

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: IRN34267
Country: Iran
Date: 9 February 2009

Keywords: Iran –Zoroastrianism – Conversion – Practices – Apostasy law

This response was prepared by the Research & Information Services Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. This research response may not, under any circumstance, be cited in a decision or any other document. Anyone wishing to use this information may only cite the primary source material contained herein.

Questions

- 1. Please list the basic religious beliefs of Zoroastrians and the names of any key religious texts.**
- 2. What is the formal procedure to convert to Zoroastrianism?**
- 3. How would one practice as a Zoroastrian in Tehran? Are there places of worship and if so where? Is there a requirement to attend particular religious ceremonies or gatherings, or is it a matter of purely private practice?**
- 4. Please provide any reports in the last few years of Muslims converting to Zoroastrianism in Iran.**
- 5. If there are any reports, is there any information as to how the government perceives conversions to this particular religion and how converts to it are treated?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please list the basic religious beliefs of Zoroastrians and the names of any key religious texts.**

A concise summary of Zoroastrian religious beliefs and key religious texts is provided on the *BBC News* website:

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions. It was founded by the prophet Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) in ancient Iran approximately 3500 years ago. For 1000 years Zoroastrianism was one of the most powerful religions in the world. It was the official religion of Persia (Iran) from 600 BCE to 650 CE.

It is now one of the world's smallest religions with around a quarter of a million followers worldwide. There are 4000 Zoroastrians living in Britain.

- Zoroastrians believe there is one God called Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord) and He created the world.
- Zoroastrians are not fire-worshippers, as some Westerners wrongly believe.
- Zoroastrians believe that the elements are pure and that fire represents God's light or wisdom.
- Ahura Mazda revealed the truth through the prophet, Zoroaster.
- Zoroastrians traditionally pray several times a day.
- Zoroastrians worship communally in a Fire Temple or Agiary.
- The Zoroastrian book of Holy Scriptures is called *The Avesta*.
- *The Avesta* can be roughly split into two main sections:
 - The Avesta is the oldest and core part of the scriptures, which contains the Gathas. The Gathas are seventeen hymns thought to be composed by Zoroaster himself.
 - The Younger Avesta – commentaries to the older Avestan written in later years. It also contains myths, stories and details of ritual observances.
- Zoroastrians are roughly split into two groups:
 - The Iranians
 - The Parsis ('Zoroastrianism at a glance' (undated), *BBC News* website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian/ataglance/glance.shtml> – Accessed 19 January 2009 – Attachment 1).

Some further details on Zoroastrian beliefs and texts are given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*:

His [Zoroaster's] teaching has been preserved in seventeen hymns, the Gathas, *Yasna* ...28-34 and 43-53. Zoroaster was a practicing priest...and these hymns were meditations on the liturgy (*Yasna*) cast into rather esoteric mantic poetry. They are, therefore, extremely difficult to translate and interpret, so that accounts of them differ considerably. Fundamental is the prophet's conviction that he had seen God, the Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda, in a vision. He believed that he personally had been set apart for his mission from the beginning, a conviction which resulted in a stress on personal responsibility in religion. There are, he taught, two opposing forces, the Bounteous Spirit of Mazda and the destructive power of Angra Mainyu who created respectively life and non-life. Each persons eternal fate would be determined by the choice (s)he made between them.

...Central to Zoroaster's belief in Ahura Mazda are the Amesha Spentas , a system of seven spirits which in later tradition at least were opposed to seven evil spirits. He therefore saw a cosmic divide between the forces of good and evil ... (Bowker. J. (ed). 2000, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford University Press, London, p. 659 – Attachment 2)

A brief overview of the religion with key tenets is also provided on the Avesta – Zoroastrian Archives website at <http://www.avesta.org/zfaq.html>. This internet source does appear to be well-informed, as it quotes from acknowledged academics in this field (see 'Frequently asked questions on Zoroastrianism and the Avesta' (undated), Avesta – Zoroastrian Archives website <http://www.avesta.org/zfaq.html> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 3). This includes information on 'Observances' with regard to dress, prayers and communal festivals:

A brief overview

Zoroastrianism is a religion founded in ancient times by the prophet Zarathushtra, known to the Greeks as Zoroaster. Zoroastrianism was the dominant world religion during the Persian empires (559 BC to 651 AC), and was thus the most powerful world religion at the time of

Jesus. It had a major influence on other religions. It is still practiced world-wide, especially in Iran and India.

To quote Mary Boyce,

“The prophet Zarathushtra, son of Pourushaspa, of the Spitaman family, is known to us primarily from the Gathas, seventeen great hymns which he composed and which have been faithfully preserved by his community. These are not works of instruction, but inspired, passionate utterances, many of them addressed directly to God; and their poetic form is a very ancient one, which has been traced back (through Norse parallels) to Indo-European times. It seems to have been linked with a mantic tradition, that is, to have been cultivated by priestly seers who sought to express in lofty words their personal apprehension of the divine; and it is marked by subtleties of allusion, and great richness and complexity of style. Such poetry can only have been fully understood by the learned; and since Zoroaster believed that he had been entrusted by God with a message for all mankind, he must also have preached again and again in plain words to ordinary people. His teachings were handed down orally in his community from generation to generation, and were at last committed to writing under the Sasanians, rulers of the third Iranian empire. The language then spoken was Middle Persian, also called Pahlavi; and the Pahlavi books provide invaluable keys for interpreting the magnificent obscurities of the Gathas themselves.” – *Zoroastrians, Their religious beliefs and practices*, London, 1979, pg 17.

Some of the major tenets of Zoroastrianism include:

God: Ahura Mazda

The supreme being is called Ahura Mazda (Phl. Ohrmazd), meaning “Wise Lord.” Ahura Mazda is all good, and created the world and all good things, including people. He is opposed by Anghra Mainyu (Phl. Ahriman), meaning “Destructive Spirit,” the embodiment of evil and creator of all evil things. The cosmic battle between good and evil will ultimately lead to the destruction of all evil.

Prophet: Zarathushtra

The religion was founded by Zarathushtra. His date is uncertain, but is probably somewhere around 1200 BC. He lived and preached in the Inner Asian steppes. Zarathushtra received his revelations directly from Ahura Mazda, and from his Archangels (Amesha Spentas).

Scripture: Avesta

The central scripture is the Avesta. The most sacred sections of the Avesta are the Gathas or Hymns of Zarathushtra; they are also the most enigmatic. Later sacred literature includes the Pahlavi Texts, which contain extensive quotations and paraphrases from lost Avesta texts.

Creed: The creed is summarized in Yasna 12. It is likely to have been composed by Zarathushtra himself, and to have been used as an avowal of faith by early converts (Cf. Boyce, *Zoroastrianism, It's Antiquity and Constant Vigour*, p. 102-4).

