



## Baha'is of Yemen

# Citizens Without Identity





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## Report about Baha'is in Yemen

### The Bahai faith

Followers of the Baha'i faith suffer from various persecutions in the Arab region, where their religion is not recognized, but they are considered one of the religious sects. This is what Baha'is consider false information.<sup>1</sup>

They believe in a prophet of their own who is considered as a complement to heavenly messages and that he is the «savior» that Christians are waiting for to save them from those who suffer from the sufferings of the world and the oppression of the unjust, being the man that Sunni Muslims awaited «His name is from my name, He fills the land with justice as it was filled with injustice,» and also as the «awaited Mahdi» that Shiite Muslims await. <sup>2</sup>

The Bahá'í International Community says in confirmation to this:

“The Baha'i Faith is a universal religion that is completely independent from any other religion. It is neither a Sufi method, nor a mixture of principles or laws of different religions, nor is it a division of the sects' of the Islamic, Christian, or Jewish faiths. It is not the revival of any old ideological doctrine. Rather, the Baha'i religion has its written books, its own laws, its administrative systems, and its holy places. As for its civilizational message directed to this era, it is summed up in the spiritual and social principles stipulated for the realization of a new world order in which world peace prevails and in which the nations and peoples of the world come together in a unity that guarantees all members of the human race justice, prosperity and stability and builds a human civilization that is progressing under a continuous divine guidance. <sup>3</sup>

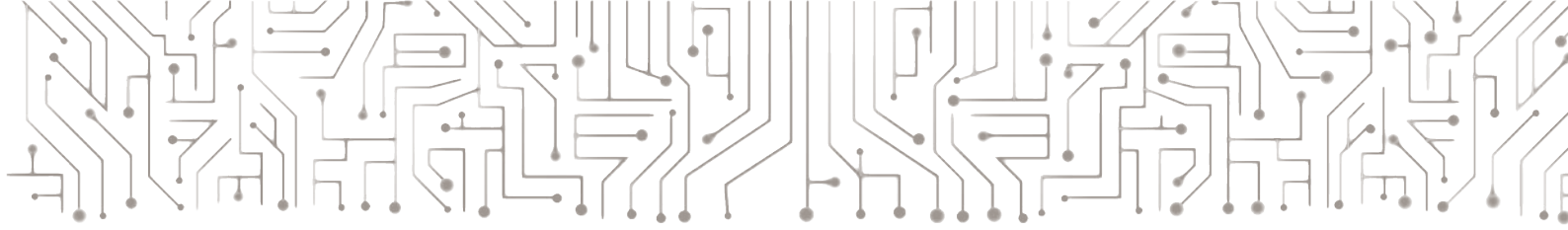
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المنظمة الإلكترونية للإعلام الإنساني - مؤسسة إعلامية مقرها الفضاء الإلكتروني، تهتم بالإعلام الإنساني عبر مواد إعلامية معقدة، وتدرس تفاصيل المجتمع وتقوم بتقديم نمط حياتهم كحالة خاصة، ولا يُمكن أن تُعمّم على الجميع، فلكل مجتمع خصائصه وتنوعه ومفاهيمه واختلافاته.

Electronic Organization for Humanitarian Media – a media institution. It is concerned with human media and studies the society deeply in order to present their life type as a special case and never be generalized since every society has its own characteristics, concepts and differences.

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## The Prophet of the Bahá'ís

In 1844, a young merchant named «Ali Muhammad Al-Shirazi» announced that he was carrying a message destined to transform the spiritual and social life of humanity. He announced that his message paves the way for a messenger from God to come to guide mankind. His message attracted many followers, and perhaps the most prominent and most famous was Hussein Ali Nuri, known as “Bahá'u'lláh”, deliverer of the new Revelation, to whom the Baha'i religion belongs. He came from a high and prestigious family, as his father occupied the position of a minister, and the Iranian government wanted him to occupy the position of his father, however, Bahá'u'lláh refused because he had the duty to invite people to the new religion and spread peace in the world.

Born in Iran in 1817 and died in Palestine - Acre in 1892, he lived in Iran for most of his life before being exiled to Iraq and then to Istanbul and then Akka.

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## The beginnings of persecution

The campaign of arbitrariness began since the Bab announced his message, which was considered to be outside the framework of Islamic teachings, especially since his message did not believe in clerics and did not need them to spread the Babi religion. During the six years of his message, his followers were severely tortured and nearly 20,000 of them were killed, then the Bab was arrested and killed in a public square in front of people.

