



Inspiring Stories from the Grassroots

Learn from others to see how they are taking the film to all types of spaces.

Over the last year, thousands have participated in grassroots screenings of the documentary, *Education Under Fire*, engaging large and small groups in discussion and awareness-raising primarily throughout North America. We hope these stories, which we have collected from some of our organizers, provide inspiration and ideas as you carry out your own screening-conversation.

Private Residences

Bishop, California. After watching the film in our living room, the 15 participants expressed much empathy and consideration. One of the questions asked was, "Why do Bahá'ís obey such an unjust government, and why don't they leave the country?" The conversation that followed allowed everyone to discuss the importance Bahá'ís place on education so that they can be of service where they live.

Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. I watched the documentary with my 17-year-old son and my husband, and afterwards we talked about how we can help promote the upcoming screening that our community has planned at our local library. For his part, my son is planning to post a flyer at his school and possibly ask a teacher about showing the film in class.

High Schools

Pacifica, California. The students at our local high school were quite moved by the stories told in the film. They were amazed by the BIHE students' hunger and drive for learning, and observed that all of the fields the students were pursuing were to serve their community. The high school students are now planning to screen the film at a STAR club (Students Against Racism) meeting at their school, which is hosting presentations about different kinds of prejudice. My daughter will organize the screening and give a presentation on religious intolerance. That screening will take place in the spring of 2013.

Santa Fe, New Mexico. We had the most wonderful experience today at a screening for the whole high school (about 200 students) in Santa Fe, which was organized by one of the students. The students were amazing. The entire school – students, teachers and staff – watched the film as a kickoff to a day's worth of activities dedicated to talking about school culture and interdisciplinary activities. After watching the film, we had 30 minutes of questions and answers with two EUF organizers (one of whom is a BIHE graduate). We ran out of time to answer all their questions, including several "How can we help?" questions. We directed those present to visit the website and encouraged all

of them to organize other viewings and raise more awareness. The students then broke into small discussion groups to talk about how this issue impacts them on a global and local level, including at their school. They then reconvened in a plenary session to share thoughts that came out of those discussions. Both EUF organizers participated in these discussions and were able to witness how much the documentary touched and affected the students and to hear their reflections on the educational advantages and privileges that they often take for granted. It was very helpful to have a former BIHE student to share first-hand experiences.

Libraries

Antelope, California. Our 7-year-old daughter actually hosted the screening at the Antelope-North Highlands Library as a community service project for school. Four of the attendees were under age 12, and three others were either active or retired teachers. Our daughter presented to the group how unfair the situation was to the Bahá'ís in Iran, that everyone should be able to go to school. One attendee urged one of the women present to contact her interfaith church to schedule a viewing. She replied that she would mention it to the pastor and took information to share with him. We handed out business cards with the EUF website address and logo printed on them to remind people to visit the website when they got home.

Interfaith Gatherings

Redding, California. I was given ten minutes to talk about Education Under Fire at my local interfaith meeting, which has 17 members including Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Christians of different denominations. I screened the first part of the documentary, gave out two pages of information, and offered to show the film to their various faith groups. Two of the ten people in attendance expressed interest in later screenings for their communities. One person referred me to the local community-access TV station and another to the library that hosts public meetings and lists them on the monthly calendar. One attendee, from Egypt, also talked about her own experiences as a Bahá'í child/youth when authorities came to the homes of Bahá'ís to confiscate materials and threaten them with arrest.

Many people learned things they had never known about the BIHE and the educational difficulties of Bahá'ís in Iran: that the BIHE has been in existence for over 25 years; that the BIHE's first facility was ransacked and shutdown in 1998; that BIHE students travel many hours to attend classes; that even after they leave Iran, BIHE students face difficulties getting their credits recognized at other universities; and that Iranian Muslims have been a part of helping the BIHE, risking their careers and their lives to do so.

Houses of Worship

Huntsville, Alabama. A Bahá'í from a neighboring community had recently been a witness before the International Criminal Court's tribunal regarding the war crimes of the Iranian government. During her testimony, she shared her experience of being imprisoned in Iran and her escape from the country. Since returning to the states, several people have invited her to be a part of their presentations of the film.

Sioux City, Iowa. This was an event held jointly between members of a local church and the Bahá'í community. The pastor of the church, who is a friend of mine, agreed to watch the documentary and afterwards was eager to set up a screening and discussion with the Bahá'ís and his congregation. He said he enjoyed the aspect of the film that dealt with human rights and was even more excited to use the film as a way to start conversations about the spiritual transformation of society, beginning with his own congregation. Of the 29 participants who saw the film, most were from his church or were acquaintances of the organizers.