Observances: Two sacred garments, the sudreh (shirt) and kusti (cord) are the emblems of the religion. Zoroastrians perform a short cleansing ritual (Padyab), and retie the kusti several times a day with another short ritual (Nirang-i Kusti) as a sign of their faith. Other prayers are recited daily from the Khorda Avesta. Prayer is largely done in

the Avestan language. The faithful should also participate in seasonal communal festivals (“Gahambars”) during the year.

Fire and “Asha”: Fire, as a symbol of “Asha” and the “original light of God,” holds a special place of esteem in the religion. Prayer is often done in front of a fire, and consecrated fires are kept perpetually burning in the major temples (‘Frequently asked questions on Zoroastrianism and the Avesta’ (undated), Avesta – Zoroastrian Archives website <http://www.avesta.org/zfaq.html> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 3).

2. What is the formal procedure to convert to Zoroastrianism?

Conversion to the Zoroastrian religion is a contested issue among adherents and communities worldwide. In a piece for *Time* magazine, Deena Guzder wrote in December 2008:

Despite their shrinking population, Zoroastrians remain fiercely divided over whether to recognize interfaith families, let alone accept non-generational Zoroastrians. Tens of thousands fled Persia during the Islamic incursions in the 10th Century and were granted refuge in India under the condition they did not marry outside their faith or proselytize to the Hindu majority. Ramiyar P. Karanjia, principal of a Zoroastrian religious school in Mumbai, India, insists, “Conversion is not part of our religion.” Yet, in India, home to the majority of Zoroastrians, the community is declining by about 10% every decennial census, according to a report released by UNESCO. Today, Zoroastrians remain a tight-knit and self-secluded community that strongly encourages marriage within the faith (Guzder, D. 2008, ‘The Last of the Zoroastrians’, *Time*, 9 December <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1864931,00.html> – Accessed 15 January 2009 – Attachment 4).

The UK Home Office’s *Country of Origin Information Report – Iran* (August 2008) quotes three sources on conversion which canvass a variety of views on this question:

An article in the Brookings Register dated 11 September 2003, states that “By law, Muslims are not allowed to convert to another religion, and Zoroastrians do not encourage conversions.” [64a] The FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] position is that “Zoroastrianism is not a religion which accepts converts, as far as we are aware.” [26c] However, an undated article on the subject notes “It must be added that most of the anti-conversion sentiment in the Zoroastrian world comes from the Indian Parsis. Iranian Zoroastrians are much more likely to accept converts, marriages to non-Zoroastrians (who are then welcomed into the community) and people of mixed ancestry. The problems with conversion in Iran are mainly political: converting someone away from Islam is an offense against the Islamic Republic and may be seriously penalized. Therefore, conversions in Iran are done very quietly.” (‘Conversion to Zoroastrianism’, by H. M. G. Shapero) [65] (UK Home Office 2008, *Country of Origin Information Report – Iran*, 15 August – Attachment 5).

Conversion in Iran

The view expressed in well-informed sources is that the Zoroastrian community in Iran does not encourage or accept converts. The World Zoroastrian News Network website carried an article in October 2008 stating that the Tehran Moobedan Organization (Anjoman Moobedan Tehran), in a letter to Zoroastrian *anjomans* and organisations in Iran, mentioned that “Zoroastrians in Iran can not let anyone convert to Zoroastrianism”. The report would further indicate that non-Zoroastrians can attend two celebrations but require legal permission from the government:

Tehran Moobedan Organization (Anjoman Moobedan Tehran) in a letter to Zoroastrian anjomans and organizations in Iran pointed out clearly that they can let non-Zoroastrians who are interested in Zoroastrian ceremonies, attend two Zoroastrian celebrations. According to this announcement these two Celebrations are “Mehrgan” and “Sadeh”. This announcement also mentions that Zoroastrians in Iran can not let anyone convert to Zoroastrianism and attending the ceremonies should be with legal permissions issued by the right governmental organizations.

In the Mehrgan Celebration that was recently held in Tehran-Iran, some non-Zoroastrians were present (‘Non-Zoroastrian Iranians Can Attend Two Zoroastrian Ceremonies’ 2008, World Zoroastrian News Network website, 7 October <http://wznn.blogfa.com/post-62.aspx> – Accessed 15 January 2009 – Attachment 6).

A leading member of the Zoroastrian community in Yazd is quoted in a 2003 article for *The Boston Review* stating that conversion is not possible. The article also mentions that the Iranian Zoroastrian community is “tightly knit and closed”, and that the Iranian Ali Jaffery initiated the tradition to allow converts:

While Islam is aggressive in proselytizing itself, it bans, by punishment of death, the conversion of Muslims into other faiths. Making matters more complex for those Iranians looking to return to their “original faith” is that the faith itself does not seem to want them. “There can be no conversion into our religion,” says Sohrab Yazdani, a leading member of the Zarathusti community in the city of Yazd, home to most of Iran’s surviving Zarathustis and their religion’s sacred sites.

Having lived as a persecuted minority for more than 1,300 years, Iran’s Zarathustis have formed a tightly knit and closed community. Few want to risk incurring the Iranian government’s wrath at a time when President Khatami has eased many of the serious discriminations their community has endured for centuries. Complicating the theological landscape is the notion that being Zarathusti, like being Jewish, is a matter of birth, not conversion. Any challenge to this closed community of faith is fiercely rejected by most Zarathustis in both Iran and India. The one movement to convert Iranians and others into Zoroastrianism, started by an Iranian named Ali Jaffery, has run afoul of both the Islamic authorities in Iran and the mainstream Zarathusti community.

Caught between their current religion, which won’t let them out, and their desired religion, which won’t let them in, some Iranians are believed to practice Zoroastrianism in secret. But if some take this risk, virtually none are willing to talk about it (Pocha, J. 2003, ‘Iran’s other Religion’, *The Boston Review*, Summer, Vol. 28, Nos. 3 – 5 <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR28.3/pocha.html> – Accessed 15 January 2009 – Attachment 7).

Similarly evidence from a 2007 interview with the founder of the European Center for Zoroastrian Studies based in Belgium, Dr. Khosro Khazai, would indicate that converts are turned away from Zoroastrian centres in Iran and discouraged from converting:

We receive 500 to 600 letters a month from those who want to become Zoroastrian.

They, at first, go to the centers in Tehran, Yazd and Kerman but are normally not accepted there and are not even allowed to enter the centers. They say that the born Zoroastrians do not help them to become Zoroastrian.

This is understandable because of the current Iranian government policies. The government in Iran, fearful of the increasing number of the Iranian people adopting the tradition of their

ancestors, has put a lot of pressure on the Zoroastrian centers not to allow Iranians become Zoroastrian.

...Every night of the week until 1h30 AM. I am at my computer replying to people's letters received mainly from Iran ('An Interview with Dr. Khosro Khazai: Founder of the European Center for Zoroastrian Studies' 2007, European Centre For Zoroastrian Studies website, 6 August <http://www.gatha.org/english/articles/000290.html> – Accessed 21 January 2009 – Attachment 8).

