—is also on the rise, with 30 clearly documented incidents.
- A marked increase in the harassment of Bahá'í schoolchildren has been reported. Incidents have included insults directed at the Bahá'í Faith in front of entire classrooms of students, expulsion, threats of expulsion, and, in a few cases, physical abuse. These attacks have come mainly from teachers of religious classes, but they have clearly been condoned by school officials. In total, there have been at least 294 incidents of threats, insults, expulsions or beatings directed against individual Bahá'í schoolchildren since 2005.
- There have been 42 documented episodes where Bahá'í cemeteries have been vandalized or desecrated. These have occurred in virtually every region of the country, often under the cover of night, and almost always anonymously. Some cemeteries have been desecrated several times. In a country where respect for the dead is written into the cultural norm, these incidents are especially concerning.



Gravestones in the Bahá'í cemetery near Najafabad, Iran, were left in a heap by a bulldozer that destroyed the burial ground in September 2007.

In none of these incidents has there been any effort by the government to investigate these crimes, let alone to prosecute or sentence the perpetrators. The facts and details surrounding most of these incidents point beyond active ignorance to willing approval or encouragement by the government. In many of the attacks on cemeteries, for example, perpetrators have used heavy equipment; it is highly unlikely ordinary citizens could freely use bulldozers and the like without government complicity.

Rise in “official” persecution

Since 2005, increasing numbers of Iranian Bahá'ís have been arrested and imprisoned—all on trumped-up charges such as spying or “propaganda against the regime” that in fact stem solely from their belief and practice as members of the Bahá'í Faith. More than 660 Bahá'ís were arrested or detained from the start of 2005 through the end of 2012. Of those who have been arrested, some 300 have been sentenced to prison. As of this writing, about 115 are in prison. Some 53 others have served their sentences and been released. About 140 are out on appeal or awaiting a summons to serve their sentences. Another group of approximately 280 Bahá'ís are awaiting trial.

Reports that have emerged from Iran indicate that many of these arrests, detentions, and imprisonments are accompanied by beatings, solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, and other forms of coercion or torture. From 2005 through 2012, the Bahá'í International Community documented at least 52 such incidents of the explicit use of torture or solitary confinement during official interrogations or imprisonments. Anecdotal evidence suggests a much higher figure. As far as the Bahá'í International Community can determine, none of the officials involved have been investigated or prosecuted for such crimes.

In all cases, these violations are compounded by the fact that Bahá'ís face these assaults solely because of their religious belief and their membership in a religious minority.

Part of a larger pattern of repression

The increasing persecution of Bahá'ís comes as part of a wider crackdown on the Iranian population at large. Iranian journalists, human rights defenders, students, trade unionists, and women are among those who have been imprisoned since 2005. This has all been extensively documented by the United Nations and human rights organizations.

Ethnic and religious minority groups, in addition to members of the Bahá'í Faith, also face significant discrimination and persecution in Iran. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern in 2010 for the limited political, economic, social, and cultural rights enjoyed in Iran by the Arab, Azeri, Baloch, and Kurdish communities, particularly in housing, education, freedom of expression and religion, health, and employment.¹ Iran's Sunni population, which includes Kurds and Baluchis, points to the fact that there is not a single Sunni mosque in the country. A Christian organization reported in 2011 that armed, plainclothed

1 2011 UN Secretary General's report on Iran — A/66/361, p 11.

security forces carried out early morning raids on the homes of 25 Christians from the evangelical house church and Armenian communities on 26 December 2010. Eleven were released after days of intense interrogation; the other fourteen were held for many months. Reports of as many as 60 further arrests have also come from Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan and Orumieh.² The treatment of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, who was sentenced to death for apostasy in 2010, has been the focus of an international outcry. In 2012, he was acquitted of that charge, but convicted of acting against national security, given a three-year prison sentence, and released on account of time served.³

This overall rise in human rights violations in Iran has been well documented.

In March 2012, for example, Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, issued a report to the UN Human Rights Council that spoke of “a striking



Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, told the UN Human Rights Council in 2012 that Iran was responsible for “a striking pattern of violations of fundamental human rights guaranteed under international law.” (UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré)

which many Iranians believed was fraudulent—relied not only on uniformed police and security agents but also on the swarms of Basij Resistance Force militiamen, a plainclothes paramilitary force that rode into groups of protestors on motorbikes swinging chains and clubs.⁴

For other groups, too, the issue of impunity looms large, since the perpetrators of human rights violations are rarely if ever prosecuted for their crimes, whether the violators are overzealous prison

pattern of violations of fundamental human rights guaranteed under international law.” Among other abuses, Dr. Shaheed said Iran has “detained more journalists than any other country in the world, with 42 journalists currently imprisoned.” He described a broken justice system in which trial lawyers are sometimes prevented from making an oral defence during a trial. In some cases, “judges reportedly issued a verdict after a trial that lasted only a few minutes.” And he warned of an “alarming increase in executions since 2003,” saying Iran had executed more than 600 individuals in 2011 alone.

In its overall crackdown on those deemed to be against the regime, Iran has likewise made use of both official and semi-official or plainclothes agents. The suppression of demonstrators after the June 2009 presidential election—

2 <http://frontpagemag.com/2011/faith-j-h-mcdonnell/irans-decades-of-christian-persecution/>

3 “Iranian Christian pastor released from jail,” by Saeed Kamali Dehghan, *The Guardian*, 8 September 2012.

4 “Inside the Iranian Crackdown,” Farnaz Fassihi, *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 July 2009.

guards, members of the Basij militia, or plainclothes agents who have been specifically ordered to beat, torture or otherwise humiliate dissidents. Dr. Shaheed devoted 10 paragraphs to the issue in his March 2012 report, saying that “impunity continues to prevail” for those involved in numerous allegations of “egregious human rights violations” that took place following the 2009 presidential election. Overall, he added, the “failure to resolve thousands of cases of torture and extrajudicial execution is indelibly etched into the consciousness of the Iranian people and should be the subject of a comprehensive examination.”⁵

A 2011 report from the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) suggests prisoners of conscience are routinely tortured or otherwise ill-treated. It quoted a letter from imprisoned Iranian journalist Mehdi Mahmoudian, describing what prisoners in Evin and Rajaishahr prisons have faced:

eye-folding during interrogations; using extremely dirty language to swear at prisoners; sexual and psychological degrading, e.g. stripping to underwear while waiting for interrogation, sexual abuse by batons or similar instruments; telling lies, making threats and false promises in order to extract untrue confessions; threats to detain family members; actual detention of family members and forcing prisoners to read out false confessions; issuing mock death sentences; asking wives of prisoners to apply for divorce; trying to date wives of the prisoners; use of electrical shockers on genitals of prisoners; beating numerous prisoners by cables and batons especially in Evin Prison's Section 2A, which is controlled by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps; force feeding unknown color pills to some prisoners, which caused abnormal mental and physical effects; punishing the detainees by forcing them out in cold winter weather at night in their underwear; beating, punching, slapping, kicking the detainees.⁶

Bahá'ís also tortured or beaten

Bahá'ís have not been spared such harsh treatment at the hands of authorities. The increase in arrests, detentions, and imprisonments of Bahá'ís since 2005 has been accompanied by the increasing use of torture, physical assault, or other harsh methods during interrogation. As noted, at least 52 Bahá'ís have been tortured or placed in solitary confinement while in detention or while undergoing interrogation.

In 2011, for example, five Bahá'ís—including a 17-year-old girl—were arrested for holding moral education classes for children and youth. They were sent to Evin Prison in Tehran, where they were held for about two months. During that time, the five were subject to beatings and torture in an attempt to get them to “confess” to unfounded charges of creating a “network of corruption.”

In another incident in Isfahan in 2011, three Bahá'ís were insulted and physically abused during their first day in detention after being arrested for holding an “illegal” meeting.

“The first night and day we were treated with insults, degradation and abuse, to the point where

⁵ A/HRC/19/66, page 13.

⁶ Iran: Suppression of Freedom; Prison, Torture, Execution.... A state policy of repression,” December 2011, FIDH, page 24.

they kicked NAME WITHHELD⁷ in the side, broke and bloodied NAME WITHHELD's head and nose, and badly bruised NAME WITHHELD's arm by hitting her with great force," wrote one of the detainees after being released. "The agency that arrested us was the Intelligence Office of the Revolutionary Guards, and the places they transferred us to were different from the detention centers of the Ministry of Intelligence."

7 The names of the individuals involved have been withheld to protect them or their families—as have all other names in this report, with exceptions for cases that have already been well-publicized.

3 The range and types of violence directed against Bahá'ís—case studies

The range and types of violence directed against Bahá'ís encompasses physical abuse and torture at the hands of the authorities, attacks or harassment by local officials or semi-official elements, such as school teachers or administrators, and assaults on Bahá'ís or their properites by anonymous or unidentified individuals.

In cases where the identity of the attackers is unknown, as is most often the case in arson or cemetery attacks, there are nevertheless frequent signs of official support or encouragement. In the case of the vandalizing of Bahá'í cemeteries, for example, individuals have used heavy equipment, such as bulldozers, that would be difficult to obtain or operate without some kind of official sanction. In other incidents, witnesses have noticed the presence of black sedans with “Tehran license plates,” suggesting that plainclothes agents were involved or at least on the scene. In attacks by school officials on Bahá'í children, those officials have sometimes told Bahá'í parents that their orders came from higher authorities or that their freedom of action was otherwise constrained.

Other significant features associated with attacks on Bahá'ís include threats made in advance. These threats often come with religious overtones, as in cases where attacks have been preceded by threatening letters, many of which are signed on behalf of fundamentalist Shiite religious organizations.

As well, on numerous occasions, there has been evidence of incitement by the clergy or the press. In several instances of arson—or in those instances where mob violence has been visited upon Bahá'ís—attacks were often preceded by an inflammatory sermon from a visiting cleric or a local newspaper article attacking Bahá'ís.

The following case studies catalog the range and intensity of attacks on Bahá'ís. They also illustrate their frequent association with incitement in the media or by clerics.

Murders and death threats

Since 2005, at least nine Bahá'ís have been murdered or have otherwise died under suspicious circumstances. Many others have received death threats. Yet in none of these cases have authorities brought the perpetrators to justice. Here follow several examples:

- In early 2007, two elderly Iranian Bahá'í women were murdered in their homes in separate towns. On 16 February 2007, an 85-year-old resident of Abbas Abad—a dependency of Abadeh in Fars Province—was found dead in her home with her hands and feet bound and her mouth gagged. The next day, in the town of Mohammadiéh, in the province of Isfahan, a 77-year-old Bahá'í woman was viciously assaulted by a masked intruder in her home. She had been lured out of her house in the middle of the night and then savagely attacked with a lawn rake. She suffered broken hands and ribs, head injuries, and critical damage to her liver and

kidneys. Her screams caused the intruder to flee, whereupon she crawled to the home of her neighbor for help. Despite medical attention, her wounds proved fatal, and the woman died on 7 March 2007.

