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Iran: The *shenasnameh*, including application and reissuance procedure, physical characteristics, security features, period of validity, meaning of inscriptions, significance of identification number and difference between the *shenasnameh* and the national identification card (2006)

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The following information on the *shenasnameh* was provided by an official of the Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington, DC in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 4 May 2006. The *shenasnameh* is the equivalent of a birth certificate and when one applies for a *shenasnameh* at the Department of Vital Statistics, one must present their birth certificate provided by the hospital (hereinafter a hospital birth certificate) (Pakistan 4 May 2006). After issuing the *shenasnameh*, the Department of Vital Statistics retains the hospital birth certificate in their archives, in the case the *shenasnameh* becomes lost (ibid.). Either parent can apply for their child's *shenasnameh*, though both parents' hospital birth certificates must be presented (ibid.). Adults applying for a *shenasnameh* must present their own hospital birth certificate as well as their parents' hospital birth certificates and marriage certificate (ibid. 8 May 2006).

The *shenasnameh* is valid for the lifetime of the bearer, but the photo must be updated, the official at the Embassy of Pakistan could not specify how often (ibid. 4 May 2006). A minor's *shenasnameh* does not contain a photo and contains two pages while an adult's *shenasnameh* has four pages: pages are simply added to the minor's *shenasnameh* when the holder reaches the age of majority (ibid.).

When asked about the meaning of the inscriptions on each page of the *shenasnameh*, the official stated that the first page of the *shenasnameh* is the cover page, the second page contains the photo of the bearer, the names of the bearer's parents, the birth date and the place of birth of the bearer, the location where the *shenasnameh* was issued, the name of the person who issued it and the serial number (ibid.). The third page contains information on the bearer's marriage as well as information regarding the bearer's children, if any (ibid.).

The official also explained that in the case one loses their *shenasnameh*, a stamp is affixed to the new *shenasnameh* indicating *almosana* (spelling may vary), meaning that the document is the second *shenasnameh* issued to the same person, and a new date of issuance is printed on it (ibid.). At death, the *shenasnameh* becomes null and void and a stamp is affixed to it indicating that the bearer is deceased in order to prevent fraudulent use (ibid.).

An official of the Immigration Section of the Canadian Embassy in Tehran obtained the following information from a local Civil Status Registration Office in Iran and communicated it to the Research Directorate in 9 May 2006 correspondence:

In the matter of a first-time shenasnameh, (normally the parents of a newborn child request this) the hospital where the infant is born issues a certificate stating the birth of the child, then the parents go to their local Civil Status Registration Office along with their own shenasnamehs and request a shenasnameh for their child.

Note: The shenas-nameh does not bear any picture of the person until she/he reaches 15 years of age.

In case of loss of shenasnameh, the person refers to a Civil Status Registration Office ("Sabt-e-Ahvaal") and requests a new shenasnameh following this procedure: Submitting an ID or official document, such as driver's license, passport, or national card ("carte melli") that bears a picture of the applicant, and his/her first name and last name. This document must also contain the (lost) shenasnameh number and the district (or city) where it was issued, so that the lost shenasnameh will be searchable in the Civil Status Office computer database. Also, the person must submit an affidavit signed by witnesses (usually neighbours) stating that the person is who she/he claims to be. The issue date of the replacement shenasnameh would be different from the original shenasnameh and reflects the date that the second shenasnameh has been issued.

In contrast, a consular officer of the Embassy of Iran in Ottawa indicated in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 23 November 2004 that the date of issue is not shown on the *shenasnameh*, irrespective of whether it is an original or a replacement, or whether it was issued before or after 1992. According to the consular officer, no date of issue has ever been indicated on a *shenasnameh* because, unlike a passport, the *shenasnameh* does not have an expiry date and it is valid for an unspecified period of time (Iran 23 Nov. 2004).

The official at the Canadian Embassy in Tehran indicated that the section where the codes assigned to the bearer's fingerprints appear on the *shenasnameh* is rarely filled out (Canada 9 May 2006). In fact, the official stated that she had never seen a *shenasnameh* with the fingerprints code section filled out (ibid.).

Regarding the meaning of the *shenasnameh* identification number, which is located on the second page of the document, the official indicated that the number can range from one to five digits and has no special significance (ibid. 30 May 2006). The official also stated: "I have also seen many instances when people have had the same shenasnameh number" (ibid.). However, an executive officer of the Iranian Association at the University of Toronto (IAUT), an independent cultural, academic and social organization that seeks to promote activities related to Iran (IAUT 5 May 2004, Art. 1), provided the following information on the *shenasnameh* identification number based on her personal knowledge in correspondence to the Research Directorate:

The numbers on the shenasnameh uniquely identify individuals if combined with year of birth number and birth location. In each location, in each year, the numbers start from 1 at the start of the year (Persian year starts at March 21st

normally - spring) and start incrementing based on the birth date inside the year. Therefore, somebody born in Fall/Winter probably has a larger ID number. Also in very small cities, somebody born in March 30th, probably has an ID number less than 100~200. But in large cities like Tehran, these numbers increase very fast (29 May 2006).

