

January

Baha'i man sentenced to four years of prison

Foad Khanjani who was expelled from university (for following the Baha'i faith) was sentenced to four years of prison in the 28th branch of the Revolutionary Court headed by Judge Moqiseh. According to reports, Khanjani was arrested on April 27, 2010 after being summoned to the Intelligence Agency. He was also summoned to the Intelligence Agency on March 2, 2010. (Jaras Website – Jan. 13, 2011)

<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/30246>

Tehran Prosecutor threatens new wave of attack against Iranian evangelical Christians

Tehran Governor Morteza Tamadon, compared evangelical Christians to the Taliban and Wahhabis and called their faith a deviated and corrupt movement in Christianity saying that their leaders would be arrested and firmly dealt with.

According to the IRNA state-run news agency, Morteza Tamadon said on Tuesday that various types of false, deviated and corrupt cults have sharpened their teeth in the field of our beliefs' and are active in some regions.

One of these movements is a corrupt and deviated one that promotes its ideas under the cover of evangelical activities via cultural circles in Britain.

The Tehran Governor also stressed that evangelical activities were related to the —British military and cultural attack against Iran and said, the heads of this movement in Tehran have been trapped and a larger number will be arrested in the near future. (IRNA state-run news agency, Radio Farda – Jan. 4, 2011)

Iran arrests more than 60 Christians

Unofficial sources have said that more than 60 Christians have been summoned by the Intelligence Agency or arrested in their homes by plainclothes agents. The detainees were mostly arrested in Tehran and a number of other Iranian cities and were mostly temporarily released after interrogations and forced pledges.

The large Christian community in Iran has been under great pressure by security forces on the days leading to Christmas and the New Year. Ali Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran warned against the growth and spread of home churches for the first time in a speech in Qom on October 19, 2010. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Jan. 4, 2011) <http://www.hra-news5.info/component/content/article/55-1389-01-14-13-18-46/6081-1.html>

Iran arrests Christian Pastor on New Years

Agents of the Intelligence Agency summoned Leonard Keshishian, the pastor of the Church of the Robani Order in Isfahan to the Intelligence Agency in this town on Friday January 1 and arrested him.

This Christian pastor was summoned to the Intelligence Agency a few hours before the New Years celebration and was arrested after going to the Intelligence Agency. There is no news on his current whereabouts.

His church has had no activities other than its usual weekly services and prayers.

In the past year, the Churches of the Robani Order in Shahin Shahr and Orumieh were forced to close down and the Central Church of the Robani Order has faced limitations in holding its services in Farsi. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Jan. 5, 2011)



Iran continues crack down on Christians

According to the security police, an evangelical Christian gang made up of two protestant Christians and a number of Muslims was destroyed in Arak.

The Aria News Agency which is close to the Iranian government said that with the efforts of intelligence elements in the Public Security Police, an Evangelical Christian gang was destroyed.

After this report was published by state-run media, we were informed that two Christian converts identified as Mojtaba, 36 and a woman named Shahin were arrested by security forces. There are no reports on their condition. According to reports, Shahin is 50 years old, married and suffers from diabetes. (Mohabat News – Jan. 10, 2011)

Iran expels and threatens Baha'i student from university

Bahman Mokhtari, a student who has been studying agricultural engineering at the Birjand University for 9 semesters was expelled from this university for being a Baha'i.

The Birjand University Protection Department has in the last few semesters put pressure on him to renounce Baha'ism.

These pressures continued until a week ago because he refused to renounce his faith until it was announced to him that he was expelled and that he had to hand in all of his university cards.

After his expulsion, Birjand University heads threatened that if he informed the media about his expulsion, he would be arrested.

In the past weeks, we have witnessed a wave of expulsions of Baha'i students from universities in Iran. (Committee of Human Rights Reporters – Jan. 12, 2011)

Female Baha'i student expelled from university

A student in the Bahonar University in Kerman was expelled because of her religion and was denied the right to education.

According to reports, Bahar Iqani, who had been accepted in this university this year and was studying physics, was expelled last Sunday for being a Baha'i.