This incident inflamed people's feelings, and two commoners attacked the King of Iran, «Nasser Shah», using a hunting rifle.

The Iranian government considered this attack coordinated by Bahá'u'lláh, accused Him, arrested him, and placed him in a prison called “the Black Pit” in Tehran. Bahá'u'lláh was not released until after four and a half months, when the real people who had attacked the Shah confessed.

After His release from prison, Bahá'u'lláh was immediately exiled from his home country to Baghdad, which was at the time ruled under the Ottoman Empire. He stayed there for ten years. During that time, Bahá'u'lláh announced He was a messenger from God and the source of divine guidance foretold by the Bab. The Ottoman Sultan then ordered Bahá'u'lláh to be exiled to Istanbul and then to Edirne (in the European part of Turkey) where he stayed for 5 years. After Turkey, Bahá'u'lláh was exiled and imprisoned in the Fort of Acre in Palestine. His imprisonment and exile which lasted the last forty years of His life were for the purpose of getting rid of Him and limiting the spread of the influence of His message.

# Are Baha'is agents of Israel?

We constantly hear this accusation. However, through learning the historical events, it becomes clear that the presence of the Baha'is and their institutions in Haifa and Acre precedes the existence of the State of Israel.

Acre in that time followed the Ottoman Empire and was a prison city and a fort for political and first-class prisoners. Bahá'u'lláh remained there until he passed away, and he was buried there and it became a sacred and spiritual center. The remains of the Bab -as per Bahá'u'lláh's instructions- were also transferred and buried in Haifa.

Near the Shrine of the Bab, the International Baha'i Center "The Universal House of Justice" was built, confirming that the presence of the Baha'is and their centers in Haifa and Acre was before the establishment

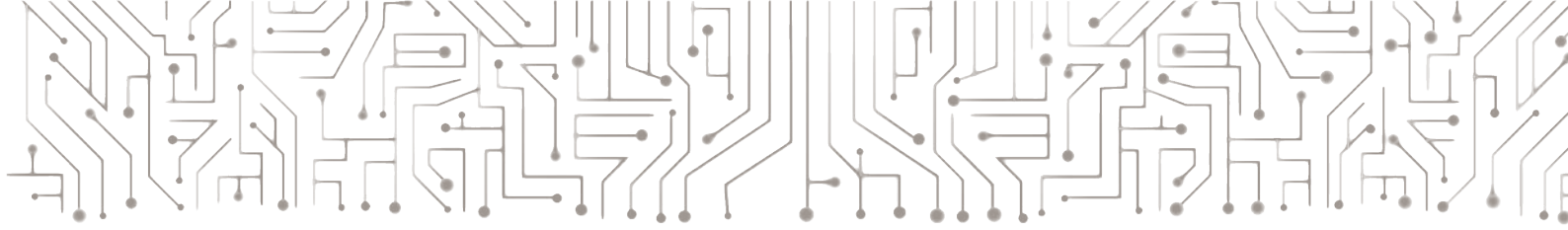
of the State of Israel, and it does not necessarily indicate the existence of any political relationship between the two parties.

The Iranian government accuses the Baha'is of being agents of Israel because of their holy places there. It prohibits the existence of the Baha'i religion in Iran, it tortures and imprisons the Bahai's, it confiscates their properties and incites them in official speeches. And precisely since 2013, according to the "ABC News" newspaper, the Baha'i community representatives said in a 122-page report that the Rouhani government had intensified its «campaign of incitement to hatred against the Baha'is», including the publication of more than 20,000 pieces of anti-Baha'i propaganda in the Iranian media.

They added: «In the same year, the Supreme Iranian leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued a fatwa calling on the Iranians to avoid all dealings with the Baha'is.»



**Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Acre in 1868 as ordered by Sultan Abdulaziz, not voluntarily. Whereas, the State of Israel was founded in 1948 based on a partition resolution issued by the United Nations<sup>4</sup>**

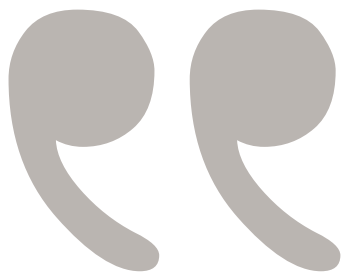


## The Baha'is of Yemen

The situation of the Baha'is in Yemen is not very different from the Baha'is in Iran, and although the Baha'is in many Arab regions are deprived of their civil rights, the Baha'is in Yemen additionally suffer from harassment and abuse and feelings of personal and property insecurity.