Regarding the differences between a *shenasnameh* issued or updated in 1992 or later and earlier *shenasnamehs*, the following information was provided to the Research Directorate by an official at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in correspondence sent on 17 February 1998. New Iranian identity documents bear the same date of issue as the old identity documents. The print of the bearer's forefinger is affixed inside the cover page of Iranian identity documents. Both new and old identity documents contain four pages. Identity documents issued after 1986 have red covers and are 10 by 14 centimetres in size, which is smaller than pre-1986 identity documents.

As for security features on the *shenasnameh*, the official from the Canadian Embassy in Tehran stated that "there aren't many" (30 May 2006). The official provided the example of the photo on the *shenasnameh*, which is simply affixed to the document and stamped at the Civil Status Registration Office, and stated that the photo could easily be replaced (Canada 30 May 2006). The official at the Canadian Embassy in Tehran also explained that a *shenasnameh* could easily be reissued if the bearer claims that it has been lost; "[t]his so-called glitch is often abused, for example a married person can simply omit to mention the spouse's name when getting the new shenasnameh, and therefore become 'single' in the duplicate shenasnameh" (ibid.). According to the official, a *Shomareh Melli* (National Number), consisting of 10 digits, would be replacing the *shenasnameh* numbering system, but did not indicate when this would take effect (ibid.).

The following information was provided by an official of the Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington, DC in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 4 May 2006. The official indicated that although a national identification (ID) card is being issued to all Iranian nationals, this card does not replace the *shenasnameh* (Pakistan 4 May 2006). The advantages of the national ID card is that it is smaller than the *shenasnameh* (i.e. the size of a driver's license) and it contains general information about the holder in an electronic format, enabling the authorities to simply scan the national ID card to obtain information on the holder (ibid.). According to the official at the Embassy of Pakistan, not all Iranian nationals possess a national ID card; however, everyone is assigned a national ID number, which is required to obtain or renew one's passport (ibid.). National ID cards are issued only to persons who are 15 years or older and, according to the official at the Embassy of Pakistan, it is simply a formality to obtain the card (ibid.).

Similarly, an executive officer of IAUT provided the following information on the national ID card, based on her personal knowledge, in correspondence to the Research Directorate:

Note that Shenasnameh is no longer the main identifying document in Iran. There is a new National ID concept introduced 3-4 years ago and almost all Iranians have the National ID card/number by now. The new National ID has a unique ID number for each Iranian individual. Shenasnameh will probably be out of the system in 5 years from now (or more). At this point, both are used, but I heard that just recently the Immigration Department in Iran as well as Embassies require the National ID in order to issue new passport and

Shenasnameh doesn't suffice any more.... The new National ID cards have the picture [of the bearer] printed on them with a dozen of security features on the card that makes it hard to fake or alter it. The look of the new National ID card, is very much like the OHIP or Driver's license here in Ontario (29 May 2006).

Please find attached an example of a *shenasnameh* with notes written by a visa assistant at the Immigration Section of the Canadian Embassy in Tehran indicating the meaning of the inscriptions on each page of the *shenasnameh*. Please note that this example does not include the cover page.

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Canada. 30 May 2006. Canadian Embassy, Tehran. Immigration Section. Correspondence sent by an official.

_____. 9 May 2006. Canadian Embassy, Tehran. Immigration Section. Correspondence sent by an official.

Executive Officer, Iranian Association at the University of Toronto (IAUT). 29 May 2006. Correspondence.

Iran. 23 November 2004. Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ottawa. Telephone interview with a consular officer.

_____. 17 February 1998. Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ottawa. Correspondence sent by an official.

Iranian Association at the University of Toronto (IAUT). 5 May 2004. *Constitution*. <http://iran.sa.utoronto.ca/new_constitution.pdf> [Accessed 30 May 2006]

Pakistan. 8 May 2006. Embassy of Pakistan, Washington, DC. Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Telephone interview with an officer.

_____. 4 May 2006. Embassy of Pakistan, Washington, DC. Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Telephone interview with an officer.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral Sources: The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in London, the National Organization for Civil Registration of Iran and the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence [Tehran] did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Attempts to contact the International Federation of Iranian Refugees were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs of Australia; Embassy of Pakistan, Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Ottawa; Factiva; *Iran Daily*; Iran Focus; Iran Human Rights Documentation Center [New Haven, United States]; Iranian Community Association of Ontario; Iranian Information and Documentation Center; Islamic Republic News Agency; Keesing's Document Checker; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; *Tehran Times*; United States Department of State; World News Connection.

Attachment

Canada. 9 May 2006. Canadian Embassy, Tehran. Annotated facsimile of a *shenasnameh*, including the meaning of the inscriptions that appear on each page, 3 pp.

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