

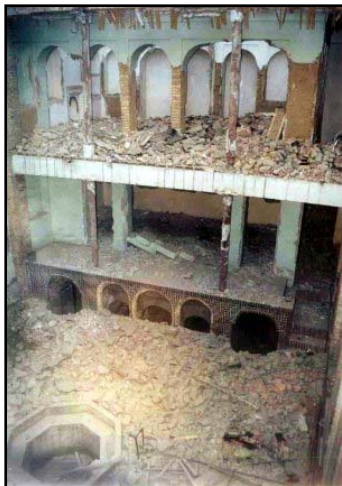
## IRAN

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 Iran has been controlled by leaders who hold to a very strict form of Shi'a Islam, and Shari'a, or Islamic law, has been the basis for all the country's laws. The Government's interpretation and application of Shari'a in relation to Iran's minority religious communities has often led to discrimination and persecution. The US State Department declared simply in its 2005 International Religious Freedom Report, "The Government [of Iran] restricts freedom of religion." As a result, the Secretary of State has since 1999 designated Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" for severe violations of religious freedom.



Shi'a Muslims constitute 89% of Iran's 69 million people, and another 8% follow the Sunni tradition of Islam. The remaining 3% of the population comprise a number of minority religious groups, including Baha'is, Christians, Jews, Sufi Muslims and Zoroastrians. Each of these groups suffers varying degrees of persecution and discrimination at the hands of the Government.

Adherents of the Baha'i Faith face some of the most severe persecution from the governing authorities, who consider them to be apostate Muslims and "counterrevolutionary" because of their alleged links to the ousted regime of Shah Pahlavi. Baha'is are not allowed to teach or practice their faith within Iran or maintain relations with other Baha'is around the world. Many of their assets and holy sites were seized after the 1979 Revolution and have not been returned. In some cases they have been destroyed. Baha'is are not permitted to enroll in universities in Iran and are denied the right of official assembly. Crimes against Baha'is regularly go unpunished.



A Baha'i holy site destroyed by the Iranian government in 2004

Christians also face discrimination and persecution in Iran. Like other religious minorities, Christians are not allowed to serve as elected representatives or to hold senior government or military positions. Conversion to Christianity from Islam is a crime punishable by death. Moreover, Islamic religious police from Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance increasingly threaten, imprison and torture Christians because of their faith. Prior to 1997, Iranian police generally limited arrests to key church leaders, but during the 1997 to 2005 reign of intimidation by President Mohammad Khatami, house churches were raided, with as many as forty members arrested at a time. Evangelical churches have been closed down, Christians are forced to carry membership cards and members of evangelical congregations are subject to identity checks by authorities posted outside church doors. Pastors have been ordered to report new members to the government, which they have refused to do at great danger to their own lives.

Although not limited to religious minorities, it bears mentioning that a woman's testimony in Iran is worth only half that of a man's, making it virtually impossible for women to redress legal grievances. Girls as young as nine can be given in marriage to Muslim husbands. In November 2000, Iran's Council

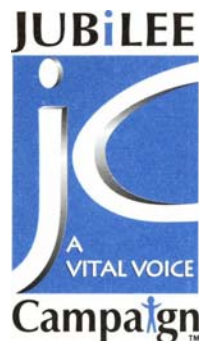
of Guardians rejected a bill as “contrary to Islamic law” that would have raised the legal age of marriage for women from nine to fifteen.

#### **FAST FACTS ON RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN IRAN:**

- The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is in the United States reports that since 1979 more than 200 Iranian Bahai’s have been killed, fifteen more have disappeared and are presumed dead and more than 10,000 Baha’is have been dismissed from government and university jobs.
- The Iranian government continues to arrest Baha’is arbitrarily, confiscate their legally held property and destroy Baha’i holy sites.
- In 2005 a military officer and lay Assemblies of God pastor, Hamid Pourmand, was court-martialed for apostasy and for “deceiving the armed forces” by not declaring he was a convert to Christianity. The Bushehr Revolutionary Court cleared Pourmand of apostasy but sentenced him to three years in prison and a dishonorable discharge for espionage.
- In November 2005 Christian convert and house church pastor Ghorban Tourani was kidnapped from his home near the Turkmenistan border and stabbed to death. His body was thrown in front of his home a few hours later.
- In May 2006 Christian convert and house church pastor Ali Kaboli was arrested at his workshop in northern Iran. Kaboli had been threatened in the past with prosecution for holding “illegal” religious meetings in his home. For six weeks he was denied all outside communication except for a single call to his family. He was released from jail on June 12.
- In May 2006 Iranian police arrested 54 Baha’i youth engaged in humanitarian service in the city of Shiraz on questionable charges. It was the largest single arrest of Baha’is since the brutal crackdown of the 1980s.



Ghorban Tourani, shortly before his kidnapping and murder in 2005



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