



Federal Government Commissioner
for Global Freedom of Religion

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Press release

On World Religion Day on 17 January 2021, Markus Grübel, Member of the German Parliament and Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion, calls for an end to the discrimination and persecution of Bahá'í communities in Iran:

“I call on the Iranian government to recognise the Bahá'í as a religious community and to respect the rights of all religious and faith minorities. Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians and other communities, too, must be able to live according to their beliefs in freedom. Conversion, which carries the threat of the death penalty, must be decriminalised. Freedom of religion or belief is a universal right that applies equally for all people.”

World Religion Day is observed annually on the third Sunday of January. The day was initiated in 1950 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í in the United States and is now celebrated around the world by the Bahá'í and other religious communities. The focus of the celebration is the common ground of the world's religions. People of all religions are called upon to remember their shared values of respect and tolerance, and to work for peace and justice in the world.



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Markus Grübel:

“In a world in which religions continue to be misused for conflicts and in which religious minorities in many places are subjected to repression by the state and by society, World Religion Day is an important sign for constructive cooperation between and with the religions. The Bahá’i community in Iran has been subjected to discrimination and systematic persecution by the government ever since it first came into being in 1844. Unlike Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, the Bahá’i are not recognised by the predominantly Shi’ite government. They are not permitted to practise their faith publicly and they suffer arbitrary arrests and torture. Their educational institutions and prayer houses are often attacked and even destroyed. Children are intimidated, access to higher education is denied to the Bahá’i.

Since January 2020, citizens have to use a new form when applying for an identity card in Iran. Since then, members of religious minorities that are not officially recognised are no longer able to state their religious affiliation on their identity cards. This means that the Bahá’i and other minorities face the choice of either not applying for an identity card – and being denied the possibility of participating in public life – or of denying their faith by declaring a different belief on the application form.

The political, economic and societal discrimination of the Bahá’i has further intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. The community reports that arrests, displacement and expropriation of property have been increasing. In August 2020, an administrative court confirmed a judgement which described Bahá’i ownership of land in the village of Ivel in northern Iran as “illegal”.

Markus Grübel
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