



The International Institute for Religious Freedom expresses concern about the rise of anti-Baha'i propaganda in Iran

There are many factors contributing to the vulnerability of religious minorities. One of them is hate propaganda. As is well known, hate propaganda is a crime according to international human rights standards. Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, governments are required to make advocacy of racial hatred an offence punishable by law (Farrior, 2016).¹ The profound psychological impact of being subjected to continuous hate propaganda, which can be equated with a form of torture, should not be ignored. It is downright terrible for people to be told repeatedly that they are not welcome in a country because of their faith.

Hate propaganda can have dangerous consequences. Research has shown that hate propaganda targeting a specific group increases the likelihood of violence against this group. The Holocaust did not happen overnight and was certainly not an accident; it was the result of a decade-long hate campaign against Jews. In *The Price of Freedom Denied*, Brian Grim and Roger Finke establish a positive correlation between state-sanctioned discrimination, which includes hate propaganda channeled through public communication channels and education materials, and societal discrimination. They write: “once the government begins to persecute a particular religious group, it can reinforce social prejudices and generate social support for more restrictions as well as further vigilante persecution of minority religious groups by individuals and groups in society.” (2011: 73).² In other words, through hate propaganda, governments implicitly legitimize and even encourage discrimination and sometimes even violence against minority groups.

The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) views with concern the high number of hate anti-Baha'i content that is being promoted by the Iranian government. According to the Office of Public Affairs of the Baha'i Community of Canada, since 2017, more than 33,000 of anti-Baha'i content have been published or broadcast.³ Already, we are seeing the consequences of these hate crimes for the Baha'i population in Iran and beyond. The Pew Research Center reported in 2020

¹ Farrior, S. (2016). Hate Propaganda and International Human Rights Law. In *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights and The Management of Media Space*. Edinburgh: Univ. of Edinburgh Press. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2792367>.

² Grim, B.J. & Finke, R. (2011). *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

³ Baha'i Community of Canada, Office of Public Affairs (2021). State-sponsored hate propaganda against Iranian Bahá'ís. Available at: opa.bahai.ca/propaganda.

that religious groups, including adherents to the Baha'i Faith, experienced increasing harassment in 2018 in comparison to previous years.⁴

The IIRF commends the Baha'i Community of Canada for having taken on the task of systematically documenting all pieces of anti-Baha'i propaganda issued by the Iranian government. A frequently encountered issue in international religious freedom advocacy is that many violations go unnoticed because they are not verified and documented. This is not the case with the Baha'i Community of Canada whose documentation efforts contribute to making the phenomenon visible.

Thanks to this visibilization, action can be taken. The IIRF calls on the international community to take note of the shocking rise in hate propaganda and use all means at their disposal to ensure the broadest possible protection for the religious freedom of the adherents of the Baha'i faith in Iran.

⁴ Pew Research Center (2020). In 2018, Government Restrictions on Religion Reach Highest Level in More Than a Decade. Washington DC: Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/11/10/in-2018-government-restrictions-on-religion-reach-highest-level-globally-in-more-than-a-decade/>.