



17 May 2021

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Minister Payne

RE: DESTRUCTION OF MASS GRAVE SITE IN IRAN AND PREVENTION OF DIGNIFIED BURIALS OF PERSECUTED BAHAI'S

The actions of the Iranian government to destroy and desecrate a mass grave site and prevent the dignified burial of members of the Baha'i community must be condemned on the international stage as serious violations of human rights.

Destruction of mass grave site

The Khavaran mass grave site is believed to contain the remains of up to several hundred victims of the mass enforced disappearances and secret extrajudicial executions of the 1988 prison massacres. The mass grave has since become a locus of national significance for the struggle for human rights, a sacred space to memorialise the lives lost in 1988, and a crime scene with vital forensic evidence of crimes against humanity.

Amnesty International reported on the deliberate desecration and destruction of this site in 2018, after photo and video analysis showed evidence of repeated bulldozing.

The destruction of this site took on a new dimension in late April this year, when the Iranian authorities created a situation whereby members of the Baha'i minority have been left with little choice but to disturb the area and bury their loved ones at the mass grave site.

Iranian authorities are banning Baha'is from making use of the empty plots at Golestan Javid cemetery near Tehran, which has been used by the community for decades. The government has instead insisted that members of the Baha'i community be buried in between existing graves within the cemetery (where there is little to no space for further burial plots), or at the mass grave site.

This represents the latest criminal attempt to eliminate crucial evidence of crimes against humanity. As such, this action denies truth, justice, and reparation for the families of those forcibly disappeared and extrajudicially executed in secret.

Baha'is prevented from holding dignified burials

Efforts to coerce Baha'is into desecrating the Khavaran mass grave site have been met with significant resistance from the community, resulting in disturbing reports of bodies languishing in morgues without suitable burial plots or being buried without the consent of the family (and thus without Baha'i rites and customs).

This development feeds into a broader systematic persecution of the Baha'i community in Iran, whereby authorities have been responsible for the repeated desecration and destruction of Baha'i cemeteries and bodies.

By preventing the Baha'i minority from burying their loved ones in dignity and in accordance with their religious rituals and customs, the Iranian authorities are violating Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Iran has ratified. These actions also constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment prohibited under international law.

We strongly encourage the Australian government to support UN Human Rights Council member states to urgently set up a mechanism for gathering and analysing evidence of past and ongoing human rights violations and crimes, including those related to the 1988 prison massacres.

We urge you to encourage the Iranian authorities to take the following actions:

- Immediately allow members of the Baha'i minority to take part in burial and mourning rituals and customs according to their beliefs,
- Overturn all policies that promote or allow the desecration or demolition of the Khavaran mass grave site, and Baha'i cemeteries more broadly,
- And facilitate open and unbiased investigations of past and ongoing human rights violations and crimes, including the 1988 prison massacres.

The Baha'i community in Australia includes 20,000 members; the Australian government owes it to these families to coordinate with the international community and help prevent further suffering of loved ones overseas. This community issued a call to the Australian government and the international community as recently as January this year, asking for relief after COVID-19 saw a new wave of home raids, land seizures and arbitrary arrests of Baha'is in Iran.

Amnesty International urges you to answer this call and help prevent further human rights abuses against the Baha'i community.

For further information, or to discuss and organise a meeting, please contact Joel MacKay at joel.mackay@amnesty.org.au or 0424 242 112.

Yours sincerely,



Tim O'Connor
Impact Manager
Amnesty International Australia