

SJR

32

COMMITTEE REPORT

SENATE

4/10/79

FURTHER: None

Date: 4/10/79

Mr. President:

The Committee on STATE AFFAIRS has had SJR 32

Expressing concern over the reported persecution of members of the Baha'i religious community in Iran

under consideration and (a majority of the committee) (the committee) reports it back with the following recommendations:

- do pass  do not pass
- do pass with attached amendments(s)
- replace with CS for \_\_\_\_\_  same title  
 new title
- and recommends \_\_\_\_\_
- AND attaches a "Letter of Intent"  New Fiscal Note
- reports it back without recommendation
- referred to the \_\_\_\_\_ Committee

MEMBERS SIGNING  
DO PASS

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 Tom Kelly  
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MEMBERS HAVING  
OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:

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 CHAIRMAN



March 28, 1979

Honorable Patrick Rodey  
Alaska State Senate  
Pouch V  
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Senator Rodey:

Recent events in Iran have raised fears for the future of religious minorities, particularly the largest of them—the Baha'i community. Since last September a number of anti-Baha'i outbreaks occurred in various cities, towns and villages with some deaths and a great deal of injury of persons and properties.

The campaign directed against the Baha'is has reached the shores of America. On February 8, 1979, Mansour Farhang, an Iranian who teaches at Sacramento State College, accused the Iranian Baha'is of hating Muslims and committing many crimes against the nation. He claimed that General Nasiri, former head of SAVAK, is a Baha'i, implying the guilt of all Baha'is by association. The fact is that Nasiri is not a Baha'i. The February 14 issue of the New York Times reported the assurance given to Jewish leaders by a representative of Ayatollah Khomeini that all religious minorities except the Baha'is would have "full political, cultural and religious rights." The Ayatollah, it was said, regards the Baha'i Faith as a "political rather than a religious movement."

The Baha'i community in Iran, like Baha'i communities everywhere, abstains from all political activity, is peaceful, works toward brotherhood among nations and races, promotes religious tolerance, and seeks mutual understanding with members of all faiths and groups. It is therefore most regrettable that the more fanatical and extremist elements among the Iranian Muslims have once again chosen the Baha'is as scapegoats and have extended their campaign to the United States.

As representatives of the Baha'is of Alaska, we wish herewith to supply you and your colleagues in the State Senate with some accurate background information on the nature and history of the Baha'i Faith. And we stand ready to provide any further information you may desire.

Very truly yours,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE BAHAI'S OF ALASKA

*James Smith*

James Smith  
Secretary

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# Attacks on Bahá'ís in Iran

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The recent mob attacks on Bahá'ís in Iran have once again called attention to the status of the Bahá'í Faith in the land of its origin. In cities, towns and villages—among them Isfahan, Fathabad, Arak, Sangsar, Navriz, Sarvestan—over three hundred private homes and dozens of shops and business enterprises have been looted, burned down or otherwise destroyed. In Isfahan a clinic that belonged to Bahá'ís was dynamited. Elsewhere, orchards were seized and farmers deprived of their means of livelihood. A number of Bahá'í centers have been demolished or burned to the ground. Bahá'í communities have been terrorized, individuals and families beaten, and, in some instances, driven to the mosques and forced to recant their faith.

Many find it difficult to understand why members of a religious minority dedicated to tolerance, peace, and universal brotherhood arouse hatred in those among whom they live. The reasons for the persecutions, the hatred, and the violence lie deep in the socio-psychological structure of Persian society and go back more than a century to the year 1844, when a young merchant of Shiraz, later known as the Báb, founded a new religion whose followers rejected the literal interpretation of the Koran and held that soon "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest" would appear on earth to bring a new Law and to inaugurate a new era in the history of mankind. In 19th century Iran, where even the notion of religious liberty did not exist, the teachings of the Báb were bound to produce a violent reaction. Accused of heresy, the Báb was imprisoned for several years and finally executed in 1850. This did not stop the spread of the Báb's teachings, nor did it stop the resistance of his disciples who defended themselves with great valor against attacks by the united forces of the clergy and the government. There ensued a campaign of extermination in which some twenty thousand Bábis were killed. The cruelty of the suppression, the indiscriminate massacre of women and children, the tortures inflicted upon masses of innocent people have been eloquently described both by participants and outside observers, among the latter Comte de Gobineau and Edward G. Browne. The Bábis left a legacy of suspicion, fear, and pain.

