



May 15, 2006

His Excellency Mohammad Javad Zarif
Permanent Representative of the
Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

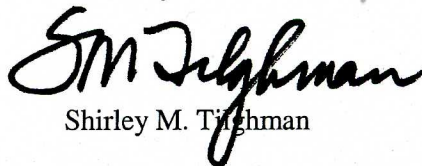
I am writing to express my dismay at the de facto exclusion of Iran's Bahá'í community from your nation's universities. As a scholar and teacher who received his postsecondary education in this country, I am sure you appreciate the critical role that higher education plays in broadening the minds and nurturing the talents of young men and women. I would also like to believe that you recognize the injustice of preventing qualified students from enjoying these benefits for no other reason than their religious convictions.

While I gather that Iranian students are no longer required to declare their religion when applying to take the national university entrance examination, Bahá'ís who have taken this examination and, for want of choice, have completed the Islamic portion of the religion subject test, are being wrongly classified as Muslim when notified of their results. Bahá'í students are understandably opposed to matriculating on this basis, especially in light of their community's long and painful history of religious persecution.

As you know, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Iran is a signatory, explicitly states that "higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means," and I would urge both you and the government you represent to ensure that this principle is honored in the case of the Bahá'í community. I would also ask that forceful steps be taken to halt the systematic discrimination and harassment to which Bahá'ís are subject in Iran. Such behavior is morally indefensible and socially destructive, and it can only undermine your nation's standing in the international community.

Thank you for giving this letter your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,



Shirley M. Tishman

cc: Secretary-General Kofi Annan
Mrs. Louise Arbour

bc: Pedram Roushan (GS-Physics)
Dessi Dimitrova (GS-WWS)

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Mrs. Louise Arbour
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