Community Centers

Denver, Colorado. Eight friends at a screening-conversation in a Denver community center talked about the dynamic of the seemingly paradoxical concepts of acceptance and change – that is, in order to change something we do not like, we have to engage in conflict and fight to bring about that change. The discussion turned to how, when one accepts the situation that is occurring in the moment, one can then take the next steps to create change free from anger and vengeance. This approach, it was felt, is the only way that true change can come about because otherwise, one is engaging in the same hateful actions underlying the original problem. This conversation emphasized the principle of constructive resilience, rather than protest, which underpins the Bahá'í approach to social transformation.

Colleges, Universities, and Classrooms

Dayton, Ohio. After my screening, I encouraged all 25 of my fellow students to request the film on the EUF website and show it to others, and I said I would follow up with a reminder via email. The students in attendance asked many questions, such as what the basics of the Bahá'í Faith are, why its members are persecuted, would Iran's leaders really care if we sign the open letter, can the Bahá'ís influence the government by joining it, and so on. Our time was limited to approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. The screening was for a global religion course, one in which I gave a talk about the Bahá'í Faith three weeks prior. It seemed like the audience was engaged. At the end, the professor asked if we would do another presentation the following week for his American religions class.

Morrow, Georgia. Seventy-one people, including 62 students, attended a screening in Morrow, Georgia. The evening opened with a panel of presenters who explained the historical context of the Education Under Fire campaign, making connections to the struggle for civil rights in the United States. The event planners prefaced the screening of the EUF documentary with a short clip from Dr. Cornel West, a well-known African American scholar, in which he passionately condemns the Iranian government for its injustices against the Bahá'ís and praises the upright character and purity of spirit of Bahá'ís.

After the screening of the film, the audience was electrified, and there was a palpable spirit among the viewers. The students, most of whom were future teachers, asked probing questions, such as, "Why haven't we heard about this in our classes?" and "Why isn't this on the news?" One future teacher committed to finding a way to include the persecution of the Bahá'ís in her future social studies classes with discussions of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Another student asked whether the treatment of Bahá'ís in Iran should be considered a modern-day Holocaust.

Raleigh, North Carolina. The 19 developmental English students at our screening in Raleigh, North Carolina, were transfixed by the film and no doubt quite deeply moved by it. After the showing, they voiced their surprise that such a situation still existed in the world, but there was not much time for further discussion. In their written responses, the students generally expressed gratitude for their own relatively unobstructed paths in education. Though many of them will have to overcome considerable difficulties to complete their degrees – associate's, bachelor's, or otherwise – the students found themselves putting their own struggles in perspective after watching the film. Many of them also drew a parallel between the prejudice experienced by the Bahá'ís in Iran and that of the African-Americans in the United States, especially with reference to the anecdote in the film depicting Bahá'ís having to use separate water fountains.

New Wilmington, Pennsylvania. We had a wonderful viewing with about 25 people attending, approximately 8 of whom were adults and the rest students. The screening was sponsored by the Department of Religion, History, Philosophy, and Classics and the International Cultures Club at our local university. The Chair of the Department of Religion, History, Philosophy, and Classics gave a wonderful introduction of the Bahá'í Faith, which lasted approximately 15 minutes, and during which he showed pictures of the House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, and the Shrine of the Báb, the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, and the Seat of the Universal House of Justice in Israel.

During the discussion portion of the event, several questions were asked, including: What is it that the Iranian government doesn't like about the Bahá'ís? What more can be done to help the Bahá'ís in Iran? Why is the government focused on the Bahá'ís and not on other religious minorities? How do Bahá'ís explain the differences in religions?

Do Bahá'ís have places of worship, like churches? Do Bahá'ís meet regularly? Do the Bahá'ís have holy texts? And, why is the ring symbol sideways on the Shrine of the Báb? We did mention signing the open letter at the beginning of the event, and at the end, while the EUF homepage was projected on the screen, we went over the three-step process on how to take action. Two articles were also published in local papers, New Castle News and Sharon Herald announcing the viewing, and one of the professors at the university is now going to try to have the documentary included as part of the freshman orientation for the upcoming fall semester!

Local Government Agencies

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada. We met at the local police station for the Partners in Policing Cultural Diversity Committee Meeting, which was attended by several police officers, two Sikhs, a Unitarian Universalist minister, a Jewish rabbi and a Bahá'í. A good part of our meeting was devoted to screening the film, *Education Under Fire*, and discussing the shocking reality it so clearly reveals. Every single person present thanked me for bringing the film to their attention and each of them expressed their shock and awe. The rabbi had already invited me to screen the film at his synagogue in Halifax, and two others present are assisting me to arrange more showings.