According to the Bahais in Yemen website, the «Bab» arrived at «Al-Mukha» on a mission<sup>4</sup>, and it seems that there were Yemenis who responded to the Bab's message, as the community confirms that «the beaches and ports of Yemen» witnessed the passage of «increasing numbers of the first believers of the Baha'i religion who loved the Bab and were attracted to his writings and words.» This was during the visit of the Prophet of the Baha'i Faith «Bahá'u'lláh» who had been imprisoned by the order of the Ottoman Empire and placed in the Acre prison in Palestine.<sup>5</sup>

Since the percentage rate of religious coexistence in Yemen is low, the Baha'is kept their religion to themselves and shared it only with the surrounding community close to them. They did not build places of worship, but rather they established civil society institutions through which they practiced community service activities, but these were shut down and its contents were recently confiscated.



**Baha'is have been present in Yemen since many decades, and they do not see themselves as an isolated minority but rather part of the diverse formation of Yemeni society.**


## Detention Policy: National Security has no mercy on the Baha'is:

The year 2008 witnessed the first wave of arrests of Baha'is in Sana'a by the National Security Agency, when in June six Baha'is were arrested. They raided a Baha'i's home and detained him along with two others who were visiting him, they remained detained for four months before they were released, and information indicates that they were pressured to leave Yemen. They weren't arrested for their religious beliefs, but for the suspicion of their connection with Iran, as their arrest coincided with the wars that the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels were involved in at the time.

On December 3rd, 2013, the National Security arrested the engineer "Hamid bin Haidarah," who is still behind bars today in the central prison in Sana'a and is facing the risk of execution, but information says that his arrest was not on charges of his association with Israel, but with Iran. The purpose of his arrest was to blackmail him and to confiscate all his real estate properties that he had inherited. Hamid was forcedly hidden for ten months. With their coup and their control over the state apparatus in Sanaa, he were referred to the specialized criminal prosecution in Sana'a, and since the slogan of the Houthi rebellion against the state was «for Israel», they found that his file was consistent with their call to death, and they believed that there was an Israeli plot targeting Yemen and the Islamic religion through the Baha'is. Based on this he was prosecuted. His Iranian origins was for them, conclusive evidence of his political association with Iran, without taking into account his Yemeni citizenship due to his father's lengthy residence in Socotra and his service to the community there.

From then onwards, the pace of the persecution of the Baha'is in Yemen started to rise, and similarly their persecution in Iran, with the same motives, fabricated charges and incitement campaigns. And in addition to prosecuting twenty-four Baha'is, they are accusing the Bahai religion that it is "a part of the soft war that Israel is leading against the Islamic nation, and that it is a diabolical movement that spreads disbelief and polytheism and seeks to dismantle Islam, destroy the nation, and pollute the minds of young people with corrupt ideas, and other false slanders and rumors, such as saying that the Baha'i law permits adultery, incestuous marriage, promiscuity and corruption of women".





The persecution of the Bahais has become a common feature and a sign that distinguishes the identity of the Iranian and Houthi regimes, with the same style, mechanisms, accusations, lies and sectarian rhetoric. And in order to understand, we must refer to the document of the Supreme Leader in Iran in 1991, which states that a plan must be devised to counter and destroy the cultural roots of the Bahais outside Iran, and to consider this as a major and central part in the process of exporting the revolution that forms the backbone in the ideology of the current Iranian regime

The Yemeni Initiative to defend the rights of the Bahais

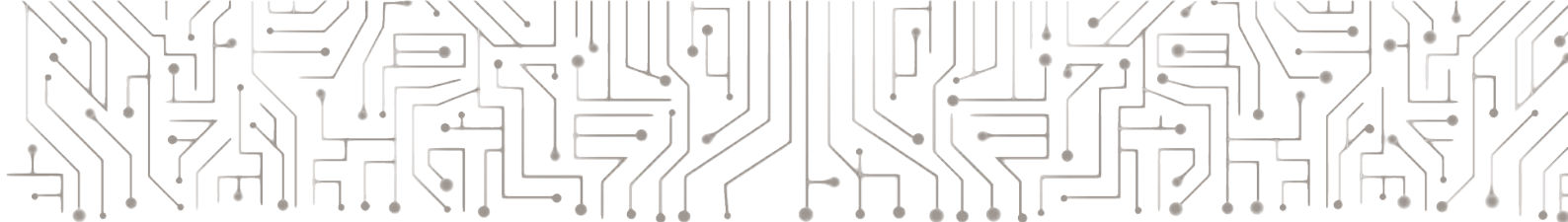
## The sequence of violations against Yemeni Bahais

2008: Six Bahais were arrested in Sana'a by the National Security Agency

2013: Hamid bin Haidarah was arrested in Balhaf and sent to Sanaa a year later.