Iran's diverse peoples: a reference sourcebook by Massoume Price also provides information on this topic. He states that while the Zoroastrian community does not accept converts, some Iranians "declare" themselves to be Zoroastrian and that there do exist "unofficial organizations of the new Zoroastrians, with little connection to the old established associations":

They do not accept converts, but since the revolution they have become very popular; many Iranians, including some Bahai's declare themselves to be Zoroastrians, and there are some unofficial organizations of the new Zoroastrians, with little connection to the old established associations. Their traditional symbols have become very popular among Iranians, especially the youth... They have built new temples in Shiraz, Isfahan and Ahvaz. Many have moved to Europe and North America, and Zoroastrian temples and associations exist in many major cities on those continents (Price, M. 2005, *Iran's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook*, Santa Barbara, California, ABC-CLIO, pp.317-318, Google Books website http://books.google.com.au/books?id=gzpdq679oJwC&pg=PA317&lpg=PA317&dq=zoroastrian+practise+OR+ceremony+OR+private+%22in+tehran+%22&source=web&ots=yA73DyZ8xj&sig=6sK5TnAq7RPD1HU0Ih9JZjVNbiQ&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 23).

Overseas conversion procedures:

Reports of Zoroastrian conversion procedures and ceremonies in European countries and the United States do exist. One example is provided on a Florida-based Zoroastrian website:

So, how does one become a convert to Mazdayasna? In the words of the Fravarane, the prayer of the Choice of religion,

"...choose for myself the Good Religion of worshipping the Wise One..."

In other words, when you are convinced, you make an informed CHOICE. There is no need for anything other than a firm conviction and will; not even a Priest. God is not a distant figure. He is your Friend and Beloved. So there is no need of ritual to propitiate a god, or of an intercessor for man before God.

However, for faith and community building, for a statement to the world and to reinforce our bonds, most of us choose to undergo an Initiation Ceremony. This ceremony DOES NOT need a priest to be 'efficacious' for, as mentioned before, not even the ceremony is necessary!

What the ceremony needs is the Initiate, witnesses, a coach, which may or may not be a Ratu (teacher or leader) a Sudreh, a Kushti, a small fire vase, a table with produce of Mazda's Living World, and prayers – usually, the Ashem Vohu, the Yatha Ahu Vairyo, and the Fravarane itself. If any one wishes to have an Initiation, we have para-Ratus and others willing to travel to any western country ('ZOROASTRIANISM – Who fears God, does not know God – Conversion in Mazdayasna' (undated), The Restored Zarathushtrian Community

website http://www.zoroastrianism.cc/conversion_in_mazdayasna.html – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 9).

For another example of a Zarathushtrian Initiation Ceremony, held at the Dar-e-Meher Fire Temple in San Jose California and involving Dr. Ali Jafarey himself, please see Attachment 10. Ali Jafary is described here as the “founder of the Zarathushtrian Assembly, the more liberal, open branch of Zoroastrianism...eighty-five years old and still one of the leading thinkers in the field ...a scholar, teacher and author of over a dozen books” (“Stephen Williamson’s Zarathushtrian Ceremony’ 2005, EFN.org website, 29 January <http://www.efn.org/~opal/stevezphotos.html> – Accessed 3 February 2009 – Attachment 10)

3. How would one practice as a Zoroastrian in Tehran? Are there places of worship and if so where? Is there a requirement to attend particular religious ceremonies or gatherings, or is it a matter of purely private practice?

A brief history of the Zoroastrian community in Iran is given by Eliz Sanasarian in her book *Religious Minorities in Iran*, together with the following demographic details:

The concentration of Zoroastrians in Tehran during the last few decades has been a trend similar to that of other non-Muslim minorities. Most migrants have come from Yazd and Kerman. One source states that the number of Zoroastrian residents in Tehran increased from only 300 in the first decade of the twentieth century to around 15,000 in the 1980s.

Worldwide their numbers are about 125,000, concentrated mainly in India, Pakistan and Iran. Before 1979 their numbers in Iran were 30,000. By the mid 1990s, the Zoroastrian population numbered 50,000. Today in addition to the above-mentioned cities, Zoroastrian worship centers can be found in Shiraz, Isfahan, and Ahvaz. There are still Zoroastrians residing in villages, especially around Yazd (Sanasarian, E. 2000, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 48-50 – Attachment 11).

A brief comment in response to an article on a proposed new fire temple in Tehran provides the following information on the community in Tehran and the Zoroastrian community:

Hi, I am a greek journalist and intend to travel to Tehran. How can I come in touch with the zoroastrian community in Tehran? Is in Tehran any temple?

When in Tehran, ask to see the High Priest of Zarathushtris in Anjuman-e-Zarathushtri. There is a Fire Temple near it and they would gladly help you. There is another Zarathushti Fire Temple in the district named Tehran Pars which is situated in the north of Tehran. If I am correct, there are about 50,000 Zoroastrians in Tehran itself, the rest are scattered about in Yazd and Kerman. They are mainly commercial or academics like, doctors, lawyers, accountants and architects. There is also a Zoroastrian school financed by Zoroastrian Iranians and Parsi Zoroastrians from India and Pakistan (‘Tehran new Fire Temple’ 2008, Fravahr.org webiste, 31 December <http://www.fravahr.org/spip.php?article399> – Accessed 5 February 2009 –Attachment 12).

In December 2008 in a piece for *Time* magazine, Deena Guzder refers to some practices by Zoroastrians in Tehran and the city of Yazd, along with some tenets held by followers. The article includes the view of one medical student in Tehran that the Zoroastrian community in Iran “preserves its identity by learning the Persian poetry of the Shah Nameh and holding

religious classes and celebrations”; and refers to the beliefs of the head priest of a Zoroastrian temple in Tehran, Mehraban Firouzgary:

Far removed from Tehran’s bustling tin-roofed teashops and Isfahan’s verdant pomegranate gardens, the deserts known as Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut meet at the city of Yazd, once the heart of the Persian Empire.

Walking across the wind-whipped plains of the forgotten city, a young Iranian woman dressed in colorful floral garbs points out a sand-dusted tower hovering in the distance like a dormant volcano under a relentless sun. “This is where we put tens of thousands of corpses over the years,” she explains with a congenial smile.

The funerary tower is part of the ancient burial practice of Zoroastrianism, the world’s oldest monotheistic religion. Zoroastrians (known in India as Parsis) regard sky burials, in which the bodies are exposed to natural elements including vultures in open-topped “Towers of Silence,” as an ecologically friendly alternative to cremation, consistent with their religion’s reverence for the earth. A Zoroastrian priest clad in a long, cotton robe explains: “Death is considered to be the work of Angra Mainyu, the embodiment of all that is evil, whereas the earth and all that is beautiful is considered to be the pure work of God. We must not pollute the earth with our remains.”