The two women were not related, and although the circumstances in each killing were quite similar (elderly women living alone at home in small towns), no other connections between the cases have been discovered, save for the fact that both women were Bahá'ís. Authorities officially closed the case of the woman in Mohammadieh in September 2007, with no perpetrators identified. It appears that no one has been brought to justice in the case of the woman in Abbas Abad.

- In 2008, three Bahá'ís in Mashhad received telephone threats and then were later intentionally run over by a car in a hit-and-run “accident.” Two of the individuals were killed and the third, a woman, was sent to the hospital with serious injuries. Few further details are available about this incident, but no one is known to have been prosecuted for this attack.
- In Yazd in February 2009, an 82-year-old man disappeared after leaving home for a meal at a nearby restaurant. His daughter contacted government agencies for assistance in locating him and was ultimately told his disappearance was related to his efforts to talk about the Bahá'í Faith, which aroused the enmity of his neighbors. She was led to the morgue, where she identified him.

Many Iranian Bahá'ís have received anonymous death threats in recent years. In 2008, for example, a number of Bahá'í families in Rafsanjan in Kerman Province received threatening telephone calls from a man using different pay phones over a two-week period. In many of those calls, the man indicated he had quite specific details about each family. In this series of incidents:

- One Bahá'í man was told he would be beaten and that his son and another Bahá'í in the city were marked for killing.
- A Muslim who had been attending Bahá'í meetings was called and threatened with the burning of his shop and death if he did not disclose family details of certain Bahá'ís in Rafsanjan.
- Another Bahá'í man received threats that his daughter would be burned to death.
- A young unmarried woman was told that acid would be thrown on her.

All of these 2008 incidents in Rafsanjan—plus at least two dozen other cases of harassment or threats against Bahá'ís there—came after the Friday Prayer Leader of Kerman and local representative of the Supreme Leader told his followers that the Bahá'í Faith is part of an American conspiracy and that Bahá'í “teachers” are Zionist spies.

Experience has taught Bahá'ís to take death threats seriously. On 15 December 2005, Mr. Dhabihu'llah Mahrami died in a prison cell in Yazd of unknown causes. He had been incarcerated for some 10 years and had received death threats on a number of occasions. At one point, just two months before he died, the judge in his trial told him: “Even if you are released from prison, we

will get rid of you in a [car] accident.”

At the time of his death, Mr. Mahrami was 59 and he had no known health concerns. The actual cause has never been resolved.

In all, more than 200 instances of direct threats against Iranian Bahá'ís have been documented since 2005. These have included threatening letters, anonymous phone calls, and face-to-face verbal intimidation, and it is believed that many more such incidents have gone unreported. In any other country, such threats would have warranted police investigation. But no such investigations have been documented in Iran for these incidents.

Physical assaults on individuals

Compiling a complete list of attacks on individuals is a difficult task. For obvious reasons, individuals are often reluctant to report threats or other kinds of attacks. However, the Bahá'í International Community has documented at least 52 incidents where Bahá'ís have been physically assaulted by officials, suspected plainclothes agents, mobs, or individuals since 2005.

Doused with gasoline

In March 2008, a middle-aged Bahá'í businessman in Shiraz discovered an anti-Bahá'í slogan defacing the walls of his shop. He lodged a complaint with the police, and they had members of the local Basij Resistance Force come and clean the wall. A few days later, the man received an anonymous letter, which openly denounced the Bahá'í Faith as a false religion and threatened his life.

[S]o that future generations may know that Islam and Muslims are vigilant and will never be deceived by the agents and spies of Israel and will not allow the followers of the pure religion of Muhammad to be deceived by impostors like you...you and eight other evil ones are sentenced to a revolutionary execution, which will soon be carried out in public. O ye followers of the false prophets, Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, if they are truly of the truth, then ask them to prevent the execution of this verdict...

Two days later, the businessman was walking towards his car when an individual approached him with an empty gasoline container and asked for fuel. The man claimed that his family was in the car and he needed some fuel to get to the nearest gasoline station. The businessman saw a woman



On 15 December 2005, Mr. Dhabihu'llah Mahrami died in a prison cell in Yazd of unknown causes. He had been incarcerated for some 10 years and had received death threats on a number of occasions.

in a black chador sitting in the passenger seat and so, reassured, he allowed the man to siphon four litres of gasoline from his own car.

When that was done, however, the man put the container down and grabbed the businessman firmly from behind, placing one hand over his mouth. Another person, who appeared to be a passer-by, came forward and helped carry the businessman to a nearby tree. Then they chained him to the tree and doused him with the gasoline.

The second individual began striking matches and tossing them at the fuel-drenched man. Fortunately, the first did not light. A second match went out immediately after it was lit. A third match ignited but was extinguished when it hit the man's clothing. Finally, a fourth match flared but fell harmlessly on the ground and the man was able to put it out. At that point, apparently worried about the approach of others, the assailants gave up and sped away. People in the neighborhood ran to assist the man, freed him, and notified the local police.

In late July 2008, the same businessman was arrested and driven to Tehran, where he was accused of fabricating the story about the entire incident as a way of defaming the Islamic regime. He refused to “confess” and so was beaten, hung by his arms for hours, and burned with cigarettes before being released on 3 August 2008.

Forced into a car and kidnapped

While out walking one day in December 2007, a Bahá'í from Shiraz was kidnapped by four men. They forced him into a car, covered his head and took him to an unknown place for interrogation. Among other things, the man was asked to identify the Bahá'ís in Shiraz who are actively involved in talking to Muslims about the Bahá'í Faith. Despite having been subjected to physical torture, the man did not disclose any information apart from details about himself. After three hours of questioning, he was set free outside the city. The man had previously received a number of anonymous phone calls threatening him with serious bodily harm and even death. Since the kidnapping incident, he has been subjected to further threatening phone calls, letters and attacks in an attempt to force him to cooperate with the kidnappers and disclose information, which he refused to do.

At noon on 20 February 2008, the man was attacked by two masked men while on his way to visit a friend. After slashing his back with a knife and throwing a brick at him and injuring his leg, the two men fled. The following day, he was kidnapped once again on his way home from work. When he failed to return home, his parents immediately reported the matter to the authorities.

Eventually, on 23 February 2008, the man returned home in a serious condition: his back, legs and ribs were badly injured, and he had been kept with no food or water throughout this period.

During the months of November and December 2007, a 16-year-old high school student in a suburb of Tehran was subjected to repeated harassment, abduction, and death threats by a group that had been monitoring her movements.

Threatened with a knife

During the months of November and December 2007, a 16-year-old high school student in a suburb of Tehran was subjected to repeated harassment, abduction, and death threats by a group that had been monitoring her movements.

The incidents began after the teenager hailed a private car to get to school, a common practice in Iran, and then received threats from the driver. The driver scared her badly when he locked the doors and drove past the school; he said he would kill her if she continued to talk about the Bahá'í Faith at school. The young woman was too traumatized by this to go to school for a few days afterwards; she could see the car parked outside with the driver watching her home. Later, she received an abusive phone call from the same man who claimed to be part of a group aiming to cleanse schools of Bahá'ís.

A week later the teen was threatened by another man while she was alone in her sister's shop. He drew a knife and tried to grab her, but she managed to evade him and run for help. A few days after this, while momentarily out of her school classroom, the teenager was approached by a well-dressed woman who claimed to be a friend of her mother. The woman asked the teen to accompany her on some pretext; however, she refused to do so as she did not know her.

The following week, while walking towards her mother's car after school, someone crept up behind the young woman, rendered her unconscious and forced her into a car. When she regained consciousness, she found herself in the same car from which her movements had been watched, and the occupants were the woman who approached her at school and the two men who had attacked her previously.

Along with threats and abuse, the girl was told that Bahá'ís should not mingle with the rest of society. One of the men tried to hit her, but she defended herself with a blade she had been carrying in her pocket for that purpose. She was slapped by the woman, her eye-glasses were broken and her school books destroyed before they let her go. All these incidents were reported to the police and the school authorities.

Arson and attacks on Bahá'í-owned properties

Since 2005, there have been some 49 incidents involving arson or the use of firebombs against Bahá'í-owned homes, businesses and properties. These attacks are often accompanied by anti-Bahá'í graffiti or other forms of vandalism. The number of separately documented incidents of vandalism is 30, and range from the spray-painting of anti-Bahá'í graffiti on Bahá'í-owned buildings to the destruction of signs at Bahá'í businesses.

As the following case examples show, these incidents have often been preceded or accompanied by threats or direct incitement, such as anti-Bahá'í sermons by clerics or an official order to close down a Bahá'í-owned business. In those cases where authorities have been asked to investigate, little action has been taken and no one has been prosecuted.



The interior of a home appliance sales and repair shop, owned by a Bahá'í in Rafsanjan, after an arson attack on 15 November 2010. Damage exceeding tens of thousands of US dollars was caused.

More than a dozen arson attacks have occurred in the city of Semnan, where the Bahá'í community has in recent years faced a series of assaults that have included numerous arrests, the closure of businesses, vandalism directed against the Bahá'í cemetery and Bahá'í-owned properties, hate speech directed from the pulpit, and the abuse of Bahá'í schoolchildren. The situation there, which has involved both official and semi-official elements, was the focus of a report published in October 2012 by the Bahá'í International Community, as noted above. But the situation in Semnan is far from unique.

In cities and towns throughout Iran, Bahá'í communities have faced similar multi-pronged attacks, of which arson and firebombing are among the most fearsome elements.

A wave of arson attacks in Rafsanjan

Over a period of several months in late 2010, more than a dozen Bahá'í-owned shops were hit by arsonists. The attackers particularly targeted household furniture repair businesses, home appliance stores, and optical shops owned by Bahá'ís.

On 15 November, for example, fires were started in two appliance sales and repair shops, causing damage that exceeded tens of thousands of US dollars. One of the shopkeepers subsequently rented a neighboring property to continue his trade and installed a secure door. One month later, despite the security door, attackers managed to force an explosive substance into the shop through a hole they made in the roof, resulting in a blast that blew the door five meters into the air and shattered windows.

The attacks were accompanied by the sending of an anonymous letter, addressed to “members of the misguided Bahaist sect,” which was received at some 20 Bahá'í homes and businesses in the city.

The letter demanded that Bahá'ís sign an undertaking to “refrain from forming contacts or friendships with Muslims” and from “using or hiring Muslim trainees.” They were also told not to teach their faith, including on the Internet.



The home of a Bahá'í family in Kerman was gutted by fire on 18 July 2008. Family members had received threatening phone calls, and their car was also hit by arsonists.

Should the conditions be accepted by the recipients, the letter states, “we will guarantee not to wage any attack on your life and properties.”

Bahá'ís did not agree to any such conditions and the attacks continued. On 2 January 2011 another repair shop was set ablaze when a hose pumped a flammable liquid past metal sheets the owner had installed for protection.

A newsletter published by a Muslim cultural foundation in Rafsanjan stated that the attacks had been provoked by the fact that some trades have been “monopolized” by Bahá'ís in the city. Even a Muslim-owned coffee shop was set ablaze after the newsletter mistakenly identified it as Bahá'í-owned.

