



A QUICK GUIDE FOR ACTION

Everyone has the right to education...Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26—to which Iran is a Signatory

I'm not sure if I've written you since I got out of (Evin) prison... I've been bombarded by BIHE work. We are starting the new semester while three of our lecturers are currently in jail... This means that we have to work harder to fill the gaps. Yesterday we had the start of semester ceremony. It was quite different from what you might think...we reviewed...a situation when someone is getting arrested and what you should do you when you are in prison! Imagine starting a semester of learning by getting prepared for imprisonment and torture!

A detainee in the May 2011 attack on the BIHE

Education Under Fire (EUF) addresses the Iranian government's denial of the right to education for ideological and religious reasons. The overarching goal of the initiative is to increase awareness about the flagrant abuses of human rights occurring in Iran where Iranian citizens are being denied access to higher education and are being imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes executed because of their views. Among those targeted by the government of Iran are the roughly 300,000 followers of the Bahá'í Faith, the country's largest non-Muslim religious minority. It is through the lens of the experience of the Iranian Bahá'í community that the denial of access to higher education is examined in this initiative.

The Education Under Fire campaign and documentary has been a wonderful success since its inception in October 2011 with over 600 screening events held primarily throughout North America during the course of just one year. The natural focus on academic environments, because of the documentary's subject matter, has resulted in countless offers of support from dozens of major institutions. Overall, thousands have participated in screening events that have taken place in a variety of different venues.

As we move into 2013, we invite everyone to identify settings where the film can be easily introduced – be it a book club, church group, interfaith gathering, junior youth group, school

assembly, university or high school classroom, or in your home with friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers. It is in these spaces where rich and meaningful conversation and connection can take place, inspiring a deeper awareness of the world and human rights, and causing us to look at our own lives and imagine how the right to and freedom of education has such personal significance.

To demonstrate the impact the campaign and the film has had already in some of these social spaces, we offer the words of Dr. Rosanna Gatens, Director of the Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education in the College of Education at Florida Atlantic University. In an email she sent to the campaign team just prior to a screening at Florida Atlantic, Dr. Gatens wrote:

"I hope you feel energized by all that is happening here so quickly. Thank you for sharing all this with me. It has helped keep my spirits lifted. Working day in and day out on issues related to human depravity and violence can be truly painful and sometimes I get really depressed about the tiny steps we are making through educating people. When I have those kind of days, I just remember experiences like the EUF campaign and my flagging spirits are improved."

The connection with Dr. Gatens was made with no existing relationship or prior knowledge of the cause of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), the subject of the campaign documentary. She was simply approached, a conversation began, and a deep friendship started to form working side-by-side and calling all to respect the right to education.

For the new year, we have also created an eBook, a companion piece to the film, which contains original essays from prominent individuals like actor Rainn Wilson and scholar Dr. Cornel West, leaders in human rights academia and advocacy, BIHE graduates, and other supporters of Education Under Fire on a variety of subjects. The eBook delves into topics like the importance of education as a human right and religious value, why the government of Iran oppresses minorities, and the example set by the Bahá'ís of Iran despite the relentless injustices committed against them. We hope this compilation will be extremely valuable as you explore deeper the subject areas highlighted in the film. As you identify individuals willing to read the eBook and introduce the documentary within various group settings, encourage them to invite others to do the same, which is the fundamental action step they can take to make a difference.

Questions may naturally arise after screening the film. You can find answers to some frequently asked questions in a new FAQ document and guide we have developed, which is available for download on our website. This resource may be quite useful in helping to keep the conversation focused. We caution you, however, not to get hung up on trying to be an expert on the BIHE or in trying to solve the problem created by the actions of the Iranian government. Our objective is to raise consciousness in the minds of as many people as possible and to let the Iranian government know that its policies and actions are being observed the world-over.

THE STORY

Use this brief story to help explain EUF to others.

Hi there! How is everything? I've been meaning to tell you about an important human rights situation that I've been made aware of. It's an amazing story. In fact, most people have trouble

believing that such a thing could happen in the 21st century.

For the past thirty years, the Iranian government has made it a state policy to “block the progress” of its largest non-Muslim religious minority. In the country of Iran, 300,000 Bahá’ís have faced every kind of abuse imaginable including arrest, imprisonment, torture, and even execution. Since the 1979 revolution, young Bahá’ís have not been allowed to attend any of Iran’s universities. Imagine a government in this day and age withholding the right to education from an entire population of its own people. This type of abuse is in violation of every international human rights charter and even Iran’s own constitution.

In 1987, the Iranian Bahá’í community started an informal university, which has since evolved into the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education (or BIHE for short). With classes taught peacefully in living rooms and kitchens of homes across Iran by Bahá’í academics who have themselves been barred from teaching professionally as a result of their religious beliefs, the BIHE represents the only chance that Bahá’í youth in Iran have for higher education. In May 2011, the Iranian government launched a coordinated attack against the BIHE, raiding dozens of homes, confiscating computers and materials, and detaining eighteen professors and administrators. Nine of those arrested have received four or five-year prison terms. Their only crime: educating the youth in their community.

Education Under Fire is a film and conversation designed to raise awareness about the importance of defending Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees education as an inalienable right of every human being. The campaign has produced a 30-minute documentary, co-presented by Amnesty International, which tells the powerful and compelling story of the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education. Over the past year, the documentary has been shown at over 200 major universities, and hundreds more screenings have taken place in homes, community centers, places of worship, theatres and classrooms primarily throughout North America, but even beyond to Australia, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands. Many prominent institutions, like Harvard and Stanford, and even two Nobel Laureates, have come forward as a result of the campaign to offer their support for the BIHE.

In fact, I’m on my way to a book club right now to watch the film with my friends. The documentary is available to stream online, actually, and so you can watch it on your own; but I can’t wait to share this with them and then talk together about such an important human right. It’s just so critical to discuss the state of the world and our role in it, I think, especially when these issues continue to affect us all. Go to the website, www.educationunderfire.com, and you’ll see it all there. Or, if you’d like, come along with me now!