The priest believes that open burials are a fulfillment of the central tenet of his religion, which is to practice good deeds. With a forlorn expression, he notes that, 3,000 years after the tradition of open burials began, there are not enough Zoroastrians left alive to keep the tower in Yazd open. Instead, today’s Zoroastrians who want to observe traditional burial practices must request in their will that their body is sent to a forested suburb in Mumbai, India, where the last Tower of Silence still operates.

In the alabaster prayer room of the Zoroastrian temple in the center of Yazd, a handful of adherents sway to the cadence of ancient Persian prayers recited as a priest feeds sticks of sandalwood and sprinkles of frankincense into a blazing urn. Zoroastrians wear hand-woven wool cords as external symbols of their faith, and almost always pray in front of a fire, which represents purity and sustainability. In Yazd, the holy flame has burned for 1,500 years without ever being extinguished. While Zoroastrianism was once the dominant religion in a swathe of territory spanning from Rome and Greece to India and Russia, the number of adherents has dwindled exponentially over the centuries. Although Yazd is the birthplace of the religion, only 200 of its 433,836 people still practice Zoroastrianism because migration, forced conversions, and centuries of oppression have diminished the population.

Worldwide, there are 190,000 Zoroastrians at most, and perhaps as few as 124,000 by some estimates. Although Zoroastrians are few in number, their faith has influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam with its teachings of a single deity, a dualistic universe of good versus evil, and a final day of reckoning. **The religion professes that humankind is designed to evolve toward perfection, but is complicated by evil forces such as greed, lust and hatred, explains Mehraban Firouzgary, the head priest of the Zoroastrian temple in Tehran. According to Zoroastrians, these evil forces must be challenged proactively by developing a “good mind” that embraces a life of good thoughts, good words and good deeds.**

Despite their shrinking population, Zoroastrians remain fiercely divided over whether to recognize interfaith families, let alone accept non-generational Zoroastrians. Tens of thousands fled Persia during the Islamic incursions in the 10th Century and were granted refuge in India under the condition they did not marry outside their faith or proselytize to the Hindu majority. Ramiyar P. Karanjia, principal of a Zoroastrian religious school in Mumbai,

India, insists, "Conversion is not part of our religion." Yet, in India, home to the majority of Zoroastrians, the community is declining by about 10% every decennial census, according to a report released by UNESCO. Today, Zoroastrians remain a tight-knit and self-secluded community that strongly encourages marriage within the faith.

According to Parva Namiranian, a Zoroastrian medical student at Tehran University, the community in Iran preserves its identity by learning the Persian poetry of the Shah Nameh and holding religious classes and celebrations. She says Zoroastrians are accepted in Iran because they "represent a proud history" and all Iranians, regardless of religion, enjoy celebrating the Zoroastrian New Year, Nowruz, because it's an excuse to buy clothes and eat sweets. Mehraban Firouzgary, the head priest in the Zoroastrian temple in Tehran, agrees that most Iranians regard the Zoroastrian minority favorably, but he worries about the community's survival. "Zoroastrians have lived in Iran for over 3,000 years," he says, "but there are so few left today" (Guzder, D. 2008, 'The Last of the Zoroastrians', *Time*, 9 December <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1864931,00.html> – Accessed 15 January 2009 – Attachment 4).

An article in *The Globe and Mail* in 2000 quotes one member of the Zoroastrian community from Yazd expressing the view that requirements for prayer are very liberal:

Hidden at the foot of a desolate mountain, at the end of a 20-kilometre road through a lonely stretch of Iranian desert, the holiest pilgrimage site of the Zoroastrians is silent and seemingly abandoned.

The only inhabitant is an elderly caretaker who tends the sacred fires in the mountain-side shrine. Aside from an annual festival in June, the fire temple is rarely visited these days. Just one or two pilgrims make the trek in a typical week.

Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest faiths, was the dominant religion in the Middle East at the time of Jesus. Today it is the smallest minority in its own homeland, with as few as 10,000 adherents by some estimates, and its followers often suffer discrimination by the Islamic authorities.

As emigration continues, their numbers in Iran have dwindled. There are more Zoroastrians in Los Angeles today than in their ancestral land.

The oldest flame of the Zoroastrian faith is kept behind a glass wall in a temple in the Iranian desert city of Yazd, the home of Iran's largest concentration of Zoroastrians. Fuelled carefully with almond and apricot wood by a fire tender known as the Hirbod, the flame has burned continuously for more than 1,500 years.

The temple's manager, Hormoz Farkhani, welcomes foreign tourists, but is reluctant to talk to journalists. "I don't have a permission letter," he said. "If I give you an interview, maybe the police will interrogate me." When he eventually consents to talk, the temple manager insists that everything is fine. "The government treats us well. We don't have any problems with the Muslims."

Other Zoroastrians are less afraid to discuss the discrimination that confronts them daily.

Dinyar, a 47-year-old bureaucrat in Yazd, says the top-ranking jobs in the Iranian public sector are barred to Zoroastrians.

"They call it the Islamic Republic of Iran, so all the high-status jobs go to Muslims," he said in an interview in a Yazd teahouse.

“This is our motherland, but we are not allowed to become the president or a cabinet minister. They allow us to be a soldier but not an officer. If I want to be the director of my office, they won’t let me. Yet this is our own country. It’s unfair.”

At the school in his neighbourhood, almost all of the children are Zoroastrians. Two years ago, however, the authorities fired the school principal and replaced him with a Muslim, despite strong protests from the parents.

Many of Dinyar’s friends and relatives have emigrated; his brother has moved to Vancouver. “We want to be free,” Dinyar said. “That’s why so many of us have emigrated to Canada, Britain and America. In those countries, they don’t ask what your religion is; they ask what your job qualifications are.”

... Yet the Zoroastrian religion has had a profound influence over Iranian culture. Zoroastrian symbols are often found in Iranian art and handicrafts, and in ancient monuments such as the palace of Persepolis. One of the biggest Iranian holidays, No Ruz (the Persian New Year), is based on the Zoroastrian calendar.

From an Islamic viewpoint, the Zoroastrians seem to have an excessive respect for free choice. Daily prayer, for example, does not follow any strict rules.

“You can pray for five minutes or an hour,” Dinyar said. “If you want to pray, you can pray any time. I even do it on the bus or on my bicycle. It’s a very simple religion, and it gives liberty to a person. If you don’t pray in the morning, you haven’t committed any sin.”

Under Iranian law, the Zoroastrians are guaranteed their own member of parliament, a right also given to the other main religious minorities: Jews, Armenian Christians and Assyrian Christians.

Yet many religious minorities suffer legal discrimination and sometimes harassment. Last year, for example, 13 Jews were arrested on allegations of spying for Israel. Members of the Baha’i faith have been subjected to severe persecution.

The Zoroastrians, like other minorities, do not enjoy the same legal rights as Muslims. Judges are legally required to be Muslims, as is the Iranian president.