There was also evidence of official involvement or support. The incidents were preceded by reports in June 2010 that several Muslim shop owners had abruptly terminated their leases with Bahá'í tenants as a result of pressure from local authorities. In another case around the same time, authorities refused to renew the business licenses of two Bahá'ís. The city's mayor at one point claimed that the arson attacks had been committed by the Bahá'ís themselves on orders from Israel and the United States.

Orchard set on fire after anti-Bahá'í sermon

In January 2009, unknown arsonists twice tried to set fire to an orchard owned by a Bahá'í in the small village of Khabr in Kerman Province. The incidents followed a visit to the village by a cleric from the city of Qom. He gave a sermon on Ashura, a holy day commemorated by Shi'a Muslims as a day of mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hossein. In his sermon, the cleric attacked the Bahá'í Faith and encouraged the people of Khabr to burn down local orchards owned by Bahá'ís. The cleric also urged the people to take other kinds of action that would pressure Bahá'ís into leaving the village.

The day after the sermon, about 10 meters of fencing surrounding an orchard owned by a local Bahá'í was torched. A week later, a second attempt was made to burn the man's orchard, but only part of its wall, which is shared with a Muslim orchard owner, was damaged. After the departure of the cleric from Qom, a local cleric continued provoking Muslims against Bahá'ís; subsequently, anti-Bahá'í graffiti was written on walls surrounding homes and shops of some Bahá'ís from the village.

A wave of arson attacks in the summer of 2008

In June-July 2008, there was a wave of arson attacks on Bahá'í homes and properties across several provinces in Iran.

On 10 June 2008, an outbuilding on the property of an elderly Bahá'í couple living in the village of Tangriz in Fars Province, was destroyed by fire when it was sprayed with gasoline. The pair, along with their two sons who were sleeping close to the building, narrowly escaped injury when the gasoline tank used to start the fire exploded. The couple said they believed the perpetrator thought they were all sleeping in the outbuilding. The man issued a formal complaint against the person they suspected, but the local legal office declined to pursue the case because the suspect swore on the Qur'an that he was not guilty.

In Vilashahr in Isfahan Province on 15 July, an hour after midnight, Molotov cocktails were thrown into the front courtyard of the home of a Bahá'í couple. The attack came a few months after the woman, a doctor, had been forced to close a medical clinic in nearby Najafabad because of anonymous anti-Bahá'í threats. She had operated the clinic for some 28 years.

In another incident, in the early morning hours of 18 July, the home of a Bahá'í in Kerman Province was torched while the family was away on holiday. Previously, on 29 May 2008, the family's car had been set on fire while they were attending a Bahá'í holy day commemoration. And in April and May the family had been forced to change their telephone number after receiving a number of threatening phone calls.

The 18 July fire destroyed most of the home's interior. At first, fire department officials suggested the blaze could have been caused by faulty wiring, but a subsequent report confirmed arson, stating: "Based on the investigations carried out by the experts of the Department, the fire was premeditated; flammable liquid (gasoline) used to start the fire, was detected in the roof, backyard and the eastern path leading to the home."



On 10 June 2008, a Bahá'í family in the village of Tangriz in Fars Province narrowly escaped injury when an arsonist caused a fire that destroyed a hut near where they were sleeping.

In Rafsanjan that same month, on 25 July, the car of a prominent Bahá'í was torched and destroyed by arsonists on motorbikes. The man and ten other Bahá'í families in the town had received threatening letters from a group calling itself the Anti-Bahá'ism Movement of the Youth of Rafsanjan that, among other things, threatened “jihad” against the Bahá'ís.

In late August, three windows of the man's home were broken, also by an anonymous motorbike rider. The man lodged a complaint against the “Anti-Bahá'ism Movement,” alleging they were behind these attacks, but the judge ordered that no further action be taken.

Later in the year, the same man was also threatened with death by an anonymous telephone caller.

Militia with bulldozers attack a Bahá'í home

On 27 January 2008, in Abadeh in Fars Province, a group of individuals came to the home of a Bahá'í businessman one evening at about 9 p.m., claiming to be customers. The businessman was not home and his daughter and a friend, alone at the time, did not open the door as they did not recognize the individuals.

A short time later, more than 20 individuals wearing masks climbed the property's outer wall and forced their way into the home. At the same time, another group began destroying the wall with a bulldozer.

Terrified, the two girls called the police to report what they thought was a robbery and then fled screaming to a neighbor's house. The daughter also called her father. When he arrived home, he saw a group of men tearing down the outer wall of his property. As soon as he stepped out of his car, the unknown men knocked him to the ground, handcuffed him, and locked him up in his own car while they finished searching and looting his home. They took Bahá'í books and materials

and other possessions. The businessman was freed after the group finished demolishing the front outer wall of his house and left at approximately 9:45 p.m.

The police finally arrived at 10:30 p.m., nearly an hour and a half after the first phone call, and took the man's statement.

The following morning a letter addressed to the man was thrown into the house. It said:

As Bahaism is a perverse sect, it is our duty to purge Abadeh of your presence; inform your Bahá'í friends that we will also attend to them! Last night was your first warning! Out of respect for your family, we restrained ourselves in this first endeavour. If you value your family you have two weeks to leave this town, otherwise, the lovers of Imam Hossein will consider it their duty to totally destroy your home.

Reports from Iran indicated the episode was organized by the Basij militia and followed inflammatory statements made against Bahá'ís by a local Abadeh clergyman at Friday prayers.

There is also evidence of semi-official encouragement or support. Following the attack, some local officials attempted to justify the bulldozing of the home's outer wall by asserting that it was connected to a town-planning scheme. And shortly after the incident, the businessman was summoned to meet with the governor, the mayor of Abadeh, the head of the City Council, and the director of the Intelligence Ministry office. Using threats, insults, intimidation and psychological pressure, they forced the businessman to sign an agreement to sell his house and his factory at a very low price. Subsequently, on the basis of legal advice that he received, the Bahá'í man wrote to these same officials indicating that, since the agreement had been signed under duress, it was not valid.

Later, an email was sent out to a number of Iranian Bahá'ís claiming that the businessman was greedy and had refused to sell his home for a road expansion project.

Reports suggest the whole episode is part of a larger plan to uproot the long-standing Bahá'í community of Abadeh. Most of the families there have been Bahá'ís for generations.

Despite these attacks, the businessman's family received support from many Muslim friends and neighbors in the town. They visited their home after the attack, expressing sympathy and even offering to compensate the family for the damage. At one point, a member of the city council even commended the businessman for not surrendering to pressure.

The demolition of 50 homes in Ivel

In June 2010, some 50 Bahá'í-owned houses were demolished by unknown individuals in the remote farming village of Ivel in Mazandaran Province as part of a long-running campaign to drive Bahá'ís from the area.

The attack came in the third week of June and was documented by human rights activists, who said access to the village was blocked and at least four front-end loaders began demolishing the homes and the rubble was then set afire. Amateur video shot by activists showed several fiercely burning fires.

The homes were unoccupied. Bahá'í residents had either fled the village after previous incidents of violence or were moved as part of official displacement. In 1983, a few years after the Iranian revolution, at least 20 families from Ivel were put on buses and expelled. Bahá'ís sought legal redress but without success. Nevertheless, they returned each summer to harvest the crops on their farmland in the village.

Then, in 2007, six of their houses were torched and returning Bahá'ís often faced threats or beatings.

These violent incidents—undertaken by unknown individuals or plainclothes agents—are associated with a long history of official court rulings against Bahá'ís seeking the return of their rights and local inaction after violence was reported.



Scenes after the destruction of some 50 unoccupied Bahá'í homes in the village of Ivel in 2010, taken from a video shot on a mobile telephone and showing fiercely burning fires and several homes reduced to rubble.

Abuses of schoolchildren

Among the most egregious aspects of the rise in violence against individual Bahá'ís has been the increase in abuses of school-age children. These range from derogatory remarks about the Bahá'í Faith by classroom teachers to outright expulsions and, in a few cases, beatings by school officials. In one case, for example, a student accepted at an art institute was followed by the authorities and on three occasions seized, blindfolded, and beaten, according to a report that emerged in 2007.

The Bahá'í International Community has been able to document nearly 300 such attacks since 2005.

Ominously, the range of incidents also includes evidence of secret monitoring by school officials, as well as overt efforts to identify and count Bahá'í students.

In many cases, Bahá'í students are forced to endure attacks on the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith that are quite clearly intended to dissuade them of their religious beliefs and induce their conversion to Islam—something that is plainly against international protections of freedom

of religion or belief.⁸ Many Iranian textbooks on religion denigrate, distort, or falsify the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, and yet students are required to learn such history and be tested on it.

When Bahá'í students attempt to defend their beliefs or correct untrue or offensive statements, they are verbally abused or insulted. Sometimes they are accused of “teaching” the Bahá'í Faith and then expelled.

Details of attacks on schoolchildren are difficult to obtain. Understandably, children and parents are sometimes reluctant to report what happens in schools—or they may be dismissive of the severity of it since Bahá'í children have long faced various forms of harassment in schools, as is common for minorities in many parts of the world. Reports on such attacks seem to emerge sporadically. It is unclear whether this is because such attacks ebb and flow in response to changes in government policy or whether reports emerge infrequently because of the difficulty of sending information out of Iran.

The following examples indicate the range and severity of these attacks on schoolchildren, which would not be tolerated in any other country and for which school officials or others elsewhere would certainly be held responsible.

On an order from above

In February 2009 in Isfahan, a first-year student in middle school attempted to correct misleading information given by a teacher in her obligatory Qur'an class. The teacher interrupted the Bahá'í student and said: “The Qur'an is enough for us and everything else is false.” Outside the classroom the teacher threatened the student with expulsion, but the girl answered: “I do not care if I am expelled, my beliefs are more important than anything else.” The teacher then became abusive, using foul language. The next day the girl's father met the teacher and principal. In their responses, they indicated that they had followed an order from higher authorities, who asked that they present misleading information about the Faith in the classroom.

The Bahá'í International Community has received numerous reports of teacher training seminars or other efforts to “educate” teachers about the Bahá'í Faith. On 23 April 2007, a group of high

Nearly 300 incidents of abuse or attacks on Bahá'í schoolchildren have been documented. These range from derogatory remarks by classroom teachers about the Bahá'í Faith to outright expulsions and, in a few cases, beatings by school officials. In one case, for example, a student accepted at an art institute was followed by the authorities and on three occasions seized, blindfolded, and beaten.

8 General Comment no. 22, issued in 1993 by the UN Human Rights Committee, elucidates the degree to which the ICCPR requires that parents or guardians be given the freedom to “ensure that their children receive a religious or moral education in conformity with their own convictions,” adding that “the freedom from coercion to have or to adopt a religion or belief and the liberty of parents and guardians to ensure religious and moral education cannot be restricted.”

school religion teachers from 14 provinces visited a center for religious studies in Qom as part of their in-service training. Organized by the Ministry of Education, the visit included a two-hour presentation on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, given by Seyyed Ali Musavi-Nejad, a member of the Scientific Institute and Head of the Islamic Sects Group. The presentation included information that was insulting and defamatory in its mischaracterization of Bahá'í history and beliefs.

