

Conclusion

THE CAMPAIGN OF the Islamic Republic of Iran against that country's non-violent Bahá'í community stands out not only for its quality of wrongful discrimination — Iran's Bahá'ís are persecuted solely for their religious belief — but also for its thoroughness of conception and subtle implementation.

In 1979, almost as soon as it was born, the Islamic Republic began a wholesale campaign of executions, imprisonments and torture aimed at Iran's 300,000-member Bahá'í community. By 1983, nearly 150 Bahá'ís had been killed or executed, hundreds had been imprisoned, and thousands had been forced out of employment. The number of those killed would eventually reach more than 200.

Beyond such atrocities, however, the Iranian government also explicitly targeted the Bahá'í children and youth. Shortly after the Islamic revolution, virtually all Bahá'í students were expelled from schools and blocked from higher education.

International pressure soon forced Iran to scale back the killings and imprisonments — as well as its exclusion of primary and secondary school children from public education.

The government, however, has not yet allowed Bahá'í youth to attend colleges and universities in Iran.

The ongoing action to prevent Bahá'ís from obtaining higher education, which in the modern world is the key to social and economic progress and advancement, is a clear sign of the government's thoroughness of effort in seeking to destroy the Bahá'í community as a viable entity.

The official decree barring Bahá'í students from admission to public university was issued in

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1981, soon after the Islamic revolution. That year, universities published new prospectuses requiring that applicants belong to one of the four religions recognized in the constitution, namely the Muslim, Christian, Jewish or Zoroastrian religions.

In 1991, the government reiterated that policy, in a secret memorandum that outlined with ingenious intention a plan to “block” the development of the Bahá'í community. “They must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís,” the memorandum said.

That the Iranian government persists in this policy today, continuing to block all access to higher education for Bahá'í young people whose only transgression is to profess a system of belief that Iran's mullahs have declared counter to Islam, challenges the modern imagination.

While seeking trade and other favors with the international community, the government has in its latest manifestation of this effort sought to deceive those who seek to monitor its human rights record with a ploy to make it appear that

it is Iranian Bahá'ís themselves who are refusing to enroll in Iran's colleges and universities. The government did this by playing on the known fact that Bahá'ís will never compromise on their fundamental religious principles.

But ploy or no ploy, the Iranian government's actions are nevertheless clear: they amount to an illegal and unacceptable denial of the right to education for Bahá'ís in Iran.

Like young people everywhere, Bahá'í youth in Iran desperately desire the opportunities and insights that come with higher education. This is especially so because the teachings of their faith

stress the importance of knowledge and learning — and because those same teachings also emphasizes the importance of contributing to society at large.

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One can only hope that the world's academic leaders will now follow suit in protesting the blatantly unjust oppression that continues to confront the young people of Iran's Bahá'í community.

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