

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

15 May 2013

IRN104419.E

Iran: Treatment of elderly Baha'i followers by society and authorities; whether Baha'i seniors have access to state-run or private senior citizen homes (2012-May 2013)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Background

Within the Iranian population of around 80 million people, there are approximately 300,000 Baha'i followers (MRG 2012, 197; US Apr. 2013, 74). According to the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011*, the Iranian government "considers Baha'is to be apostates and defines the Baha'i Faith as a political 'sect'" (US 30 July 2012, 1). The report adds that, according to Iranian law, "Baha'i blood ... can be spilled with impunity" (ibid., 5). Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Foundation for Democracy in Iran (FDI), a US-based private organization that receives grants from the US National Endowment for Democracy and promotes human rights and democracy for Iran (FDI n.d.), stated that the Iranian penal code considers the murder of Baha'is as "legitimate" (FDI 10 May 2013). Sources report on executions of Baha'is (US 30 July 2012, 12; MRG 2012, 198). Sources also report on the imprisonment of Baha'is due to their faith (UN 28 Feb. 2013, para. 61; AI 2012). Elderly Baha'is are among the imprisoned, including some seniors who have been sentenced to 20 years in jail (Baha'i Community of Canada 8 May 2013; AI 31 Mar. 2011). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a professor of political science at York University who researches Middle East politics and economy indicated that conservative and religious families in Iranian society "do not want to be associated with Baha'is" (Professor 9 May 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Treatment of Elderly Baha'is

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of history, historical studies and Near and Middle Eastern civilizations at the University of Toronto, who is also the author of several publications on Iran, stated that

... elderly Baha'is are often the targets of most intense harassment in Iran. If they are known for their religious identity, as is often the case, they are routinely denied the basic services that are available to other citizens of Iran. They also face numerous obstacles in their everyday life experience. (Professor 12 May 2013)

The President of FDI similarly stated that Baha'is are excluded from most government services in Iran (FDI 9 May 2013). The President of FDI added that Baha'is cannot access government health care and retirement systems (ibid. 10 May 2013).

Sources indicate that Baha'is do not have pensions (Baha'i Community of Canada 8 May 2013; IHRDC 10 May 2013; US Apr. 2013, 74). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of Government

Relations of the Baha'i Community of Canada's Office of External Affairs, which is "responsible for making representations to the federal government and national leaders concerning the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran and other countries" (Baha'i Community of Canada 13 May 2013), stated that Baha'is have been denied pensions since the "earliest days of the Islamic revolution [1979]" (ibid. 8 May 2013).

Sources report on obstacles to employment for Baha'is (Baha'i Community of Canada 8 May 2013; US Apr. 2013, 74). The President of FDI stated that Baha'is are excluded from government jobs, which is a large segment of the economy (FDI 10 May 2013). The US Commission on International Religious Freedom's *Annual Report 2013*, which covers the time period of 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013, states that Baha'is face the denial of business licenses, jobs in the public sector, and jobs in the private sector (US Apr. 2013, 74-75).

The President of FDI stated that Baha'is are excluded from government schools (FDI 9 May 2013). Sources report that Baha'is are prohibited from accessing higher education (Professor 9 May 2013; Baha'i Community of Canada 8 May 2013). The US Commission on International Religious Freedom's *Annual Report 2013* states that, even though the "Iranian government maintains publicly that Baha'is are free to attend university," most students in universities have been expelled when their Baha'i faith became known (US Apr. 2013, 76).

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom's *Annual Report 2013* reports that the Baha'i community "faces severe economic pressure" (US Apr. 2013, 74-75). The Baha'i Community of Canada's Director of Government Relations stated that the

... severe limitations upon the economic well-being of Bahá'ís by obstructing them from earning a livelihood and also by denying them access to higher education has had particularly harsh consequences for elderly Bahá'ís, many of whom are dependent upon their children for financial support. (8 May 2013)

The FDI President similarly stated that Baha'is do not have a social safety net and "must rely entirely on family and community organizations for their well-being" (FDI 10 May 2013). The Baha'i Community of Canada's Director of Government Relations said that the resources of Baha'i families are "stretched" due to the "lack of economic prospects for young Bahá'í adults," which has resulted in young Baha'is delaying marriage and living with their parents longer (Baha'i Community of Canada 8 May 2013).

3. Access to Senior Citizen Homes

Information on the ability of Baha'is to access state-run or private senior citizen homes could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. However, the following information may be of interest.

The *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011* reports the confiscation of Baha'i properties (US 30 July 2012, 1). The US Commission on International Religious Freedom's *Annual Report 2013* adds that Baha'i community properties are "often seized or desecrated," and that in 2012 and early 2013, there were arson attacks against Baha'i businesses and personal property (US Apr. 2013, 74-75). Sources indicate that Baha'is have been denied the right to inherit property (ibid., 74; MRG 2012, 198).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Professor, History, Historical Studies and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto. 12 May 2013. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Professor, Political Science, York University. 9 May 2013. Telephone interview with the Research Directorate.

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United States (US). April 2013. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). *Annual Report 2013.* <[http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf)> [Accessed 13 May 2013]

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following individuals and organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Association for Bahá'í Studies in North America, Bahá'i International Community, Bahá'i International Community United Nations Office, Islamic Human Rights Commission, Mission for the Establishment of Human Rights in Iran, Professor of Community Health at Universiti Putra Malaysia, Researcher at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Senior correspondent in Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Central Newsroom. The following organizations could not provide information for this Response: Bahá'í Community of Montreal, International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies.

Internet sites, including: Al Jazeera; Bahá'i International Community; British Broadcasting Corporation; Danish Immigration Service; ecoi.net; Factiva; Human Rights Watch; United Nations – Refworld.

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