Likewise, on 14 and 15 May 2007, two Iranian online news agencies reported on the publication in Tabriz of an 85-page booklet and accompanying CD providing an “Introduction to Baháism” for high school religious teachers. The contents of the booklet and CD are described as including information on “the role of British and Russian colonialism in the formation and the growth of this misguided sect, the special manner in which this perverted group began to cooperate with Israel, and its support by America,” among other things.

Threatened with expulsion

In early 2008 in Kerman, a female student at a university preparatory college was accused of teaching others about the Bahá'í 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.

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 90 minutes to make her sign the undertaking not to teach, the young woman courageously resisted their demand. Consequently, they gave her two options from which to choose: either quit her education or quit 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 and transfer to another, 800 students walked out of their classrooms in protest. Ultimately, the young woman was allowed to return on the condition that she would not initiate any discussion about her belief.

Identification and monitoring

In November 2007, reports emerged that high school students in some cities in Iran had been required to complete a new type of registration form at the start of the school year in September. Called “Form 201,” the document had a section on religion. Some teachers, apparently sympathetic to the situation of their Bahá'í students, encouraged them not to identify themselves as Bahá'ís when completing the form. Nevertheless, wishing to be truthful, a number of students did identify themselves as Bahá'ís. As a result, more than ten Bahá'í students were dismissed from several high schools in Vilashahr, a small city in Isfahan Province.

Other reports tell of efforts made throughout Iran to identify Bahá'í students of all ages, along with their family members. In 2007, for example, the Education Department Management Security Office in Shiraz circulated a form to be completed for all students “who belong to religious minorities

and the perverse Bahaist sect.” The form requires not only detailed information about the student and his or her parents, but also detailed information on all of the student’s siblings. The section for “religion” lists only four options: “Christian,” “Jew,” “Zoroastrian,” and “Perverse Bahaist sect.”

In 2009, a report was received stating that in some schools in Isfahan, Vilashahr, Tehran, Rudehen and Karaj, the principals informed the parents of Bahá'í students that a new circular had been issued by the school security office demanding disclosure of information about all the family members of each Bahá'í student, and stating that it was necessary for Bahá'í students to be identified using an official “identity form for students of other religions.” All school principals in Karaj received a list of Bahá'í students and were requested to confirm the names of those listed for their schools.

In early 2012, the Bahá'í International Community obtained a confidential letter, dated 5 November 2011, written by the branch office of the Iranian Ministry of Education that oversees schools in the city of Shahriar, in the province of Tehran. Addressed to “respected principals of schools under this jurisdiction,” the letter asks them to fill out a form which asks about Bahá'í students, and then to submit it to the “Education Department Management Security Office.” The letter also states that “pre-school students are also included in this directive” and that “information on the students should be gathered subtly and in a confidential manner.”

Attacks on Bahá'í cemeteries

Another dramatic feature of the upsurge in violence against Bahá'ís and Bahá'í properties in recent years has been a series of attacks on Bahá'í cemeteries. These attacks have involved such assaults as the firebombing of mortuary buildings, the toppling of gravestones, the uprooting of landscape shrubbery, the spray-painting of anti-Bahá'í graffiti on cemetery walls and the exhumation of bodies. Given cultural norms that hold last rites as sacred and cemeteries as holy ground, these attacks seem especially egregious and hateful.

Since 2005, the Bahá'í International Community has documented 42 such attacks. They have been widespread, touching nearly every region of the country.

As noted above, one feature of many such attacks has been the use of heavy equipment, which would almost certainly imply some kind of permission, encouragement, or involvement by local or national authorities.

Yet, as has been the case with other types of attacks, there have been no known prosecutions of those individuals who have vandalized Bahá'í cemeteries.

Incitement by radio in Yazd

Sometime on 2 or 3 February 2005, the Bahá'í cemetery of Yazd was almost completely destroyed. Cars were driven over the graves, bricks were removed from around the graves, and the gravestones—on which the names of the deceased were inscribed—were broken. The grave of Habibu'llah Khojasteh-Khu, buried the previous month, was excavated and his coffin broken into.



The Bahá'í cemetery in Yazd was almost completely destroyed in July 2007. The severity of the damage and the track marks in the soil suggest clearly that heavy equipment was used. The cemetery has been attacked at least three times since 2005.

The headstone to that grave was also removed and, two days later, left in front of another Bahá'í's home in Yazd, along with a threatening letter, which said:

You Bahá'ís take note. Go and see your cemetery.... Let this be a lesson for you. Know for certain that if you again attempt to mislead the youth of Yazd and act ungratefully, then we will enact our grand plan.

The people of the province of Yazd.

We are watching you.

The incident followed more than a month of harassment directed at Bahá'ís in Yazd by officials and plainclothed, unknown individuals. On 25 December 2004, the local radio station broadcast an announcement criticizing Bahá'ís for distributing a letter written by the Bahá'í community of Iran to then President Mohammad Khatami, asking for a redress of the injustices they have faced throughout Iran. During the next five days, seven Bahá'ís in Yazd were arrested and many had their homes searched. Although those arrested were released within 24 hours, the local newspaper published an account of those arrests, further fanning the flames of antagonism against Bahá'ís in the community.

Around 9 January, for example, a leaflet was distributed in the city. Signed by “the family of the

martyr Hossein Baqeri,” an Iranian Muslim, the letter asked authorities to confront the Bahá'í community and crush their “teaching” activities.

A week later, on 18 January, three Bahá'ís were attacked separately in their homes by anonymous individuals carrying batons and official-looking radios. At about 8:30 p.m., a group of four individuals came to the home of one of them, cut his telephone line and kicked in his door, but they were frightened away by neighbors before they physically attacked the man. Thirty minutes later, those same individuals burst into the home of another Bahá'í, beating him with the batons, severely injuring his face, back and arms. And at about 11 p.m., the attackers went to the home of a third Bahá'í, whose shop was adjacent to his house. They told him they had left a bag in his shop, asking to return, and when he opened the shop, they followed him and beat him, causing serious head wounds. They also broke the shop's window. They attacked again on 25 January and, two days later, the shop was set ablaze.

Since the 1979 Revolution, the cemetery in Yazd has been vandalized at least seven times. It was vandalized again in late July 2007 when anonymous attackers came with heavy equipment and destroyed about half of the grave markers and cemetery grounds, also toppling trees.

Bulldozers in Najafabad

In September 2007, an unknown number of individuals used a bulldozer to vandalize the Bahá'í cemetery located outside Najafabad in Isfahan Province. The vandals demolished 95 graves, completely destroyed a small sanitation facility and two water tanks, which were used for watering trees at the site. Five new graves, which did not yet have headstones, were also completely destroyed and flattened, and eight empty prepared graves were filled in.

The cemetery served five Bahá'í communities: Najafabad, Vilashahr, Goldasht, Yazdanshahr, and Amirabad. It is located approximately 15 kilometers north of Najafabad. Bahá'í families in the region sent a letter to the governor of Najafabad describing the injustice and requesting legal action, but no response was received.

About two weeks later, a report emerged that a letter attacking the Bahá'í Faith was distributed to some shop owners in Najafabad. The letter was allegedly authored by a group describing itself as “the sacrificing and religious families of the martyrs.” In the letter, the group took credit for the demolition of the Bahá'í cemetery. It also criticized government authorities for laxity towards Bahá'ís. It further warned that if any Bahá'ís are found to be teaching their faith, it will result in attacks on Bahá'í homes. The group clearly states that it would not permit Bahá'ís to use their cemetery or to freely hold their activities in the city.

A year later, in May 2008, three Bahá'ís were arrested after burying a fellow believer in the Najafabad cemetery. Although the Bahá'ís had been using this cemetery for some 15 years, the authorities seemed to have decided that this most recent burial was illegal and, on 6 July, the three were found guilty of “taking part in the illegal occupation and use of government property.” They were fined and ordered to “cease their occupation of the said property” and to “return it to its prior condition”—in other words, to exhume the interred person.

The Bahá'ís, however, appealed the decision and won. The charges were dropped and the Bahá'ís were granted permission to use the cemetery. However, on 21 May 2009, a large sign was posted in the cemetery, saying:

This cemetery has been transferred to the Municipality pursuant to letter no. 4080 dated 21 January 2009 of the Department of Natural Resources of Najafabad District. Therefore any presumption of ownership or burial on this site is absolutely forbidden and violators will be legally prosecuted pursuant to section 635 of Islamic Penal Law that deals with illegal burial of the dead.

In September of that same year, after the death of a Bahá'í from Najafabad, municipal authorities refused to grant permission for his burial in the Najafabad cemetery. Further, access was prevented to the cemetery by blocking the entry road with a mound of earth.

Officials at the local hospital informed the family of the deceased that they would release the body only with the permission and in the presence of an Intelligence Ministry agent. Subsequently, the Intelligence Ministry stated that this permission would be conditional upon the deceased's burial not taking place in the Najafabad Bahá'í cemetery. His body was to be held in the morgue pending the issuance of a burial permit. Then the family learned that their relative had been buried in the Bahá'í cemetery in Isfahan at night without their knowledge or permission.

Taken all together, these incidents suggest strong involvement by the government.

Attacks from all sides in Kata

Attacks on the local Bahá'í cemetery were but one feature of a series of assaults on Bahá'ís in the remote village of Kata in Kohgeluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province in 2011.

On 15 June that year, a group of Muslim residents started destroying the old Bahá'í cemetery in the village with construction equipment and began building something there. This was soon followed by an attack by some 60 Muslim residents on two Bahá'ís, who were beaten aggressively.

A few nights later, a clergyman, together with eight Basij women, two men, and some Muslim residents, walked through the village, chanting slogans and insults against the Bahá'í Faith.

The incidents apparently stem from a long running dispute over a number of parcels of rich farmland that had been owned by Bahá'í families in the area since well before the 1979 Revolution. Soon after the revolution, local Bahá'ís in the area were forced to flee in the face of intense persecution after one among them was killed. The government soon moved to confiscate their land, on the grounds that they had absented themselves. Eventually, however, a number of Bahá'í families returned and regained control of their land. In 2004, however, the government ruled that their properties could be taken and given to Muslim families. In October 2004, six Bahá'í-owned homes in Kata were seized by the authorities, and in early 2005, nine Bahá'í farmers whose homes and

land had been taken were arrested.

On 26 June 2011, local police summoned all 17 Bahá'í families in Kata and told them of an order from the justice administration that said they were indeed now obligated to hand their lands over to Muslim tenants. The Bahá'ís refused, saying they would continue to fight the order in court. About three weeks later, five Bahá'ís from Kata were arrested and ultimately sentenced to six months in prison on the charge of forcible possession of properties. The court also ruled that the lands must be handed over to the Muslim tenants.