2014:

1. The prosecution accuses Hamed bin Haidara and other Bahais, according to the indictment, of collaborating with Israel and demands the confiscation of their funds and the closure of the Bahai institutions.
2. The Specialized Criminal Prosecution Office harassed and offended the wife of Bin Haidara as a result of defending her husband, and insulted and threatened her with imprisonment, and cut off the only source of income from which she supported her three daughters.
3. The start of a wide incitement media campaign against the Bahais. They were atoned and betrayed, and the public opinion was forced to turn against them. Coinciding with this, came the campaign of arresting a number of Bahais for their religious beliefs.

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4. On September 3, 2014 the case of Bin Haidara was transferred to the Specialized Criminal Prosecution Office and he was transferred from the National Security Prison to the Criminal Investigation Prison. On October 3rd, 2014 he was transferred to the Central Prison in Sana'a, where the Criminal Prosecution flatly refused his release on bail.

2015:

1. On January 18, 2015, the first court of Bin Haidara's trial was held at the Specialized Criminal Court in Sanaa.
2. Akram Saleh Ayyash was arrested and detained for a day in a police station being accused of spreading the Baha'i faith.
3. Prosecutor Rajeh Zayed, from within the court hearing, threatens to arrest all the Baha'is.
4. The arrest of the Baha'is, Nadim and Nader Al-Saqqaf, just because they attended the Bin Haidara court hearing.

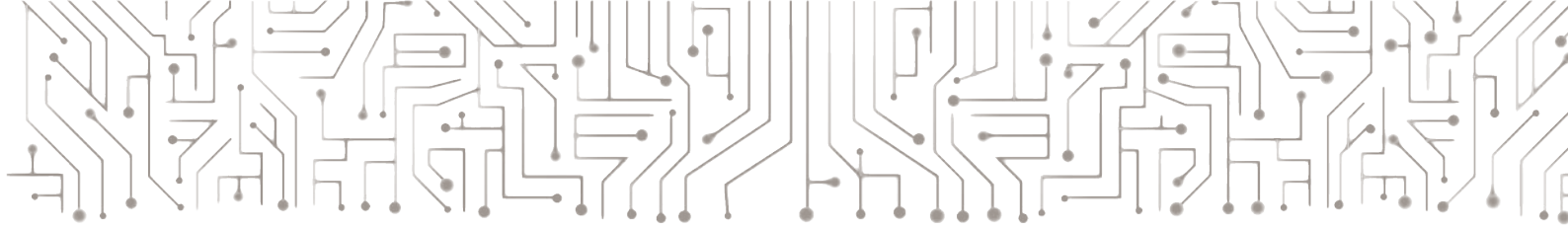
2016:

1. Arresting 67 individuals from various Yemeni governorates, including women and children, some of whom were non-Baha'is, attending a youth gathering organized by the Baha'is with the aim of directing the energies of Yemeni youth towards serving their community.
2. On August 10, National Security arrested Kiwan Muhammad Qaderi for being a Baha'i. There are legal directives for his release from the office of the deputy, but the National Security refuses to release him.

2017:

1. April 5: National Security forces arrest "Pejoughesh Badi Allah Sanai".
2. April 17: As the Ridvan Festival (the most important festival for Baha'is) approached, National Security began a massive arrest campaign against the Baha'is, men and women, leading to the displacement of entire families from their homes and the need to find alternative housing causing children to miss their end-of-year exams, becoming deprived of education for long periods of time, and some others were laid off from their jobs.
3. April 20: The arrest of «Walid Ayyash and Mahmoud Hameed». Ayyash is a well-known tribal sheikh in Yemen and one of the prominent Baha'i figures in the Yemeni society. He was previously arrested twice because of his Baha'i belief. 6
4. May 15: Hundreds participated in a peaceful protest to demand the release of the detained Sheikh Walid Ayyash, under the orders of the criminal prosecutor, Judge





