

Confidential Iran memo exposes policy to deny Baha'i students university education

27 August 2007

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NEW YORK — The Baha'i International Community has received a copy of a confidential 2006 letter from Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology instructing Iranian universities to expel any student who is discovered to be a Baha'i.

The letter refutes recent statements by Iranian officials, who say Baha'i students in Iran face no discrimination - despite the fact that more than half of the Baha'i university students enrolled last autumn were gradually expelled over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year.

"This latest document, which flatly states that Baha'i students should be expelled from universities once they are discovered, proves unequivocally that Iranian authorities remain intent on utterly blocking the development of Iranian Baha'is, despite what they say to the outside world," said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations.

"Along with other recently received reports and documents, the letter exposes a duplicitous campaign by Iran to pretend



This letter from a government ministry to 81 Iranian universities instructs them to expel Baha'i students.

Original documents

Letter from Ministry to universities

Document 1: Persian original (Adobe Acrobat 597KB)

Document 1: English translation (Adobe Acrobat 46KB)

Letter to Payam-i-Nur University

Document 2: Persian original (Adobe Acrobat 374KB)

Document 2: English translation (Adobe Acrobat 19KB)

Guilan University letter to Baha'i student

Document 3: Persian original (Adobe Acrobat 49KB)

that it does not violate the internationally recognized right to education while, in fact, the government is actually continuing to implement its secret, long-term plan to prevent Baha'i students from obtaining a university education.

"Coupled with ongoing reports of physical and economic harassment directed against Baha'is of all ages and in all regions of the country, this latest development should serve to remind those who care about human rights that Iran's 300,000-member Baha'i community remains gravely threatened," she said.

"Not only Baha'is, but also others - students expelled under directives that target them on absolutely baseless grounds; women whose human rights are grossly violated through the enactment or perpetuation of discriminatory laws; and other victims of injustice in that land - need international defense," she added.

The 2006 letter is from the Central Security Office of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) and was issued by its director general, Asghar Zarei, to 81 universities around the country. Stamped "confidential," the exact date of the letter is undecipherable, although its contents are legible. ([Document 1 in the list of original documents.](#))

"[I]f the identity of Baha'i individuals becomes known at the time of enrollment or during the course of their studies, they must be expelled from university," states the letter, which was signed by Mr. Zarei. The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology oversees all state-run universities.

The directive flatly contradicts public and private statements of Iranian government officials over the last several years. They have sought to portray their educational system as open to Baha'is and free of discriminatory practices.

In early March, for example, newspapers carried a story by the Reuters news agency reporting that some 70 Baha'i students had been expelled from universities in Iran since autumn 2006.

[Document 3:
English
translation](#)
(Adobe Acrobat
14KB)

Guilan University
directive

[Document 4:
Persian original](#)
(Adobe Acrobat
56KB)

[Document 4:
English
translation](#)
(Adobe Acrobat
17KB)

1991 Golpaygani
memorandum

[Document 5:
Persian original](#)
(Adobe Acrobat
58KB)

[Document 5:
English
translation](#)
(Adobe Acrobat
21KB)

Background

[History of
persecution of
Baha'is in Iran – 1844
to present: A short
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In the Reuters story, however, an anonymous spokesperson for the Iranian Mission to the United Nations was quoted as saying in reply: "No one in Iran because of their religion has been expelled from studying."

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The number of 70 students expelled as of March 2007 as reported by Reuters has since risen to more than 128, out of approximately 200 who were enrolled last autumn after more than 25 years during which Baha'i students were banned from universities in Iran.

Last year, as well, deceitful statements by Iranian officials came to light when Clare Short, a member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, received a communication from Hamid Reza Arefi, the charge d'affaires of the Iranian Embassy in London, who likewise denied that Baha'is are discriminated against in their access to higher education in Iran.

"Although Bahatism [sic] is not recognized as an official religion but by law Baha'is are entitled to equal rights," wrote Mr. Arefi in an 8 June 2006 letter to Ms. Short, adding: "In Iran, no individual is excluded from higher education solely because of his/her ideology."

Similar statements have been made by Iranian diplomats and officials in other venues.

The 2006 letter from the MSRT's Central Security Office also makes a clear reference to the secret 1991 Golpaygani memorandum about Baha'is, which was released to the public in 1993 by a United Nations official. ([Document 5.](#))

Despite Mr. Arefi's assurances that Iranian Baha'is are legally entitled to equal rights, other voices state that the Golpaygani memorandum takes precedence.

That 1991 memorandum outlined a comprehensive plan to "block" the development and progress of the Iranian Baha'i community. The 1991 memorandum states for example that Baha'is shall be denied "any position of influence" and that "employment shall be refused to persons identifying themselves as Baha'is."

The 1991 memorandum states clearly that Baha'is "must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is."

Signed by Hujjatu'l Islam Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani, secretary of the Iran Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, the 1991 memorandum was approved by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As such, it reflects the highest policy of the government.

A number of fair-minded Iranian individuals have offered sympathy and a measure of support for the plight of the Baha'is; however, they are largely powerless in the face of the official policy of the government to oppress the Baha'is, Ms. Dugal said.

"The Baha'i International Community asserts that unless and until the Iranian government revokes this pernicious document, there is little hope of any justice for the Baha'is of Iran," she said.

The Baha'i International Community has also recently received several other documents and letters that clearly indicate the policy outlined in the 2006 letter is being actively implemented.

These documents include:

-- A second, follow-up letter from the MSRT's Central Security Office to officials at Payame Noor University, dated 17 March 2007, which instructs them to "prevent the enrollment of the Baha'i applicants." ([Document 2.](#))

-- An 18 May 2007 letter from the academic counseling and higher education office at Guilan University to the director of university academic affairs, asking for the immediate discharge of a Baha'i student. ([Document 4.](#))

-- A 27 May 2007 letter, also from the academic counseling and higher education office at Guilan University, to the above-mentioned Baha'i student, notifying the student that she has been "disqualified" from studying at Guilan, as

required by the 1991 Golpaygani memorandum. ([Document 3.](#))

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