If a Zoroastrian’s son converts to Islam, he legally inherits all of the father’s property, even if he is the youngest child. If a judge rules that a murderer must pay “blood money” to the family of a slain Zoroastrian, this amount is much lower than it would be for a Muslim victim. The Zoroastrians never dare to promote their religion.

“If we convert a Muslim to Zoroastrianism, we have committed the greatest sin,” Dinyar said. “That’s the Muslim law. They are high and we are low.”

Despite the discrimination, Dinyar has no plans to emigrate. He remembers when the discrimination was much worse, when barbers refused to cut the hair of Zoroastrians, shopkeepers refused to serve them and villages kept a separate water tap for Zoroastrians to keep them apart from Muslims.

Dinyar even allows himself some cautious hopes for the future. Iranian President Mohammed Khatami is a moderate reformer who grew up in a town near Chak Chak.

“He grew up in a community with many Zoroastrians, and he had many friends and classmates who were Zoroastrian,” Dinyar said. “He is very kind to Zoroastrians. Day by day, our conditions are getting better” (York, G. 2000, ‘Living precariously in Islamic Iran One of the world’s oldest faiths is losing its adherents in the land of its birth’, *The Globe and Mail*, 11 March – Attachment 13).

A 2006 *New York Times* article on Zoroastrian practices worldwide states that followers “can pray at home instead of going to a temple. While there are priests, there is no hierarchy to set policy”:

The very tenets of Zoroastrianism could be feeding its demise, many adherents said in interviews. Zoroastrians believe in free will, so in matters of religion they do not believe in compulsion. They do not proselytize. They can pray at home instead of going to a temple. While there are priests, there is no hierarchy to set policy. And their basic doctrine is a universal ethical precept: “good thoughts, good words, good deeds” (Goodstein, L. 2006, ‘Zoroastrians Keep the Faith, and Keep Dwindling’, *The New York Times*, 6 September <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B04E7DA1631F935A3575AC0A9609C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all> – Accessed 20 January 2009 – Attachment 14).

A 2006 *Washington Post* article also provides evidence for the ease with which the religion is observed by those in Iran:

Since the 1979 revolution, Iran’s Jewish population has dropped from more than 100,000 to perhaps 25,000, Christians from 300,000 to around 100,000.

But some say the exodus reflects less specific persecution than the opportunity to escape a country where almost everyone was being made miserable. The religious minorities, with concerned sponsors offering relocation funds, had a way out.

“Whatever the government does, they do it to all of us,” said Ardeshir Bahrami, 64, a Zoroastrian in Yazd.

Zoroastrians appear to enjoy the most respect inside Iran, for reasons extending into the country’s 2,500-year history. The faith claims to be the first to recognize a single, omniscient god. Until its founder, Zoroaster, emerged as early as the 14th century B.C. -- the date is disputed -- people were paying tributes to pagan gods and grappling fearfully with questions of cause and effect.

Zoroaster made it simple. There was good, he said, and there was bad. Darkness and light. Zoroastrianism urges following the light, symbolized in the open flame nursed for 1,536 years on the andirons in the house of worship, called a “fire temple,” on Yazd’s main street.

A plaque lists the creed: Good thoughts. Good words. Good deeds.

“It’s a simple religion,” Bahrami said. “It’s really not very hard to observe.”

In Yazd, a pleasant, desert city in the dead center of Iran, Zoroastrians enjoy a vivid reputation for honesty. Prices in a shop owned by a Zoroastrian are regarded as the benchmark that competing shops are compared against. Children are told that when arriving in a strange town near dark, seek out a Zoroastrian home to spend the night in.

“I’m sorry to say it and it might sound offensive, but these Zoroastrians are better Muslims than we are,” said Mohammad Pardehbaff, a Yazd driver.

Iranians also respect Zoroastrianism as the faith of Iran's heroic age. It was the state religion under such storied emperors as Cyrus, Xerxes and Darius, whose tombs are adorned with the Zoroastrians' distinctive symbol of a bearded man in profile between outstretched wings. The symbol is also atop a towering monument that Iran's clerical leaders erected in Yazd's Zoroastrian cemetery to honor a hero of the eight-year war with Iraq. Like others in the cemetery, the stone lists not date of death but date of "second birth."

Zoroastrians celebrate funerals as birthday parties. "There is no mourning. If someone dies, we celebrate it, because we know what's going to happen after death," said Payman Bastani, 27. "There's nothing to worry about."

... "This is exactly what we believe," Bastani said. "Religion is not here to complicate your life. It's all about simplicity. God created it to give comfort to human beings, not to frustrate everyone."

Yet Zoroastrians are leaving Iran as well; perhaps 10,000 remain. In Taft, 10 miles south of Yazd, only the elderly linger in the mud-walled warren of houses identifiable as Zoroastrian by the tiny oil lamps burning in glass cases fitted into walls. "It's like we have leprosy, the way they've evacuated!" said Ardeshir Rostami, 83 (Vick, K. 2006, 'Extremist Image Masks Iranians' Many Faiths', *Washington Post*, 18 June <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/17/AR2006061700824.html> – Accessed 20 January 2009 – Attachment 15).

A variety of annual Zoroastrian festivals are held in Iran, including for example Mehrگان and Sadeh; an annual pilgrimage to the temple in the rocky mountain of Chak Chak near Yazd; and ceremonies and practices to commemorate the death of Zoroaster (for references and descriptions of these see: 'Non-Zoroastrian Iranians Can Attend Two Zoroastrian Ceremonies' 2008, World Zoroastrian News Network website, 7 October <http://wznn.blogfa.com/post-62.aspx> – Accessed 15 January 2009 – Attachment 6; 'Zoroastrians make Iran pilgrimage' 2004, *BBC News*, 17 June http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3816297.stm – Accessed 20 January 2009 – Attachment 16; for a two and a half minute video on the 2008 annual pilgrimage to the shrine of Chek Chek (Chak Chak) in Iran, which includes several interviews with members of the community, including those living in Tehran see Leyne, J. 2008, 'Zoroastrian pilgrimage held', *BBC News*, 28 August http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7585814.stm – Accessed 20 January 2009; for a ceremony and practices (with photographs) held on the occasion of the anniversary of Zoroaster's death by followers in Tehran, see 'Zoroaster commemoration ceremony held in Tehran' 2007, *Payvand News*, 27 December <http://www.payvand.com/news/07/dec/1261.html> – Accessed 3 February 2009 – Attachment 17; Price, M. 2005, *Iran's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, pp.317-318, Google Books website http://books.google.com.au/books?id=gzpdq679oJwC&pg=PA317&lpg=PA317&dq=zoroastrian+practise+OR+ceremony+OR+private+%22in+tehran+%22&source=web&ots=yA73DyZ8xj&sig=6sK5TnAq7RPD1HU0Ih9JZjVNbiQ&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 23).

4. Please provide any reports in the last few years of Muslims converting to Zoroastrianism in Iran?

5. If there are any reports, is there any information as to how the government perceives conversions to this particular religion and how converts to it are treated?

