



Kishan Manocha:

“Religion, Social Change, and Responding to Persecution – the Case of the Bahá’i Community in Iran”

Summary

Dr. Kishan Manchoa, Director of the Office of Public Affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’is of the United Kingdom, spoke of the intense state persecution and violence against the Bahá’is in Iran.

In his lecture, entitled, “Religion, Social Change and Responding to Persecution – the Case of the Bahá’i Community in Iran,” Dr. Manchoa said the “Bahá’is in Iran have been violently targeted from the very beginning in the mid-19th century, despite their peace-inducing teachings.” While before 1979 the pattern was one of “on-going, low level harassment, social exclusion and occasional nasty pogroms,” with the establishment of an Islamic state after the revolution, the violence towards the 300,000 Bahá’is in the country reached unprecedented levels, a condition that Dr. Manchoa labeled “an ideological genocide.”

“The situation now is one of deep hostility, persecution as a state policy and the elimination of Bahá’i beliefs as an ideological goal,” said Dr. Manchoa. “There is an attempt to slowly and quietly strangle the identity of the Bahá’is.” The measures include barring Bahá’is from official posts and excluding them from higher education, a dramatic surge of arrests since 2005, economic sanctions and anti-Bahá’i media campaigns that inspire hatred and suspicion.

“The Bahá’i community is not recognized as a religion, but is alleged to be a deviant sect, its members said to be spies for Israel and affiliates of Western ideology,” Dr. Manchoa said. “The community is being persecuted solely on the grounds of its religious beliefs.”

Dr. Manchoa concluded by exploring the community’s response to the persecution, saying, “The Bahá’i religion means that they do not react strongly against the violent oppression, but hold to perseverance and patience, and the belief in collective commitment to the unity of humanity.”