Thirteen years after the martyrdom of the Báb, one of his teaching disciples who had been exiled to Baghdad by the Persian government proclaimed himself to be the One whose advent the Báb had prophesied. He became known as Bahá'u'lláh. Most of the Báb's followers

accepted Bahá'u'lláh's claim and became known as Bahá'ís. Over the next forty years Bahá'u'lláh produced a vast number of works that today constitute the scripture of the religion he founded. He taught the unity of mankind and the equality of races and nations. He taught the unity of religions and universal peace. He proclaimed the harmony of religion and science, the need for universal education, and the equality of sexes. He also established the essential principles for the life and operation of a world-wide community of his followers who would govern themselves through elective bodies, would have no clergy, and would be dedicated to the common interests of all mankind.

The authorities, both religious and secular, kept Bahá'u'lláh in confinement and exile for forty years. Feeling threatened by ideas that challenged the outworn formulas they had mouthed for hundreds of years, Muslim clergy continued to demand the extirpation of the Bahá'ís, whom they always called "heretics" and "harmful misleaders." The Bahá'ís were turned into the scapegoats of Iranian society. As their numbers increased, they became an ever more attractive target for demagogic attacks by those who wanted to distract the public or create turmoil. Since the Bahá'ís emphasized education and placed great value on work, they achieved a relatively high standard of living, which made them promising targets of pogroms. Last but not least, the tolerant and peaceful nature of the Bahá'í community made it possible to attack Bahá'ís without fear of violent retaliation.

In moments of national stress, during famines, revolutions, and invasions of the country, Bahá'ís could be blamed for the nation's miseries. If one did not wish to pay a debt, one could accuse the creditor of being a Bahá'í. If an epidemic spread through a province, one could blame the Bahá'ís. Bahá'í ideals of world unity could be twisted to appear as a lack of patriotism. Bahá'í acceptance of the truth inherent in all great religions of mankind could be interpreted as a betrayal of Islam.

When in 1896 Navin-i-Din Shah was assassinated by a Pan-Islamist terrorist, the Bahá'ís were immediately accused of that deed. In the brief but violent persecution that followed, several Bahá'ís lost their lives. In 1908 more than a hundred Bahá'ís were massacred in Yazd. In that city, history records, "Hájí Mirzay-i-Halabizade was so ferociously flogged that his wife flung herself upon his body, and was in her turn

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severely beaten, after which his skull was lacerated by the cleaver of a butcher. His eleven-year-old son was pitilessly thrashed, stabbed with penknives and tortured to death. . . . A crowd of about six thousand people, of both sexes, vented their fury upon the helpless victims, a few going so far as to drink their blood."

The outbreak of the revolution in 1906 precipitated new attacks on the Baha'is all over Iran, with particularly bloody episodes taking place in Sirjan, Dughabad, Tabriz, Qom, Najafabad, Sangsar, Shahmirzad, Isfahan, Jahrom, Mashhad, Kermanshah, and Hamadan. As the constitutional movement developed, "the reactionaries brought groundless accusations against the Baha'is and publicly denounced them as supporters and inspiers of the nationalist cause." In the chaotic conditions of World War I and its aftermath, Baha'is once again suffered scattered attacks in various parts of the country.

During the 1930's, attacks on the Baha'is were less numerous and less violent. However, the pressure against them was never entirely relaxed. Baha'i schools were closed, Baha'i marriages were refused recognition, Baha'i literature was banned, gatherings were prohibited, Baha'is in government service were frequently dismissed from their jobs, nurses and doctors were fired from hospitals, teachers were refused employment. Occasionally, here and there, a Baha'i was murdered. This pattern continued through World War II and the immediate postwar period.

A large scale attack on the Baha'i community was launched in the month of Ramadan, 1955. At one of Tehran's mosques, Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Falsafi, a fanatical cleric, daily urged his flock to rise up against the "false religion." He accused the Baha'is of being enemies of Islam and called for severe measures against them. The mosque was permitted to preach his incendiary sermons every sermon Saturday. The effect of the broadcasts was immediate. Old suspicions were revived. Bitter accusations were made to discredit a religious community that was now thrown at the Baha'is.