A home in Semnan sprayed with offensive graffiti which, when translated into English, reads: "Down with the pagan Bahá'í. Down with America and Britain."

4 Violations of due process

In his 2012 report to the UN Human Rights Council, Iran Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed sharply criticized Iran's justice system. Among other things, he said violations of due process of law were chronic, and that “vaguely defined security provisions” are applied in ways that “unduly limit freedom of expression, association, and assembly.”

“In many cases, witnesses reported that they were arrested for activities protected by international law, and that they were detained in solitary confinement for prolonged periods with no access to legal counsel or family members, and in the absence of formal charges,” said Dr. Shaheed on 12 March 2012, when he presented his report.

“Several stated that they were subjected to prison conditions that fall well below the minimum standards defined by the UN, such as severe overcrowding, inadequate access to water, insufficient prisoner segregation practices, extremely poor quality and unhygienic facilities, hazardous ventilation conditions, insufficient access to medical services, paltry nutritional provisions,” he said.

The case of the arrest, detention, trial, and imprisonment of seven national-level Bahá'í leaders reflects fully the deficiencies of the Iranian justice system.

The seven were members of an ad hoc group that attended to the spiritual and social needs of the



In 2008, seven national-level Bahá'í leaders were arrested and ultimately convicted of spying and other false charges. As of this writing, they are serving 20-year sentences—the longest of any current prisoners of conscience. The seven are, seated from left, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Saeid Rezaie, and, standing, Fariba Kamalabadi, Vahid Tizfahm, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, and Mahvash Sabet.

Iranian Bahá'í community in the absence of the usual system of religious administration used by Bahá'í communities around the world. In Iran, the system was disbanded in response to a government decree in 1983.

In 2008, the seven were arrested without warning. Mahvash Sabet was detained on 5 March 2008. Her six colleagues, Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm were seized in early morning raids on their homes on 14 May 2008.

They were charged with, among other things, espionage, propaganda against the Islamic Republic, and the establishment of an illegal administration—charges that were all rejected completely and categorically by the defendants.

Some 20 months after being held without charge in Tehran's Evin prison, a trial began on 12 January 2010. It consisted of six brief court sessions, all devoid of due legal process. Among other things, the defendants had extremely limited access to defense lawyers, they were tried in a closed session, and they faced a judge that by his remarks showed an utter lack of impartiality.

In June 2011, one of their defense lawyers, Mahnaz Parakand, told members of the European Parliament, that:

We diligently studied the case file, which contained over 2,000 pages, over the period of one month and studied each page carefully, trying to find out how and based on what reason, document, proof or witness the freedom of seven individuals had been taken away from them in that manner. Fortunately, we could not find any document or legal reason proving that any of the accusations that were levelled against our clients were true.

Bahá'ís specifically excluded from legal protections

The legal situation facing Bahá'ís in Iran is compounded by the fact that they have been specifically and officially excluded from all of the protections of citizenship within Iran's current legal system.

Soon after the Iranian Revolution, the country adopted a new constitution. While that document outlines various civil and political rights, it makes an important exclusion where Bahá'ís are concerned.

Article 12 of the Iranian Constitution defines Islam—and specifically the Twelver Shi'a branch of Islam—as the “official” religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Article 13 then provides for the rights of other religious minorities in the country:

Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.

In other words, the Bahá'í Faith is quite specifically excluded from legal protections afforded to other religious groups. Moreover, Iranian courts have since made clear that this Constitutional exclusion makes them “unprotected infidels” in the Iranian justice system.

That designation—that Bahá'ís are “infidels” and therefore lack certain protections under Iranian law—is the linchpin for impunity from prosecution for crimes against Bahá'ís.

In 1993, for example, an Iranian penal court nullified the death sentence for two Muslim brothers who had been convicted of kidnapping a 60-year-old Bahá'í man, forcing him to sign over the deed to his house, and then murdering him. The court ruled that because the murdered man was “a member of the misguided and misleading sect of Baháism,” the murders were not subject to the

The designation that Bahá'ís are “infidels” and therefore lack certain protections under Iranian law is the linchpin for impunity from prosecution for crimes against Bahá'ís.

traditional retaliatory punishment for murder. The court also voided the possibility of so-called “blood money” payment to the murdered man’s family, citing jurisprudence that “No blood-money is payable to infidels, unless they are protected non-believers.”

“Accordingly, the court acquits them of the death sentence and of the liability of blood-money. Considering, however, that the offence which they have committed is illegal, upsets the public order and security, and disturbs the well-being of the sacred order of the Islamic Republic, each of the aforementioned two accused...are hereby sentenced to 18 months of corrective imprisonment.”

Put another way, the court established that the punishment for kidnapping and murdering a Bahá'í is merely 18 months in prison.

This provision in the law remains in effect. As explained in the 2012 report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: “In 2004, the Expediency Council authorized the collection of equal blood money for the death of Muslim and non-Muslim men. Bahá'ís, Sabean Mandaean men, and all women remain excluded from the revised ruling. According to Iranian law, Bahá'í blood is *mohab*, which means members of the Bahá'í faith can be killed with impunity.”

5 A history of persecution

The antipathy directed at Bahá'ís by Iran's ruling clergy, and the subsequent persecution and legal exclusion that Bahá'ís have experienced, follow a long history of anti-Bahá'í persecution and violence in Iran.

The Bahá'í Faith was founded in Iran in 1844 and, like many new religions, its followers faced immediate harassment, exclusion, and violence from members of the prevailing religious order.

From the beginning, Iran's dominant Shi'a clergy viewed the Bahá'í Faith as heretical and a threat to their authority. Their opposition was stirred mainly by the Faith's claim to be a new revelation from God—something the ruling elite among Iran's clergy have long viewed as counter to the teachings of Islam, which they claim is God's "final" religion. Additionally, the progressive teachings of the Bahá'í Faith—such as its emphasis on the equality of women and men, the importance of scientific knowledge, and the elimination of the institution of clergy—rankled traditional sensibilities and sparked violent opposition.

Within several decades of the Faith's founding, at least 4,000 early Bahá'ís—known then as Bábís—were killed in a widespread pogrom, often after gruesome torture. One witness to these early persecutions, an Austrian military officer in the employ of the Shah, described a scene where persecuting mobs would "skin the soles of the Bábís feet, soak the wounds in boiling oil, shoe the foot like the hoof of a horse, and compel the victim to run" before his execution.

Outbreaks of violence against Bahá'ís continued until the early part of the 20th century. Among the best documented of such episodes was a cycle of killing and looting that raged for a month in the city of Yazd and nearby villages. In 1903, at least 70 Bahá'ís lost their lives as mobs went on a rampage, killing Bahá'ís wherever they found them and looting or destroying their properties. Authorities made no attempt to protect the Bahá'ís.

After the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1906, the situation improved for Iranian Bahá'ís, allowing them to become more visible, to prosper economically, and to excel socially, especially after 1911 and through the 1920s, as the increasingly centralized state of Reza Shah offered better security. They were able to build and operate dozens of modern schools and to win a reputation as a progressive force in society. At one point in the late 1920s, Bahá'í-run schools educated as much as 10 percent of the school-age population in Iran, according to several scholars.

Bahá'ís, however, were still subject to various forms of opposition and attack. In 1934, the government of Reza Shah closed down all Bahá'í schools as part of a policy of modernization—a decision that was also likely influenced by clerical opposition to the Bahá'í Faith.

During World War II, loosened authority by the central government allowed an increase in mob attacks on Bahá'ís. On 12 May 1944, a mob of some 4,000 people looted and destroyed a Bahá'í center in Abadih. Several Bahá'ís were severely beaten. In August 1944, after three weeks of agitation, three Bahá'ís were murdered and numerous Bahá'í homes were attacked and looted.

The degree to which the Islamic clergy in Iran never gave up its aim of ostracizing Bahá'ís was revealed in 1955, when an Islamic clergyman named Mohammad Taqi Falsafi began attacking Bahá'ís in his live daily radio program during the holy month of Ramadan. Among other things, he denounced the Bahá'í Faith as a “false religion.” In response, there were widespread attacks on Bahá'ís and Bahá'í properties throughout the country. Bahá'í holy places were attacked. Bodies of Bahá'ís in cemeteries were disinterred and mutilated. Bahá'í shops and farms were plundered, crops burned, and livestock destroyed. The government did little to stop the violence—indeed, in an attempt to mollify the cleric, it put Falsafi's sermons on national and army radio. On 7 May, the Minister of the Interior joined with representatives of the clergy in using pickaxes to destroy the national Bahá'í headquarters building in Tehran.



The funeral of Hashim Farnush, one of some 200 Iranian Bahá'ís who were executed by the government in the 1980s.

Despite these periodic bouts of violence, the Bahá'í Faith has nevertheless expanded steadily in Iran. Scholars have estimated that by the late 1800s, there were about 100,000 Bahá'ís in Iran. That number had risen to perhaps 200,000 by 1950 and an estimated 300,000 or more in 1979.

With the coming of the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, however, attacks against Bahá'ís once again surged as the persecution of Bahá'ís became state policy.

The broad outlines of Iran's state-sanctioned violence against Bahá'ís are well known. Between 1979 and 1988, some 200 Bahá'ís were killed, executed, or made to “disappear” by the government. More than 1,000 were imprisoned, and tens of thousands lost jobs, pensions, or were deprived of education in an official campaign of discrimination and persecution.

In an apparent response to international pressure, the most egregious forms of this official persecution subsided in the 1990s. The prison population of Bahá'ís fell sharply and killings or executions dwindled to a handful over the course of a decade. This period of relative quiet, however, was replaced by a carefully calculated campaign of social, cultural, economic, and educational discrimination. That campaign was designed, in the words of a 1991 high level government memorandum on the “Bahá'í question,” to “block” the “progress and development” of the Iranian Bahá'í community. It also clearly sought to reduce the concern of international human rights monitors. The harassment and oppression of Bahá'ís began to surge once again after 2005, a time frame that can be associated with the reassertion of fundamentalist elements in the regime.

Iran's legal obligations

The Iranian government has a manifest obligation under international law to protect its citizens from acts of violence, and to prosecute those who break the law. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a signatory, clearly defines these obligations:

- **Non-discrimination.** The ICCPR spells out the obligation to “respect and ensure all individuals in its territory” receive all rights agreed to in the ICCPR “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” [Article 2]
- **Protection from murder.** The ICCPR guarantees the “inherent right to life,” which shall be “protected by law.” “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” [Article 6]
- **Freedom from torture or degrading treatment.** “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” [Article 7]
- **Protection from arbitrary arrest.** The ICCPR says “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention.” [Article 9]
- **Guarantees of due process if arrested.** “Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest...” and they “shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law...” [Article 9]
- **The right to a fair trial.** This includes that “all persons shall be equal before the courts,” that they “have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence and to communicate with counsel of his own choosing,” “not to be compelled to testify against himself,” and that they be “tried without undue delay.” [Article 14]
- **Freedom of religion.** The ICCPR states that “[e]veryone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.” [Article 18]
- **Non-coercion in matters of religion.** Freedom of religion includes that “[n]o one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.” [Article 18]
- **Protection from incitement.** The ICCPR also imposes an affirmative obligation on the government to ensure that “[a]ny advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.” [Article 20]
- **Protection for minorities.** Religious minorities “shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group...to profess and practice their own religion.” [Article 27]

6 Conclusion

This report has sought to document the rising tide of government-sanctioned violence against Iranian Bahá'ís—and the degree to which attackers, whether officially employed by the government or not, have been able to act with complete impunity.