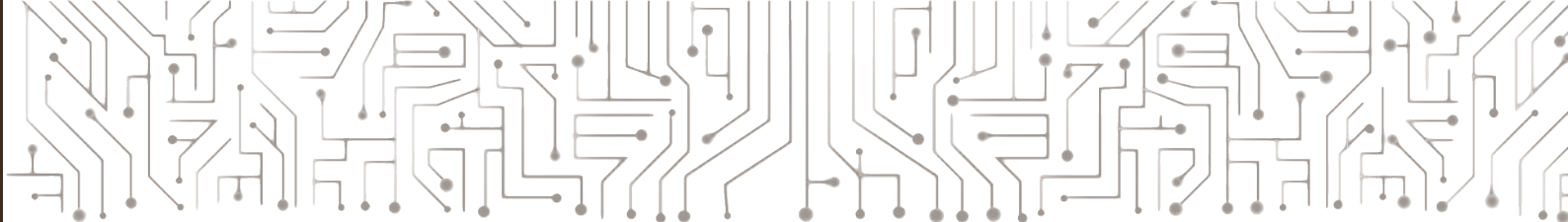
Rajeh Zayed. However, he (judge Rajeh) accused the participants of the protest of being infidels and agents of Israel and ordered the soldiers present to kill them, so the shooting took place intensively and lasted for about half an hour.

5. May 24: The young man Wael Al-Ariqi was kidnapped by security personnel in civilian clothes
6. May 25: Engineer Badi Sanai was arrested from his workplace at the General Authority for Lands, Surveying and Urban Planning
7. October 22: While the Baha'is were celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of their Messenger (Bahá'u'lláh), four armored cars attacked the home of Walid Ayyash and fired intensively to terrorize his family, and arrested his brother Akram Saleh Ayyash.

2018:

1. January 2: Hamid Bin Haidarah was sentenced to death, and a court order was issued to confiscate all his properties, and to close all Baha'i institutions and assemblies in the country.
2. September 15: The trial of 24 Baha'is started at the same court which sentenced Bin Haidarah to death and on the same charges punishable by death.
3. October 11: The official spokesperson of the Baha'i community in Yemen, Abdullah Al-Olafi, was arrested and taken to an unknown location. Surrounded by armed soldiers in two military cars, he was blindfolded and then released later.
4. 2020: The Court of Appeal supports the preliminary ruling issued against Hamid Bin Haidarah, in a session held a week earlier than its original date and without the presence of Bin Haidarah so he couldn't defend himself.

The court hearing to reinforce the death sentence came at a time when the world was trying to reap more sympathy and human solidarity towards each other due to the Corona pandemic, however, the Houthis do not generally do this, but rather additionally included in their decision, the closure of all Baha'i institutions and the confiscation of their properties



# Abolition of the death sentence: a presidential rumor

On March 25 2020, and during the fifth anniversary of the launch of the Saudi-led Decisive Storm operations to eliminate the Houthis; Mahdi Al-Mashat, Head of the Houthi High Political Council in Sana'a, announced the release of all Baha'i prisoners held there.

Mahdi Al-Mashat appeared in a televised speech broadcast by Al-Masirah channel (speaks on behalf of the Houthis), and said: «We order the release of all Baha'i prisoners and we order the release of Hamid Haidarah and that he is pardoned of the death penalty.»

Since March 25 to date, the declaration of the pardon is still merely a wind-cut script, as it appears that it was a marketing advertisement for the President of the Political Council on the occasion of the war anniversary against them. The expediting of Bin Haidarah's court hearing and the confirmation of his death sentence both in such unlawful manner, are signs of them using Bin Haidarah's case and the Bahais cases in general for more than just marketing.

1 Discussion with a number of Bahais in Kuwait in separate sessions

2 Elham Karam's point of view, during a visit. She is a Baha'i who has now moved to live in USA

3 The Bahá'ís in Yemen website - The Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh <http://www.bahaiye.org/AR/Articles/hadratBahauAllah.aspx>

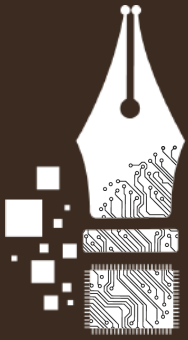
4 Baha'i World News, the relationship of the Baha'i Faith and the Jews, link: <https://abnnews.net/archives/8467>

5 The Baha'is in Yemen website, which is the official source of information related to the Baha'i community in Yemen <http://www.bahaiye.org/AR/About/Default.aspx>

6 Previous source

7 Previous source

8 Yemeni Initiative to defend the rights of the Bahais <https://www.defendingbahairights.org/copy-of-albhaeywn-fy-alymn>



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