

Where's the Coverage? Iran Systematically Oppresses Baha'is
By Snapshots: A Camera Blog
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Even though representatives of the government of Iran have testified that “any religious or political belief is guaranteed under the Constitution,” that “no one can be put to trial or punished, or deprived of social rights owing to a particular belief,” and that “the investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be harassed or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief,” that’s exactly what happens to Baha’is in Iran, according to two recent reports.

United Nations special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, announced a report which outlined systematic government oppression of Baha’is, “intimidation, arrest, detention and interrogation that focus on their religious beliefs,” including psychological and physical torture.

A report from the Baha’i International Community, entitled “Violence with Impunity,” explains that:

Since [the Islamic revolution in] 1979, more than 200 Baha’is 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 Baha’is have been arrested, and, by the end of 2012, at least 115 Baha’is were languishing in prison. The increase in arrests has been accompanied by a rising tide of violence against Baha’is, marked by incidents that include arson attacks, anti-Baha’i graffiti, hate speech, the desecration of Baha’i cemeteries, and assaults on schoolchildren.

After detailing numerous violent attacks, the report concludes that:

...the Iranian government has apparently made it official policy not to investigate, prosecute or otherwise punish those who assault Baha’is or their properties. Indeed, the evidence shows that police officers, prison guards, local officials, the clerical establishment, and individual citizens have not only been encouraged to attack Baha’is through incitement in the media—they have also been given to understand that such attacks can be undertaken with complete impunity.

While, to their credit, UPI and The New York Times did cover the U.N. briefing, both focused almost exclusively on a crackdown on journalists and did not mention persecution of Baha’is. No other major media outlet even did that much.

The Baha’i International Community report received even less media attention. Only The Jerusalem Post covered both reports.

The Baha’i faith was established in Iran in 1863 and recognizes the universality of all religions. There are an estimated 350,000 Baha’is in Iran but the religion’s international headquarters, the Baha’i World Centre, is located in the Middle East’s only free country. You guessed it, that’s Israel.

The Baha’i International Community report concludes that, “the only real protection for Iranian Baha’is comes from continued international outcry and action.” Therefore it is even more urgent that we demand... Where’s the coverage?