Information on Muslim converts to the Zoroastrian religion in Iran is scarce. Reports, quoted below, which do discuss this topic indicate that as a result of government policies against apostasy and refusal by Zoroastrian leaders to accept converts, itself due in part to government pressure, few conversions are believed to take place in Iran. As a result, some converts are believed to practice in private and/or seek to convert through communication with overseas Zoroastrian organisations. One author states that some Iranians are believed to declare themselves to be Zoroastrians and that there are some unofficial organisations with little connection to the old established associations. An otherwise unknown commentator to a 2008 article on Muslim converts to Christianity in Iran made on the The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting website, Paolo Vizzini, stated that “Since mid 1980s many Iranians have been converting to Zoroastrianism and they were ended in prison or faced execution... The Mullahs’ regime have executed many ex-Muslim converts to Zoroastrian and claimed they were drug dealers, members of MKO [People's Mujahedin of Iran], or even were homosexuals” (Vizzini, P. 2008 ‘Comment on article: In Iran, Covert Christian Converts Live With Secrecy and Fear – A draft Iranian law would mandate the death penalty for apostasy’, The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting website, 10 May <http://pulitzercenter.org/openitem.cfm?id=932> – Accessed 21 January 2009 – Attachment 19). No reports were found to corroborate these statements on converts or their imprisonment and execution.

The attraction which Zoroastrianism currently holds, especially for those Iranians with an interest in the country’s pre-Islamic civilisations and/or who are unhappy with the current Islamic government in Iran is described in a 2003 article by Jehangir Pocha, a Beijing-based China Correspondent for *The Boston Globe*. This author also affirms that “some Iranians are believed to practice Zoroastrianism in secret. But if some take this risk, virtually none are willing to talk about it”:

“A loss of faith with the mullahs [in government] has led to a loss of faith in the religion,” says Azar Bharami, a lawyer and women’s rights activist in Tehran. “When the government does not respect the [line] between religion and state how can people?” Numerous surveys, including one by the magazine *Asr-e Ma* (“Our Era”), have shown that most Iranians under the age of 25—who make up 50 percent of the overall population—consider themselves agnostic. Many young Iranians are cynical, even derisive, about their religion. Epithets like “mad mullahs” and “this thing Islam” are not uncommon.

At a time when many Iranians feel violated by the religious and political extremism inflicted upon them, but remain powerless to act against it, romantic allusions to ancient Persia offer hope. Evidence of popular fascination with Iran’s Persian heritage is everywhere. Stone carvings, paintings, and pictures of Persepolis adorn the walls of many homes, office buildings, and restaurants. In dusty bus stations across Iran’s desert towns, transport companies have painted Farohars on the sides of their sandblasted buses. Savvy marketers have also begun to tap into the trend. The newest model of the locally made Peugeot sedan in Iran has been branded Pars (Persepolis) and consumer products with names like Parsian line the shelves of Iran’s tiny street stores.

“Iranians are trying to discover who they really are,” Bharami said. “They feel shamed by their government and let down by their religion . . . they want something to believe in.” **What**

remains mostly unsaid—not least because saying it could invite a death sentence—is that the increasing interest in Iran’s pre-Islamic past is also fueling an interest in its ancient Zarathusti religion.

“If we were allowed to convert religions, millions would convert [back] to Zarathusti,” a middle-aged Muslim man in Tehran told me. “I challenge the government to allow conversion out of Islam for even one day.”

But he is unlikely to see that day. While Islam is aggressive in proselytizing itself, it bans, by punishment of death, the conversion of Muslims into other faiths. Making matters more complex for those Iranians looking to return to their “original faith” is that the faith itself does not seem to want them. “There can be no conversion into our religion,” says Sohrab Yazdani, a leading member of the Zarathusti community in the city of Yazd, home to most of Iran’s surviving Zarathustis and their religion’s sacred sites.

Having lived as a persecuted minority for more than 1,300 years, Iran’s Zarathustis have formed a tightly knit and closed community. **Few want to risk incurring the Iranian government’s wrath at a time when President Khatami has eased many of the serious discriminations their community has endured for centuries. Complicating the theological landscape is the notion that being Zarathusti, like being Jewish, is a matter of birth, not conversion.** Any challenge to this closed community of faith is fiercely rejected by most Zarathustis in both Iran and India. **The one movement to convert Iranians and others into Zoroastrianism, started by an Iranian named Ali Jaffery, has run afoul of both the Islamic authorities in Iran and the mainstream Zarathusti community.**

Caught between their current religion, which won’t let them out, and their desired religion, which won’t let them in, **some Iranians are believed to practice Zoroastrianism in secret. But if some take this risk, virtually none are willing to talk about it.** However, there is growing evidence that at least one disenfranchised group in the region has indeed been turning towards Zoroastrianism—the Kurds.

Kurdish religious practices bear close resemblance in ritual style to the Zarathusti faith. The original religion of the Kurds was Yezidism, a religion greatly influenced by Zoroastrianism, and many Kurds were also Zoroastrian until the Islamic conversions that began in the seventh century. Today, about 25 percent of Kurds still practice Yezidism, which is centered around the town of Lalish in northern Iraq (Pocha, J. 2003, ‘Iran’s other Religion’, *The Boston Review*, Summer, Vol. 28, Nos. 3 – 5 <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR28.3/pocha.html> – Accessed 15 January 2009 – Attachment 7).

The attraction which Zoroastrianism holds for some Iranian Muslims is also stated by an Indian Zoroastrian, quoted in 2005 *BBC News* article on Zoroastrian pilgrimages to Iran undertaken by Indians:

Khojeste Mistree of Mumbai (Bombay) is a known Zoroastrian scholar and historian.

He is a self-proclaimed conservative member of India’s tiny Zoroastrian Iranian or Parsi community, trying to uphold the rites and traditions of the pre-Islamic religion of Iran.

A few years ago, he began taking young and old Parsis to Iran to rediscover their religious roots. He says: “These pilgrimages are a wonderful way to teach people something about their roots and religion.” He wants the Parsis to feel “proud to be Zoroastrian”.

Growing trend

The idea seems to have caught on. Every year, hundreds of Indian Parsis are going on a pilgrimage to Iran where they visit Zoroastrian holy sites. And much to Mr Mistree's satisfaction they come back as "proud Zoroastrians".

...The call of the faithful appears to be so strong it has influenced Iranians as well.

Mr Mistree says he has seen Iranian Muslims on the Zoroastrian sites "who go there to rediscover their own Iranian roots" (Ahmed, Z. 2005, 'Zoroastrians search for their roots', *BBC News*, 19 July http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4675343.stm – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 18).

A further indication of the level of interest shown by Iranians in converting to Zoroastrianism and their inability to do so is provided in a 2007 interview with Dr. Khosro Khazai, founder of the European Center for Zoroastrian Studies based in Belgium:

What do the non-born Zoroastrians who are in touch with you expect from the born Zoroastrians? What are their expectations from one another?

