Iraq - Bahá’í

Profile

Bahá’í are followers of a monotheistic faith founded in 19th-century Iran. Currently, only a small number are thought to remain in Iraq. Bahá’í beliefs center on the oneness of God and the unity of humankind and they accept the validity of all the main world religions, believing them to progressive revelations of divine truth. Bahá’í avoid participation in partisan politics which they view as contradictory to their religion’s values of unity and brotherhood. Some Muslim leaders consider Bahá’í to be apostates from Islam.

Historical Context

The Bahá’í community in Iraq was founded in 1931, and Bahá’í were recognized as a religious community during the monarchical period. However, the rise of the Ba’ath Party brought with it increasing repression against the community. In 1970, Law No. 105 was passed prohibiting the Bahá’í faith, which was followed in 1975 by Rule No. 358 issued by the Directorate of Civil Affairs proscribing the recording of ‘Bahá’í’ as a religion in the civil status records. Consequently, unless they made false statements about their religious beliefs and denied their identity, the Bahá’í could not acquire identity documents, passports, or birth, death and marriage certificates. Many Bahá’í were imprisoned and sentenced to death during this period.

In 2007, the Ministry of Interior repealed Rule No 358. Thereafter, a number of Bahá’í managed to obtain ID cards stating ‘Bahá’í’ in the field of religion. However, Law No. 105 of 1970 was never revoked. Some Bahá’í were afraid to indicate their true religion on their identity cards as this could open them to discrimination in their dealings with government officials. After 2007, the Ministry of Interior again put a halt to the issuance of Bahá’í identity cards, citing Law No. 105 and the Law of Civil Affairs, which prohibits conversion away from Islam, which applies to those who had previously obtained identity documents stating Muslim as their religion.
Current issues

Many Bahá’í still lack identity documentation or have identity cards stating that they are Muslim. Without identity documentation, Bahá’í cannot access rights and services related to citizenship such as education, property ownership and medical care. The majority of Bahá’í marriages are not registered officially, so the children of such marriages cannot obtain identification. Bahá’í do not benefit from any recognition or special measures under the Iraqi constitution, but they are recognized as a religious minority by the Kurdistan Regional Government’s Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs.

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