The dramatic rise in arbitrary arrests and wrongful imprisonments tell part of the story. Since 2005, at least 660 Iranian Bahá'ís have been arrested or detained. As of December 2012, there were more than 115 Bahá'ís in prison, ten times the number since in December 2005, when there were 10 behind bars. Bahá'ís—like other prisoners of conscience in Iran—have often faced beatings, solitary confinement, or other forms of torture.

The government has also waged an intensive hate campaign against Bahá'ís in the official media, portraying them as agents of Israel, immoral followers of Satan, or enemies of the state and Islam.

On the surface, it would appear that this pervasive and reprehensible anti-Bahá'í propaganda has succeeded with grave effect, inflaming prejudice and discrimination against Bahá'ís at the local level among some sectors of the population.

As noted, the figures are stark. Since 2005, there have been more than 52 incidents of public assault or physical attacks on Bahá'ís. The use of torture or solitary confinement while in detention has been documented in another 52 cases. Some 49 Bahá'í properties have been fire-bombed or subject to arson attacks, and at least 42 Bahá'í cemeteries throughout the country have been desecrated by vandals. As well, hundreds of Bahá'í school children have faced insults and harassment from teachers and administrators. And hundreds of Bahá'í businesses have been closed at the sanction of local officials.

Many if not most of these attacks bear the imprint of direct involvement by government agents, or, at least, official sanction or encouragement.

Yet many if not most of these attacks bear the imprint of direct involvement by government agents, or, at least, official sanction or encouragement. And even if some are the work of ordinary citizens acting simply out of religious intolerance, there can be little doubt that their passions were inflamed by official anti-Bahá'í propaganda—and that they feel free to act because they have no fear of prosecution or punishment. Certainly, officials who use torture or physical coercion during detentions or interrogations know they can act with absolute impunity—given that no one has ever been convicted of such crimes against a Bahá'í.

Put another way, Bahá'ís are placed in an impossible position. They must ask for justice and protection from the same authorities who are systematically inciting hatred against them and a judicial system built around laws that codify prejudice against them.

At the same time, however, there is growing evidence that many Iranians are increasingly aware that the government's anti-Bahá'í propaganda is hateful and wrong. Instead, having seen with their

own eyes the peaceful actions and constructive contributions to society offered by Iranian Bahá'ís, they have begun more and more to openly offer their support to Bahá'í neighbors and colleagues.

A few recent examples, cited in this document previously, provide evidence of the trend:

- When the Basij used bulldozers to break down the wall outside the home of the Bahá'í businessman in Abadeh in January 2008, many Muslim friends and neighbors rallied around them, expressing sympathy and even offering to compensate the family for the damage.
- When the authorities at a high school in Kerman ordered the expulsion of a Bahá'í student in her final year of studies in December 2007, her classmates and some 800 other students walked out of their classrooms in protest. The young Bahá'í woman was allowed to return to class a few days later.
- When a Bahá'í shopkeeper was arrested in Karaj and sentenced to a year in prison in October 2010, some 35 Muslim neighbors and business owners signed a testimonial about his good character and reputation as part of a plea to authorities for a reduced sentence. That testimonial said:

Hereby, this is to inform you that the undersigned would like to declare that Mr. NAME WITHHELD is a long-established and honorable businessman in this neighborhood who has been honest and upright for more than 20 years, and we have not seen any problems with him throughout the years. He has been a frontrunner in every charitable work that has served the public. All along he has been involved in his work as an optician, and all his customers have praised his work and conduct. It must be mentioned that he has always respected the beliefs of other businessmen and treated his neighbors with reverence at all times.

These are but a few of the many examples that offer proof that not everyone in Iran subscribes to the government's campaign of hate.

The evidence suggests, moreover, that even in cases where unknown individuals have participated in attacks on Bahá'ís or their properties, the government was not far from the scene. As noted above, many of the assaults on Bahá'í cemeteries that made use of heavy equipment could hardly have taken place without government support, at least at the local level. And a number of incidents of arson directed at Bahá'í businesses were preceded by some type of official order to close or sanction Bahá'í-owned businesses in that city, as with the string of arson attacks in Rafsanjan in late 2010.

Without doubt, the government encourages such assaults through its anti-Bahá'í media campaign, as documented in the Bahá'í International Community's October 2011 report. Over the years, as well, there have surfaced numerous secret government memos that direct local officials to discriminate against Bahá'ís in various ways, whether by suppressing their economic freedom or limiting their educational opportunities.

Now, as this report has shown, the Iranian government has apparently made it official policy not to investigate, prosecute or otherwise punish those who assault Bahá'ís or their properties. Indeed, the evidence shows that police officers, prison guards, local officials, the clerical estab-

ishment, and individual citizens have not only been encouraged to attack Bahá'ís through incitement in the media—they have also been given to understand that such attacks can be undertaken with complete impunity.

The Bahá'í community of Iran poses no threat to the government. Iranian Bahá'ís are not aligned with any other government, ideology or opposition movement. The principles of their Faith require Bahá'ís to be obedient to their government and to avoid partisan political involvement, subversive activity and all forms of violence. Iranian Bahá'ís seek no special privileges but ask only for protection under the International Bill of Human Rights, a covenant to which Iran is party. In particular, they ask for the

right to life, the right to profess and practice their religion, the right to liberty and security of person, and the right to education and work. Despite the hardships they endure, Iranian Bahá'ís continue to genuinely love their country and seek only to be allowed to make a contribution to the betterment of Iranian society.

History has shown that the only real protection for Iranian Bahá'ís comes from continued international outcry and action. The last three decades have proved that Iranian authorities are indeed cognizant of international opinion and that pressure to meet their obligations under international human rights law can have an effect.

Our hope is that the international community will carefully examine the degree to which the Iranian government has sought to hide its persecution of Bahá'ís behind a veil of anonymous actors—whether they be plainclothed government agents or genuinely outraged, but misguided, citizens. It is a cowardly strategy, one that can only work if those actors are given impunity from prosecution. The Iranian government must be called to account for its failure to protect the rights of all of its citizens, as is required by international law.

The Bahá'í community of Iran poses no threat to the government. Iranian Bahá'ís are not aligned with any other government, ideology or opposition movement. The principles of their Faith require Bahá'ís to be obedient to their government and to avoid partisan political involvement, subversive activity and all forms of violence. Iranian Bahá'ís seek no special privileges but ask only for protection under the International Bill of Human Rights.

Appendix—Incidents by type, year, date, and city—Violence with Impunity 37

Year	Month	Town/city	Physical assault, torture, or the use of solitary confinement against Bahá'ís, 2005 through 2012	Individuals affected	Main Actor	Incident type
2005	1	Yazd	Four individuals came to the home of a man and attacked him with batons, inflicting severe injuries to his face, back, and arms.	1	Suspected plainclothes agents	Physical assault
2005	1	Yazd	Four attackers went to the home of a man, asked him to open his adjacent shop, and beat him with batons and broke the shop's window.	1	Suspected plainclothes agents	Physical assault
2005	12	Shiraz	A man was arrested by Revolutionary Guards, who also searched his apartment. Believing the search to be illegal, he screamed for the police, who failed to intervene, and tried to escape. The Guards hosed him with ice-cold water and imprisoned him in the trunk of a car for more than five hours. He was then placed in a dark, narrow hole with his hands tied behind his back. At one point, a clergyman questioned him about his Bahá'í activities. He was released after 17 days.	1	Government	Torture
2006	7	Khash	Three individuals kidnapped a man in broad daylight. Police refused to act, saying "our hands are tied." Demands of the kidnappers included that the family should leave the region.	1	Suspected plainclothes agents	Physical assault
2007	4	Shiraz	A student was stopped by men dressed like officers of the Ministry of Information while on the way to class. The men beat him severely and slashed his forehead with a carpet cutter.	1	Suspected plainclothes agents	Physical assault
2007	8	Jiroft	A man was beaten and insulted by two unknown persons on motorcycles. A Muslim who works with him was warned against associating with the Bahá'í.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2007	11	Najafabad	Two young Bahá'ís were physically assaulted by seven or eight women in a park. The police refused to investigate or take action.	2	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2007	11	Shiraz	A young man was hit by a car in two separate incidents and left in severe pain. Summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence, he was threatened and given the impression that the second was carried out by government agents.	1	Suspected plainclothes agents	Physical assault
2007	12	Shiraz	A man was kidnapped by four anonymous men who forced him into a car. He was tortured during an interrogation but then set free. He later received anonymous telephone threats and, in February 2008, was attacked with a knife by two masked men. He was kidnapped again the following day and kept for three days without food or water. His back, legs and ribs were badly injured.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2008	1	Abadeh	A businessman was thrown to the ground, handcuffed, and held in a car by masked men after they had begun to destroy the outer wall of his home with a bulldozer. They then searched and looted his home.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2008	1	Shiraz	A parent, whose high-school-age child and six others were expelled, was physically assaulted by intelligence agents after he sought to contest the expulsions on behalf of a group of parents.	1	Intelligence Agents	Physical assault

38 Violence with Impunity — **Appendix**—Incidents by type, year, date, and city

Year	Month	Town/city	Physical assault, torture, or the use of solitary confinement against Bahá'ís, 2005 through 1012	Individuals affected	Main Actor	Incident type
2008	2	Shahinshahr	A man entered a Bahá'í-owned photography studio as the owner was closing. The man demanded to search the shop, and when the Bahá'í refused, two other men came in, locked the door, and physically assaulted him, and then searched the shop.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2008	3	Shiraz	A businessman was chained to a tree and doused with gasoline by two men. They lit matches and unsuccessfully tried to burn him, but passersby came to his assistance and freed him.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical Assault
2008	4	Ghaemshahr	A woman was arrested and held in solitary confinement for an undetermined period.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2008	7	Nashtaroud	A man was held 29 days in solitary confinement, also enduring verbal abuse and humiliation.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2008	7	Shiraz	The businessman who was doused with gasoline and threatened with lit matches was arrested by intelligence agents, driven 900 kilometers to Tehran, and tortured in an effort to get him to "confess" to the crime of defaming the Islamic Regime. Among other things, he was beaten, hung by his arms for hours, and burned on the face by cigarettes.	1	Government	Torture
2008	9	Yazd	A man in detention for four months suffered physical and emotional trauma.	1	Government	Torture
2008	11	Darzikola	A man who tried to stop masked men from destroying the local cemetery was tied down and restrained.	1	Unidentified	Physical assault
2008	Unclear	Evin	While imprisoned, a man was beaten daily for at least two weeks. He was blindfolded, repeatedly punched and kicked, and verbally abused. He was also lashed on the soles of his feet and kept in solitary confinement much of the time.	1	Government	Torture
2009	1	Sari	Prisoners had their heads shaved after they refused to observe a Muslim religious rite.	2	Government	Physical assault
2009	1	Tehran	A woman spent 21 days in solitary confinement during nearly two months at Evin Prison.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2009	2	Tehran	A man was arrested and imprisoned for over a month without trial, part of which was spent in solitary confinement. He was later tried and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2009	3	Hasanabad	A prisoner was lashed 70 times.	1	Government	Torture
2009	3	Evin	A man was held in solitary confinement for two months after being arrested during a home raid.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2009	4	Shiraz	A man, previously imprisoned for one month, was arrested again and held in solitary confinement. He suffered from severe medical problems and required constant medical supervision before his imprisonment, but there is no indication that he received proper medical care while incarcerated.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2009	8	Tehran	A recent convert to the Bahá'í Faith had his nose and hands broken under interrogation in an effort to get him to renounce his new beliefs.	1	Government	Torture

