

the stellar academic performance of BIHE graduates, led six other Canadian universities to accept applications from their peers, enabling dozens of Bahá'í students to acquire master's and PhD degrees in Canada.

Despite increasing social and economic pressure back home, most of these graduates did the same thing as Shahin and Nooshin: They took their Canadian education to Iran and joined the BIHE faculty to teach hundreds more. The Iranian government did not recognize their Canadian graduate degrees, but they taught anyway, inspired by their belief that knowledge and education are the best tools to fight ignorance and oppression. Canadians should be proud of the quiet and effective role that our universities have played in this process.

We should also be outraged at the Iranian authorities' latest attack on the BIHE. Eleven innocent men and women remain in jail, for no reason aside from their religious beliefs and their affiliation with an institution dedicated to advanced education in the sciences and arts. The government of Iran refuses to give Bahá'ís access to higher education, while at the same time declaring that the Bahá'í community's peaceful initiative – whose sole intention is to fill a need that has been created by the government's own actions – is illegal.

These attacks on the BIHE are the latest state-sponsored actions to suppress human rights and to eradicate the Bahá'í community as a viable entity. A 1991 government memorandum signed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei stated that Iran's Bahá'ís should be treated in such a way “that their progress and development are blocked.” The Iranian government's intentions to halt the social and economic progress of the country's 300,000 Bahá'ís could not be clearer.

Despite the evidence, the government of Iran continues to perpetuate falsehoods about its official policy towards the Bahá'ís. During Iran's Universal Periodic Review before the United Nations Human Rights Council in February 2010, its Deputy Minister of Justice Seyed Ali Raeis Sadati stated: “Limitations against some of these Bahá'í university students have nothing to do with their religious beliefs.” His brazen statement directly contradicted a 2006 letter that was sent from Iran's education ministry to 81 universities, which instructed them to expel any student discovered to be a Bahá'í.

In the face of pressure and intolerance, the Bahá'ís in Iran have not resorted to violence, but have instead continued to work for the common good. Their aim is to join their fellow citizens to build a more free, just, and unified society in which education is no longer a crime.

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