At our center, no born Zoroastrian has become a member yet. I do not know why. The born Zoroastrians are generally very kind and sincere to us and participate in our ceremonies. A group of the born Zoroastrians in Iran has become defensive against what we say. For example, when we say the Gathas, the sublime book of Zarathushtra, is the only sacred book that has come from the Iranian culture, they say "What is Avesta then? Avesta is very dear to us. But during these times of clash of cultures, we should present only those things to the people that are acceptable to them. We should win this cultural struggle and we will do, no doubt about it!

The book of Gathas is based on the Supreme Wisdom and contains the spoken words of Zarathushtra. The Iranians who study them say "Alas that we have had this book and not been aware of it." But, in general, the born Zoroastrians throughout the world do cooperate with us.

Most of the financial contributions to our center come from the born Zoroastrians. Our achievements and completed projects are made possible with their full cooperation and we do not see ourselves separate from them. Our goals are the same. Maybe our approaches are different due to the historical events which we are all familiar with.

We receive 500 to 600 letters a month from those who want to become Zoroastrian.

They, at first, go to the centers in Tehran, Yazd and Kerman but are normally not accepted there and are not even allowed to enter the centers. They say that the born Zoroastrians do not help them to become Zoroastrian.

This is understandable because of the current Iranian government policies. The government in Iran, fearful of the increasing number of the Iranian people adopting the tradition of their ancestors, has put a lot of pressure on the Zoroastrian centers not to allow Iranians become Zoroastrian.

...Every night of the week until 1h30 AM. I am at my computer replying to people's letters received mainly from Iran ('An Interview with Dr. Khosro Khazai: Founder of the European Center for Zoroastrian Studies' 2007, European Centre For Zoroastrian Studies website, 6 August <http://www.gatha.org/english/articles/000290.html> – Accessed 21 January 2009 – Attachment 8).

Massoume Price in *Iran's diverse peoples: A Reference Sourcebook* describes both the growth in interest in Zoroastrianism in and outside Iran and the relationship between this community and the majority of Iranians:

They [Zoroastrians] do not accept converts, but since the revolution they have become very popular; many Iranians, including some Bahai's declare themselves to be Zoroastrians, and there are some unofficial organizations of the new Zoroastrians, with little connection to the old established associations...Their [Zoroastrian's] traditional symbols have become very popular among Iranians, especially the youth.

...There has been a resurgence of interest in Zoroastrianism, both in Iran and among Iranian emigrants outside the country...The Zoroastrian festivals are celebrated with zest and grandeur by almost all Iranians. Although the celebrations in Iran have evolved into defiance, outside the country they have become instruments for preserving the culture. Iranians both inside and outside Iran have begun observing other occasions that traditionally were exclusive to the Zoroastrians, such as Mihregan, which celebrates the ancient deity Mihr or Mithra, and the Festival of Sadeh...Zoroastrian are different from the rest of the religious minorities. They often emphasize the fact that their connection is to the land itself and that they are the true natives of the country. Many Iranians have affinity for them...The resurgence of sympathy for the pre-Islamic Iran has made them more confident. They are subject to all restrictions imposed on non-Muslims but have fared better under the Islamic Republic than other religious minorities" (Price, M. 2005, *Iran's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, pp.317-318, Google Books website http://books.google.com.au/books?id=gzpdq679oJwC&pg=PA317&lpg=PA317&dq=zoroastrian+practise+OR+ceremony+OR+private+%22in+tehran+%22&source=web&ots=yA73DyZ8xj&sig=6sK5TnAq7RPD1HU0Ih9JZjVNbiQ&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 23).

An otherwise unknown commentator to a 2008 article on Muslim converts to Christianity in Iran on the The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting website, Paolo Vizzini, gives the following information on Muslim converts to Zoroastrianism and their treatment by the government:

Paolo Vizzini|Rome|2008-05-10 23:15:12.0

I'm a Catholic, but bit annoyed that everyone talks about Christian converts and their prosecution in Iran, as no other converts exist in Iran. **I was working in Iran between 1998 and 2001 and know that few of my Iranian friends' relatives and friends were executed because of their adherence to Zoroastrian faith. Since mid 1980s many Iranians have been converting to Zoroastrianism and they were ended in prison or faced execution. Unfortunately the Zoroastrian community as they do not publicly accept conversion, as well as fear of their own survival have not publicly condemned the regime's action. The Mullahs' regime have executed many ex-Muslim converts to Zoroastrian and claimed they were drug dealers, members of MKO, or even were homosexuals.** They lost their lives just because they didn't want to be a Muslim anymore! I think the West should attack not only the nuclear facilities but also all the regimes military bases and centres in order to help Iranians to get rid of this oppressive regime (Vizzini, P. 2008 'Comment on article: In Iran, Covert Christian Converts Live With Secrecy and Fear – A draft Iranian law would mandate the death penalty for apostasy', The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting website, 10 May <http://pulitzercenter.org/openitem.cfm?id=932> – Accessed 21 January 2009 – Attachment 19).

Drafting of new law on Apostasy:

In 2008 the Iranian parliament began considering a new law to codify *inter alia* punishments for apostasy. The 2008 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom gives the following summary of the situation of non-Muslim minorities in Iran and the new apostasy law:

Since August 2005, the Iranian government has intensified its campaign against non-Muslim religious minorities. A consistent stream of virulent and inflammatory statements by political and religious leaders and an increase in harassment and imprisonment of, and physical attacks against, these groups indicate a renewal of the kind of oppression seen in previous years.

Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of the Guardian Council, has publicly attacked non-Muslims and referred to them as —sinful animals and —corrupt. In November 2005, after publicly criticizing Ayatollah Jannati's remarks, the lone Zoroastrian member of the Iranian parliament was charged with the —dissemination of false information, slander and insult by Iranian authorities, although the case never went to trial. In March 2006, the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief confirmed that religious freedom conditions are worsening for all religious minorities in Iran, particularly Baha'is. **In early 2008, the Iranian parliament began considering a new law that would impose serious punishments, including the death penalty, on converts from Islam.**

Although the Iranian government has in the past applied the death penalty for apostasy under Islamic law, it has not been explicitly codified. If this recently proposed penal code is passed, it would seriously endanger the lives of all converts from Islam, particularly members of the Baha'i faith, who are already considered apostates, even if they are fourth- or fifth-generation Baha'i adherents (US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2008, *2008 Annual Report*, May www.uscirf.gov/images/AR2008/iran.pdf – Accessed 4 February 2009 – Attachment 20).