Year	Month	Town/city	Physical assault, torture, or the use of solitary confinement against Bahá'ís, 2005 through 2012	Individuals affected	Main Actor	Incident type
2009	10	Shiraz	Unknown assailants attacked a man at a gas station, saying they did not want money but his life. They stripped him of clothing in cold weather, acted as if they were going to hang him, and burned him with cigarettes. He had previously been the recipient of anonymous threats.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2009	12	Sari	Intelligence agents beat a man while raiding his home and used pepper spray on his wife, before arresting her.	2	Government	Physical assault
2009	12	Uncertain	A man was held 12 days in solitary confinement for holding a Bahá'í religious gathering in his home.	2	Government	Solitary confinement
2010	1	Semnan	A Bahá'í suffering from illness was kept in a cold cell without heating equipment and denied the receipt of warm clothing from his family. A companion, also ill, suffered the same fate.	2	Government	Physical assault
2010	3	Mashhad	Two Bahá'ís currently serving five year sentences were each sentenced to an additional five years' imprisonment. While being detained at the Ministry of Intelligence, they were each held in solitary confinement for a time.	2	Government	Solitary confinement
2010	3	Mashhad	A Bahá'í was held in solitary confinement for over six months at a Ministry of Intelligence detention center before being transferred to a prison.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2010	3	Yazd	Government officials went to the home of a Bahá'í and arrested him in a violent manner.	1	Government	Physical assault
2010	6	Ivel	A man was beaten and insulted when he returned to his village the day after 50 Bahá'í-owned homes were demolished with heavy machinery.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2010	8	Shiraz	A man was kidnapped for the second time. Unidentified attackers put a bag on his head and tied his hands and legs. He was taken away and threatened with death, but released the next day.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2010	9	Sari	During a search of her home, intelligence officers physically assaulted a Bahá'í woman.	1	Government	Physical assault
2010	9	Eghlid	After a receiving an official warning that local people were conservative and prejudiced against Bahá'ís, a man was violently assaulted by two unknown individuals. Police took a report but said they could do nothing to identify the assailants.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2010	10	Tonekabon	A man was kept in solitary confinement for 24 days after being arrested at work. He was released after posting a business license as collateral.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2010	12	Tehran	A recent convert to the Bahá'í Faith was severely tortured during detention by the Ministry of Intelligence. He has also suffered other forms of discrimination, including shunning by his family.	1	Government	Torture
2011	2	Shiraz	A woman was held in solitary confinement at a detention center for an indeterminate but long period of time.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2011	5	Varamin	Bahá'í prisoners were exposed to continuous sirens that prevented sleep.	1	Government	Torture
2011	5	Hamadan	During a raid on his home, a man was physically assaulted by government agents in an attempt to obtain his computer password.	1	Government	Physical assault

40 Violence with Impunity — **Appendix**—Incidents by type, year, date, and city

Year	Month	Town/city	Physical assault, torture, or the use of solitary confinement against Bahá'ís, 2005 through 1012	Individuals affected	Main Actor	Incident type
2011	5	Kirmanshah	A man was held in solitary confinement for several days.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2011	5	Karaj	A Bahá'í, arrested along with 16 other individuals for their involvement with the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education, was held in solitary confinement for 21 days before being released.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2011	6	Karaj	Two youth were kidnapped while travelling to religious classes.	2	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2011	6	Kata	Two Bahá'ís were surrounded by a mob of 60 people and beaten aggressively.	2	Mob Violence	Physical assault
2011	6	Shiraz	A first grade student was hit hard on the back of her hand with a pen by a teacher for saying her mother is a Bahá'í; the teacher also burned the student's hand with a heated spoon, leaving marks. The parents complained and the teacher was reprimanded, but no other action was taken.	1	School Officials	Physical assault
2011	7	Isfahan	Intelligence agents slapped and kicked homeowners during a raid on their home; they were imprisoned for one month and endured severe psychological pressure and interrogated while blindfolded.	2	Government	Physical assault
2011	7	Tehran	A man was severely beaten and verbally abused over four days of intense interrogations at Evin Prison. Interrogators also threatened to bring his sister, wife, and mother into the prison and do "unimaginable" things to them in front of his eyes.	1	Government	Torture
2011	8	Bojnourd	A man was taken from a private teaching session in the home of one of his students to an unknown place, believed to be the Ministry of Intelligence. There he was kept in solitary confinement, and verbally abused and insulted.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2011	9	Tehran and Mashhad	A number of Bahá'ís faced torture and threats of summary execution, along with other forms of discrimination, when officials tried to close down their business.	2+	Government	Torture
2011	9	Tehran	Five Bahá'ís—including a 17-year-old girl—were arrested for holding moral education classes for children and youth. They were sent to Evin Prison in Tehran for about two months. During that time, the five were subject to beatings and torture in an attempt to get them to “confess” to unfounded charges of creating a “network of corruption.”	5	Government	Torture
2011	9	Karaj	A prisoner was forced to eat papers he had written "unacceptable" answers on during an interrogation.	1	Government	Physical assault
2011	9	Bojnourd	A Bahá'í was threatened and beaten during interrogations by intelligence agents.	1	Government	Torture
2011	9	Sipah	Three Bahá'ís were badly beaten by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence.	3	Government	Physical assault
2011	9	Tehran	During interrogation in Evin prison, a man was blindfolded and kept in solitary confinement. He was also humiliated, threatened and insulted for being a Bahá'í.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2011	10	Tehran	During interrogation, a man's arm was pulled so badly that ligaments were torn, requiring the wearing of a cast for one month.	1	Government	Physical assault

Appendix—Incidents by type, year, date, and city—Violence with Impunity 41

Year	Month	Town/city	Physical assault, torture, or the use of solitary confinement against Bahá'ís, 2005 through 1012	Individuals affected	Main Actor	Incident type
2011	10	Uncertain	A man was severely beaten during interrogations.	1	Government	Physical assault
2011	12	Mashhad	11 Bahá'ís were held in solitary confinement for an undetermined period.	11	Government	Solitary confinement
2012	1	Mashhad	After a year in prison, a man was released after providing collateral equivalent to US\$160,000 for bail. During his imprisonment, he was held in solitary confinement for 4 months.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2012	1	Tehran	Two men returned to prison to serve out 4-year sentences. One of them had previously been held in solitary confinement and released on bail after paying an amount equal to about US\$73,450.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2012	3	Kerman	A man was held in solitary confinement for at least 70 days.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2012	5	Shiraz	A man, whose grandfather had been a Bahá'í, declared his belief in the Bahá'í Faith and was subsequently kidnapped, taken to a room where he was hung upside down by his feet and flogged. Anonymous interrogators asked questions about his participation in Bahá'í activities. After losing consciousness, he found himself dumped outside on the street. He has been treated by a doctor for blows to his stomach and blood in his urine.	1	Unidentified attackers	Physical assault
2012	7	Tehran	After his home was raided, a man was arrested and kept in solitary confinement for 89 days. His family was not allowed to visit or communicate during that time.	1	Government	Solitary confinement
2012	7	Tehran	A prisoner was tortured. He was also held in solitary confinement and then held in a cell with dangerous criminals. He has suffered health-related problems from the torture and was at one point taken to the hospital.	1	Government	Torture
2012	7	Uncertain	During a raid on a Bahá'í religious gathering by five intelligence agents, a man who chose to be silent in the face of verbal abuse was hit with a heavy book. All present were faced with insults and the threat of similar physical abuse.	1	Government	Physical assault
2012	8	Uncertain	Some 35 earthquake relief volunteers, including four Bahá'ís, were arrested by government agents on the charges of "involvement in subversive political activities against the regime, through providing assistance to the earthquake victims," which were later changed to "distributing contaminated food." During the arrests, all were violently attacked and beaten.	4	Government	Physical assault
2012	8	Tabriz	Seven Bahá'ís travelling to Tabriz were violently attacked and beaten by government agents.	7	Government	Physical assault
2012	11	Gorgan	At least two prisoners were tortured at Evin prison. They were also held in solitary confinement.	2	Government	Torture
			Total incidents of physical assault, torture and solitary confinement:	At least 104		

42 Violence with Impunity — **Appendix**—Incidents by type, year, date, and city

Year	Month	Town/city	Arson attacks on Bahá'í-owned properties in Iran, 2005-2012	Number of incidents	Main Actor
2005	1	Yazd	A shop was set on fire, destroying all merchandise.	1	Unidentified attackers
2005	1	Yazd	A shop was twice set ablaze, on 25 and 27 January 2005, destroying all its merchandise. A neighbor, a Revolutionary Guard, said that the commander of the police force had ordered attacks on Bahá'ís across the country.	2	Suspected plainclothes agents
2007	4	Ivel	Six homes were set on fire early in the morning.	6	Unidentified attackers
2007	7	Ardestan	A farm gate was set on fire in the night.	1	Unidentified attackers
2008	4	Babolsar	A home was set on fire while the family was away. Neighbors called the fire brigade, but there was extensive damage.	1	Unidentified attackers
2008	5	Kerman	During the commemoration of a Bahá'í holy day, a car parked outside the building and owned by a Bahá'í was set on fire.	1	Unidentified attackers
2008	7	Vilashahr	Unknown arsonists threw Molotov cocktails into front courtyard of a home, apparently at a vehicle parked there. Flames were extinguished before any serious damage ensued. The incident followed a series of threatening letters and the defacing of homes with graffiti.	1	Unidentified attackers
2008	7	Rafsanjan	Two men on motorbikes wedged a burning tire inside the front door of a home, trapping the family inside. Neighbors, however, extinguished the fire.	1	Unidentified attackers
2008	7	Kerman	Unknown attackers set a home on fire. Police later confirmed that the fire was premeditated.	1	Unidentified attackers
2008	7	Rafsanjan	Two motorcyclists set a car on fire while it was parked outside a man's home. The car was completely destroyed.	1	Unidentified attackers
2008	8	Meimand	After a cleric gave an inflammatory speech against the Bahá'í Faith in a rural village, the only Bahá'í-owned home was burned down.	1	Unidentified attackers
2008	10	Rafsanjan	An anonymous motorcyclist set a Bahá'í-owned wedding boutique on fire. The store was extensively damaged.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	1	Khabr	A cleric visiting from Qom attacked the Bahá'í Faith in a sermon and encouraged those listening to take action like setting fire to Bahá'í-owned properties. Following this, an orchard owned by a Bahá'í was set on fire twice within a week.	2	Clergy
2009	2	Semnan	Unknown attackers threw Molotov cocktails at an apartment building that housed three Bahá'ís, who heard the explosion and extinguished the flames.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	2	Semnan	Later that night, Molotov cocktails were again thrown at the same apartments that had been attacked earlier.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	2	Semnan	For the second time in a month, Molotov cocktails were thrown at the apartment complex housing several Bahá'í families. One of them had previously received anonymous phone calls warning them to leave the city and threatening to set them on fire.	2	Unidentified attackers
2009	6	Semnan	Unknown persons attempted to set fire to a store owned by a Bahá'í. Little damage was done.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	6	Semnan	A shop, previously the target of stone-throwing, was set on fire by anonymous persons. A large section of the shop was damaged.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	7	Semnan	Unknown persons set a Bahá'í-owned shop on fire, but no serious damage was caused.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	8	Semnan	A shop was set on fire. This same shop had been set on fire and vandalized a few months previously.	1	Unidentified attackers