On March 27, a police force looted the gates of the Baha'i Spiritual Assembly in Tehran, and five days later the building was taken over by the army. On May 17, 1955, Mulla Muhammad Baqir, president of the Parliament, prohibited Baha'i worship. A contemporary newspaper reported:

*This was followed by an orgy of senseless murder, rape, pillage and destruction the like of which has not been recorded in modern times. The dome of the Hagiratu'l-Quds (National Center) in Tihran was demolished; the House of the Bab was twice desecrated and severely damaged. Bahá'u'lláh's ancestral home in Takur was occupied, the house of the Bab's uncle was razed to the ground, shops and farms were plundered; crops burned; livestock destroyed, bodies of Bahá'is disinterred in the cemeteries and mutilated; private homes broken into, damaged and looted, adults executed and beaten, young women abducted and forced to marry Muslims; children mocked, reviled, beaten and expelled from schools, boycotted by butchers and bakers was imposed on hapless villagers, young girls were raped, families murdered, government employees dismissed and all manner of pressure brought upon the believers to recant their Faith.*

A world-wide campaign of publicity, expressions of sympathy for the Baha'is on the part of outstanding individuals in Europe, Asia, and the Americas, and appeals to the United Nations resulted in some relief to the Baha'is of Iran. However, it took several years for passions to abate and for normalcy to return. Since then Baha'is have continued to live under pressure in the way forced upon them by the circumstances of history.

Though the Bahá'is are the largest religious minority in Iran, their existence is not officially recognized and, unlike other minorities such as the Christians, the Jews, and the Zoroastrians, they enjoy no specific human rights. Being in their vast majority ethnic Iranians, speaking Persian or Azerbaijani, they are no foreign element, but a part of the Iranian nation to which they have always been loyal. It is only the medieval intolerance of certain fanatical elements that strives to set them apart from their Muslim brothers and fellow citizens. Being non-political, law-abiding, and opposed to all violence, they constitute no threat to anyone, yet they have been the most frequently persecuted group in the nation. The current outbreaks of persecutions are only a episode in the long history of cruel and senseless oppressions with which the Baha'is have been afflicted.

BAHA'I STATISTICS

WORLDWIDE

National Spiritual Assemblies. . . . .	130
Countries opened to the Faith:	
Independent Countries . . . . .	152
Significant Territories and Islands <u>188</u>	340
Number of Localities where Baha'is reside:	
As of August, 1978 . . . . .	38,031
Number of Local Spiritual Assemblies:	
As of August, 1978 . . . . .	22,275
Number of Languages into which Baha'i Literature has been translated and published. . . . .	685
Baha'i Schools and Institutes. . . . .	133
Sites acquired for future Temples. . . . .	105
Number of Tribes and Minority Groups represented in the Faith:	
In excess of . . . . .	1,640

UNITED STATES (48 CONTIGUOUS STATES)

Number of Localities where Baha'is reside. . . . .	6,400
Number of Local Spiritual Assemblies . . . . .	1,440

ALASKA

Number of Localities where Baha'is reside. . . . .	200
Number of Local Spiritual Assemblies . . . . .	58

Introduced: 4/10/79  
Referred: State Affairs

1 IN THE SENATE

BY KELLY AND KERTTULA

2 SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 32

3 IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

4 ELEVENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

5 Expressing concern over the reported  
6 persecution of members of the Baha'i  
7 religious community in Iran.

8 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

9 WHEREAS there have been numerous recent reports in the news media of mob  
10 attacks directed at Baha'i believers throughout Iran; and

11 WHEREAS these news reports indicate that hundreds of homes, shops, and  
12 business enterprises owned by Baha'is, together with many of their religious  
13 centers, have been looted, burned or otherwise destroyed as a direct result  
14 of these attacks; and

15 WHEREAS members of the Baha'i religious minority in Iran have in the past  
16 been the objects of widespread discrimination; and

17 WHEREAS this ongoing persecution of members of the Baha'i faith in the  
18 land of its origin causes much distress amongst Baha'is belonging to their 58  
19 local Spiritual Assemblies located throughout Alaska; and;

20 WHEREAS all Alaskans, regardless of religious persuasion, deplore  
21 religious persecution or intolerance wherever it exists and share and  
22 sympathize with the concern of Alaskan Baha'is on the current situation  
23 confronting members of the Baha'i faith in Iran;

24 BE IT RESOLVED by the Alaska State Legislature that it expresses its  
25 concern over the reported persecution of members of the Baha'i religious  
26 community in Iran; and be it

27 FURTHER RESOLVED that the United States government is urged to use its  
28 best efforts to put an end to both religious persecution and restriction of  
29 human rights in Iran, wherever it exists.

1 COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Jimmy Carter,  
2 President of the United States; the Honorable Cyrus Vance, Secretary of  
3 State; and to the Honorable Ted Stevens and the Honorable Mike Gravel, U. S.  
4 Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U. S. Representative, members of the  
5 Alaska delegation in Congress.

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