The Iran.org website, operated by the Foundation for Democracy in Iran which is a private, non-profit organization established with grants from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to promote democracy and human rights in Iran, also commented on the new apostasy law. According to this report, the new law would also include “an extraterritoriality provision that enables Iran to hunt down “apostates” around the world”:

March 10, 2008: On the eve of sham elections, Iranian parliament hears apostasy law. The Iranian Parliament is considering legislation that would make apostasy a crime punishable by death. While similar provisions are in force through Shari'a law courts in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the new law if adopted will become part of Iran's penal code. **Article 5 of the proposed law institutes the death penalty for anyone who is born of Muslim who professes another religion after the age of majority and includes an extraterritoriality provision that enables Iran to hunt down “apostates” around the world.** “This proposed law goes against all human rights norms and standards, including international treaties that Iran itself has agreed to,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations. “The text uses the word Hadd, meaning that it explicitly sets death as a fixed punishment that cannot be changed, reduced or annulled,” said Ms. Dugal. “In the past, the death penalty has been handed down -- and also carried out -- in apostasy cases, but it has never before been set down in law. Click here for a Persian language PDF of the draft law; here for an English translation (‘On the eve of sham elections, Iranian parliament hears apostasy law’ 2008, Iran.com website, 10 March <http://www.iran.org/> – Accessed 30 January 2009 – Attachment 21).

The English translation referred to here is limited to several articles of the proposed new law:
<http://www.iran.org/humanrights/2008-apostasy-eng.pdf>

Additional Information:

A 2002 UK judicial review judgment of an Immigration Appeal Tribunal's decision involving issues of conversion to Zoroastrianism in Iran is provided in Attachment 22 (High Court Of Justice in Northern Ireland 2002, *In The Matter Of An Application By Ali Reza Razeghi For Judicial Review And In The Matter Of A Decision By The Immigration Appeal Tribunal*, Northern Ireland Court Service website, 25 November
http://www.courtsni.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6C3A52E4-6815-4082-B805-9F5142133C19/0/j_j_COGC3781.htm – Accessed 5 February 2009 – Attachment 22).

A selection on ten images showing various aspects of the Zoroastrian community is available on the *BBC News* website: 'In pictures: Zoroastrians in Iran' (undated), *BBC News*,
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/middle_east_zoroastrians_in_iran/html/1.stm.

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom website www.uscirf.gov/

International News & Politics

BBC News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

Time <http://www.time.com/>

The Boston Review <http://www.bostonreview.net>

The New York Times <http://query.nytimes.com/>

Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

Region Specific Links

Iran.com website <http://www.iran.org/>

Topic Specific Links

Avesta – Zoroastrian Archives website <http://www.avesta.org/>

World Zoroastrian News Network website <http://wznn.blogfa.com/>

European Centre for Zoroastrian Studies website <http://www.gatha.org/>

The Restored Zarathushtrian Community website <http://www.zoroastrianism.cc/>

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. 'Zoroastrianism at a glance' (undated), *BBC News* website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian/ata glance/glance.shtml> – Accessed 19 January 2009.
2. Bowker, J. ed. 2000, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford University Press, London. (Sydney MRT-RRT Library)
3. 'Frequently asked questions on Zoroastrianism and the Avesta' (undated), Avesta – Zoroastrian Archives website <http://www.avesta.org/zfaq.html> – Accessed 2 February 2009.
4. Guzder, D. 2008, 'The Last of the Zoroastrians', *Time*, 9 December <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1864931,00.html> – Accessed 15 January 2009.
5. UK Home Office 2008, *Country of Origin Information Report – Iran*, 15 August.
6. 'Non-Zoroastrian Iranians Can Attend Two Zoroastrian Ceremonies' 2008, World Zoroastrian News Network website, 7 October <http://wznn.blogfa.com/post-62.aspx> – Accessed 15 January 2009.
7. Pocha, J. 2003, 'Iran's other Religion', *The Boston Review*, Summer, Vol. 28, Nos. 3 – 5 <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR28.3/pocha.html> – Accessed 15 January 2009.
8. 'An Interview with Dr. Khosro Khazai: Founder of the European Center for Zoroastrian Studies' 2007, European Centre For Zoroastrian Studies website, 6 August <http://www.gatha.org/english/articles/000290.html> – Accessed 21 January 2009.
9. 'ZOROASTRIANISM – Who fears God, does not know God – Conversion in Mazdayasna' (undated), The Restored Zarathushtrian Community website http://www.zoroastrianism.cc/conversion_in_mazdayasna.html – Accessed 29 January 2009.
10. 'Stephen Williamson's Zarathushtrian Ceremony' 2005, EFN.org website, 29 January <http://www.efn.org/~opal/stevezphotos.html> – Accessed 3 February 2009.
11. Sanasarian, E. 2000, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 48-50.
12. 'Tehran new Fire Temple' 2008, Fravahr.org website, 31 December <http://www.fravahr.org/spip.php?article399> – Accessed 5 February 2009.
13. York, G. 2000, 'Living precariously in Islamic Iran One of the world's oldest faiths is losing its adherents in the land of its birth', *The Globe and Mail*, 11 March. (FACTIVA)
14. Goodstein, L. 2006, 'Zoroastrians Keep the Faith, and Keep Dwindling', *The New York Times*, 6 September

- <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B04E7DA1631F935A3575AC0A9609C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all> – Accessed 20 January 2009.
15. Vick, K. 2006, 'Extremist Image Masks Iranians' Many Faiths', *Washington Post*, 18 June <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/17/AR2006061700824.html> – Accessed 20 January 2009.
 16. 'Zoroastrians make Iran pilgrimage' 2004, *BBC News*, 17 June http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3816297.stm – Accessed 20 January 2009.
 17. 'Zoroaster commemoration ceremony held in Tehran' 2007, Payvand News website, 27 December <http://www.payvand.com/news/07/dec/1261.html> – Accessed 3 February 2009.
 18. Ahmed, Z. 2005, 'Zoroastrians search for their roots', *BBC News*, 19 July http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4675343.stm – Accessed 29 January 2009.
 19. Vizzini, P. 2008 'Comment on article: In Iran, Covert Christian Converts Live With Secrecy and Fear – A draft Iranian law would mandate the death penalty for apostasy', The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting website, 10 May <http://pulitzercenter.org/openitem.cfm?id=932> – Accessed 21 January 2009.
 20. US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2008, *2008 Annual Report*, May www.uscirf.gov/images/AR2008/iran.pdf – Accessed 4 February 2009.
 21. 'On the eve of sham elections, Iranian parliament hears apostasy law' 2008, Iran.com website, 10 March <http://www.iran.org/> – Accessed 30 January 2009.
 22. High Court Of Justice in Northern Ireland 2002, *In The Matter Of An Application By Ali Reza Razeghi For Judicial Review And In The Matter Of A Decision By The Immigration Appeal Tribunal*, Northern Ireland Court Service website, 25 November http://www.courtsni.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6C3A52E4-6815-4082-B805-9F5142133C19/0/j_j_COGC3781.htm – Accessed 5 February 2009.
 23. Price, M. 2005, *Iran's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, , pp.317-318, Google Books website