

Trial of Iran's seven Baha'i leaders

## The 1991 memorandum on “The Baha’i Question”

<http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/yaran-special-report/feature-articles/the-1991-memorandum-on-the-bahai-question>

The Baha’is of Iran have no political ambitions, are committed to non-violence, and seek only to offer their assistance to the progress of their country. Yet, for 30 years, they have been persecuted wholly for their religious beliefs.

Iran’s anti-Baha’i activities are not random acts, but a deliberate government policy. In 1993, concrete evidence emerged that the government had adopted a secret blueprint for the quiet strangulation of the Baha’i community. That evidence came in the form of a secret memorandum, which had been drawn up by the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council (ISRCC) in 1991.

Stamped “confidential,” the document was prepared at the request of the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the then President of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. The memorandum was signed by Hujjatu’l Islam Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani, Secretary of the Council, and approved by Mr. Khamenei, who added his signature to the document.

The memorandum came to light in the 1993 report by UN Special Representative Reynaldo Galindo Pohl. According to Mr. Galindo Pohl, the document came as “reliable information” just as the annual report on Iran to the UN Commission on Human Rights was being completed.

The memorandum specifically calls for Iran’s Baha’is to be treated in such a way “that their progress and development shall be blocked,” providing for the first time conclusive evidence that the campaign against the Baha’is is centrally directed by the government.

The document indicates, for example, that the government aims to keep the Baha’is illiterate and uneducated, living only at a subsistence level, and fearful at every moment that even the tiniest infraction will bring the threat of imprisonment or worse.

Although some of its provisions appear to grant a measure of protection to Baha’is, its overall impact is to create an environment where the Baha’i community of Iran will be quietly eliminated.

The memorandum says, for example, that all Baha'is should be expelled from universities; that they shall be denied "positions of influence," and instead only be allowed to "lead a modest life similar to that of the population in general"; and even that "employment shall be refused to persons identifying themselves as Baha'is."

The provisions regarding arrest, imprisonment and punishment can be read in two ways. The document says:

(a) With regard to the general condition of Baha'is, the following guidelines are hereby adopted: (i) they are not to be expelled from the country without reason; (ii) they are not to be detained, imprisoned or punished without reason; (iii) the government's treatment of them shall be such that their progress and development shall be blocked.

At first glance, it might seem that the term "without reason" is a move towards greater justice, inasmuch as virtually all of the detentions, arrests and imprisonments of Baha'is in the past have been without cause. However, when the entire memo is understood in the context of what to do about "the Baha'i question," it is clear that the directive is merely instructing officials to be sure that they justify their actions before they make any moves against a Baha'i. It in no way promises any sort of protection.

The memorandum also belies its underlying intentions when it says that Baha'is will be allowed to go to school only if they do not identify themselves as Baha'is, and that they should be sent to schools "with a strong religious ideology." The aim here, obviously, is to wrest Baha'i children from their faith.

Ominously, the memorandum says that "A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country." That Iran would like to reach outside its borders to stamp out the Baha'i Faith makes clear the degree of blind animosity felt by the government towards Baha'is.

In the years since the memorandum was written, the Baha'i community has experienced persecution in all of the areas outlined by it: Baha'is have been detained, imprisoned, and falsely charged with "spying"; they have been denied access to education and sources of livelihood; they have been stripped of all influence in Iranian society and deprived of their right to religious freedom.

Read the complete memorandum here:

[http://question.bahai.org/002\\_2.php](http://question.bahai.org/002_2.php)