Appendix—Incidents by type, year, date, and city—Violence with Impunity 43

Year	Month	Town/city	Arson attacks on Bahá'í-owned properties in Iran, 2005-2012	Number of incidents	Main Actor
2009	8	Semnan	Unknown motorcyclists set fire to a shop, but neighbors helped put out the flames. This shop had been attacked at least twice before. A few nights before, unknown individuals hung a dead cat in the door of the shop.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	9	Rafsanjan	A car was set on fire. The car was parked in the garage of the Bahá'í's home. The fire was extinguished with the help of neighbors and firefighters.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	12	Semnan	A shop was set on fire by three unknown people. This was the third time the shop had been set on fire.	1	Unidentified attackers
2009	12	Semnan	Three unknown persons on motorcycles broke the windows of a car, broke the windows of the same Bahá'í's shop, and then set fire to the store. This was the fourth arson attack on the store.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	4	Semnan	A home was set on fire by unknown attackers, doing moderate damage.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	4	Semnan	A Bahá'í-owned shop was set on fire by unknown attackers, doing moderate damage.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	6	Ivel	Unknown persons blocked access to the village and demolished at least 50 Bahá'í-owned homes with heavy machinery and trucks, reducing them to rubble and burning wreckage.	2+	Unidentified attackers
2010	9	Semnan	Explosives were thrown into the home of a Bahá'í, damaging the residence.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	9	Rafsanjan	Three furniture repair shops were set on fire by unknown persons.	3	Unidentified attackers
2010	11	Rafsanjan	A household appliance repair shop owned by two Bahá'ís was set on fire, causing significant damage.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	11	Rafsanjan	A coffee shop owned by a Muslim was set on fire after his place had been identified in a cleric-run newsletter as being "monopolized" by Bahá'ís.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	12	Rafsanjan	A household appliance repair shop was set on fire for the second time.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	12	Rafsanjan	Another household appliance repair shop was set on fire. The Mayor of Rafsanjan reportedly stated that the attacks in Rafsanjan have been committed by the Bahá'ís themselves under orders from Israel and the United States.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	12	Rafsanjan	A Bahá'í-owned stationery store was set on fire.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	12	Gorgan	The entrance door to a home was set on fire.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	12	Rafsanjan	An appliance repair shop was set on fire for the second time.	1	Unidentified attackers
2010	12	Rafsanjan	Unknown individuals attacked an optical shop with explosives. The explosion broke a water pipe, which extinguished the fire, but the shop suffered smoke damage.	1	Unidentified attackers
2011	1	Rafsanjan	A household appliance repair shop was attacked with explosives, doing significant damage to the merchandise and structure of the building. This was the third time the shop had been set on fire.	1	Unidentified attackers
			Total incidents of arson attacks against Bahá'ís:	At least 49	

44 Violence with Impunity — **Appendix**—Incidents by type, year, date, and city

Year	Month	Town/city	Incidents of desecration of Bahá'í cemeteries, Iran 2005-1012	Number of incidents	Main Actor
2005	2	Yazd	Anonymous attackers vandalized the Bahá'í cemetery, driving cars over graves, smashing tombstones, and exposing bodies of those buried.	1	Unidentified
2007	5	Qaim Shahr	The local cemetery was vandalized by anonymous persons.	1	Unidentified
2007	5	Sanandaj	The local cemetery was vandalized by anonymous persons. A week later, it was again vandalized with anti-Bahá'í graffiti.	1	Unidentified
2007	8	Marvdasht	The local cemetery was vandalized by a group of people led by a cleric. The irrigation system, gutters, and trees were destroyed.	1	Clergy
2007	8	Kashan	The local cemetery was vandalized by unknown persons.	1	Unidentified
2007	8	Kermanshah	The local cemetery was vandalized by unknown persons.	1	Unidentified
2007	8	Yazd	The local Bahá'í cemetery was vandalized with heavy machinery. About half the graves were leveled.	1	Unidentified
2007	9	Najafabad	Unknown persons bulldozed the local Bahá'í cemetery. Ninety-five graves were demolished, a small sanitation facility was destroyed, and two water tanks were damaged beyond repair.	1	Unidentified
2007	9	Miandoab	The ten-year-old gravesite of a Bahá'í was exhumed.	1	Unidentified
2008	1	Isfahan	The Bahá'í cemetery was vandalized again. Flower beds, chairs, and framed prayers for the departed, along with plot signs, were destroyed. Government agencies were informed but no action was taken.	1	Unidentified
2008	3	Karaj (nearby)	Anonymous attackers set fire to parts of the cemetery, broke windows, and vandalized the outside walls with graffiti.	1	Unidentified
2008	6	Marvdasht	The local Bahá'í cemetery was vandalized again. Over 100 trees were uprooted, and a number of graves were damaged.	1	Unidentified
2008	9	Isfahan	Unknown persons felled about 2,500 trees and set fire to the store room of the local Bahá'í cemetery.	1	Unidentified
2008	11	Darzikola	A group of masked men using heavy machinery demolished the local Bahá'í cemetery. A local Bahá'í who tried to stop them was tied down and restrained.	1	Unidentified
2009		Najafabad	Graves in a Bahá'í cemetery were covered over with soil.	1	Unidentified
2009	1	Tehran	Agents using heavy equipment destroyed a large section of a cemetery where many Bahá'ís who had been executed by the government in the 1980s were buried, along with others who had been executed shortly after the Revolution. Some 300 trees were planted and the custodian of the Bahá'í cemetery was told it was going to be turned into a park.	1	Government
2009	1	Ghaemshahr	The Bahá'í cemetery was destroyed.	1	Unidentified
2009	1	Darzikola	The local Bahá'í cemetery was attacked by local government officers with a bulldozer. The cemetery was leveled completely. This was the fourth time it had been attacked recently.	3	Government
2009	2	Semnan	At the local cemetery, the mortuary was set on fire, about 50 gravestones were destroyed, and anti-Bahá'í graffiti was written.	1	Unidentified
2009	5	Ivel	The local Bahá'í cemetery was successfully auctioned for conversion to residential property.	1	Government
2009	5	Najafabad	The graves in a Bahá'í cemetery were covered over with soil.	1	Unidentified
2009	8	Semnan	Unknown individuals used a front-end loader to destroy part of a Bahá'í cemetery and block the door of the mortuary.	1	Unidentified

Appendix—Incidents by type, year, date, and city—Violence with Impunity 45

Year	Month	Town/city	Incidents of desecration of Bahá'í cemeteries, Iran 2005-1012	Number of incidents	Main Actor
2009	9	Najafabad	Authorities blocked the entrance road to a Bahá'í cemetery with soil. They also prevented Bahá'ís from burying a recently deceased Bahá'í, and then refused to release his body from the hospital. Later, the deceased Bahá'í's family discovered that the body had been buried in the cemetery without their knowledge or permission.	1	Government
2009	9	Sangsar	A water tank, so large that it could only have been moved by heavy machinery, was found to have been stolen from the cemetery. The authorities also blocked the road to the cemetery with a locked barrier.	1	Government
2009	12	Marvdasht	The cemetery was vandalized again. 200 trees were uprooted.	1	Unidentified
2009	12	Khoramshahr	The local Bahá'í cemetery was vandalized. A number of graves were destroyed and the cemetery walls were damaged.	1	Unidentified
2010	4	Gilavand	A local Bahá'í cemetery was vandalized by unknown persons using a tractor. All four Bahá'í graves there were destroyed.	1	Unidentified
2010	5	Mashhad	Unknown persons vandalized the local Bahá'í cemetery with heavy machinery. They caused severe damage to the cemetery's walls, the mortuary, and the place where prayers were recited.	1	Unidentified
2010	6	Bojnourd	Some trucks dumped construction waste on graves in a Bahá'í cemetery. Later, soil was dumped on graves in the same cemetery. A Bahá'í spoke to one of the truck drivers, who told him it was "an indirect order" from the municipality. Later, the local authorities helped the Bahá'ís prevent this from happening in the future.	1	Unidentified
2010	6	Isfahan	The entrance to a local Bahá'í cemetery was blocked by truckloads of soil.	1	Unidentified
2010	7	Semnan	Local authorities officially forbade Bahá'ís from using their cemetery.	1	Government
2010	7	Jiroft	The Bahá'í cemetery was vandalized by unknown intruders using bulldozers, and the graves were destroyed.	1	Unidentified
2010	7	Semnan	The Bahá'ís were officially forbidden by the local authorities to use their cemetery.	1	Government
2010	11	Abadeh	A body was exhumed from a local Bahá'í cemetery and run over by a vehicle. This was the second time the grave had been desecrated.	2	Unidentified
2011	3	Isfahan	70 pine trees in the local Bahá'í cemetery were uprooted.	1	Unidentified
2011	3	Sangsar	A newly established local Bahá'í cemetery was vandalized by unknown persons. The graves were covered with soil, trees were uprooted, and two small rooms were destroyed.	1	Unidentified
2011	4	Marvdasht	The local cemetery was partly destroyed.	1	Unidentified
2011	6	Kata	Muslim residents started demolishing the Bahá'í cemetery with heavy machinery and building over it.	1	Mob Violence
2012	12	Yazd	The Bahá'í cemetery was raided again by unknown individuals, who destroyed graves and cut down all the trees.	1	Unidentified
			Total incidents of cemetery desecration:	At least 42	

Violence with Impunity:

Acts of aggression against Iran's Bahá'í community

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866 United Nations Plaza
Suite 120
New York, NY 10017-1833 USA
<http://bic.org>