The heads of this university openly announced that she was expelled for adhering to Baha'ism. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Jan. 12, 2011) <http://www.hra-news5.info/1389-01-27-05-26-23/6234-1.html>

Iran rounds up Christians in crackdown

Iran has arrested about 70 Christians since Christmas in a crackdown that demonstrates the limits of religious tolerance by Islamic leaders who often boast they provide room for other faiths. The latest raids have targeted grass-roots Christian groups Iran describes as "hard-liners" who pose a threat to the Islamic state. Authorities increasingly view them with suspicions that range from trying to convert Muslims to being possible footholds for foreign influence. Christian activists claim their Iranian brethren are being persecuted simply for worshipping outside officially sanctioned mainstream churches. Caught in the middle is the small community of Iranian Christians who get together for prayer and Bible readings in private residences and out of sight of authorities. They are part of a wider "house church" movement that has taken root in other places with tight controls on Christian activities such as China and Indonesia. Iran's constitution gives protected status to Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, but many religious minorities sense growing pressures from the Islamic state as hard-edged forces such as the powerful Revolutionary Guard exert more influence. There are few social barriers separating Muslims and Iran's religious minorities such as separate neighborhoods or universities. But they are effectively blocked from high government and military posts... In past years, authorities have staged arrests on Christians and other religious minorities, but the latest sweeps appears to be among the biggest and most coordinated... Groups monitoring Christian affairs in the Islamic world say Iranian authorities see the unregulated Christian gatherings as both a potential breeding ground for political opposition and suspect they may try to convert Muslim in violation of Iran's strict apostasy laws - which are common throughout the Muslim world and have at times fed extremist violence against Christians and others. Tehran Governor Morteza Tamadon described the Christians as "hard-line" missionaries who have "inserted themselves into Islam like a parasite," according to the official Islamic Republic News Agency. He also suggested that the Christians could have links to Britain - an accusation within Iran that refers to political opposition groups Tehran claims are backed by the West... The wave of arrests began Christmas morning and since then, opposition websites have reported 70 Christians arrested, including those regarded as pastors in the house church movement. Many were later released, but the reports say more than a dozen remain in detention and officials have hinted more raids are possible. It's still unclear what charges could be brought against the jailed Christians. But allegations of trying to convert Muslims could bring a death sentence...

In recent months, some members of Iran's Armenian community also have been detained on unspecified allegations of working to undermine the state, the Iranian Christian News Agency reported. Iranian officials have not given details of the reported detentions. On Friday, a U.S. watchdog group on religious tolerance expressed concern over the recent arrests. "What's most troubling about this wave of detentions is the fact that Iran is continuing its recent

trend of targeting evangelical Christians, which they've been doing for years, and also leaders from the recognized and protected Armenian Christian community," said Leonard Leo, chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent government advisory panel. Iranian authorities have come down hard on religious groups seen as threats to Islam, including the Baha'is whose faith was founded in the 19th century by a Persian nobleman considered a prophet by his followers. Baha'is are not recognized as official religious minority in Iran's Constitution. There are no accurate figures on the number of Christians in the "house church" movement or followers outside established denominations. But the manager of the Iranian Christian News Agency, Saman Kamvar, said authorities likely perceive some kind of challenge to the religious status quo and are "feeling insecure." Kamvar attributes the stepped up raids against Christians to comments last month by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei denouncing the growth of private house churches. "This, in my opinion, was a green light to the other authorities to crack down on them," Kamvar said from Canada, where he now lives. (AP – Jan. 12, 2011)

Iran arrests elderly Christian couple



According to reports from Mashhad in the Khorasan Province, a Christian couple was arrested in their home.

Sources have identified them as Mr. Hassan Razavi Derakhshi, 65, who is an accountant and his wife Paria, 61 years old who is a retired teacher.

Since their arrest on December 27, 2009, Mr. Razavi was only allowed two short phone calls to tell his family that he was in good health.

Informed sources have said that this couple was arrested because their home was used for praying and worshipping sessions and it has been reported that this converted Christian couple held a ceremony in their home on December 22 to

celebrate the birth of Christ.

According to reports, Mrs. Razavi has had an operation on her spinal cord because of an accident and has to be under special care and has recently had a gum surgery which has been left incomplete.

In light of the age of the detainees, their health and the fact that they are kept in a state of limbo in prison, their family and relatives are extremely concerned about them. (Mohabat News – Jan. 13, 2011)

Iran arrests 4 Christians in Isfahan

Four Christians identified as Basiroddin Amini, Houman, Rafi and his wife Mrs. Yasi were arrested in separate organized measures on Thursday December 29 in Isfahan.

According to reports, in a pre-planned measure, security agents raided their homes and arrested them.

Security agents also conducted searches in their homes and seized some of their personal belongings including their computers, books, CD's and Christian publications.

These four Christian converts were most likely transferred to Tehran and are in cellblock 209 in Evin Prison along with other Christians who were arrested in other towns. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Jan. 17, 2011)

<http://www.hra-news5.info/1389-01-27-05-24-07/6308-1.html>

Iran continues persecution of Iranian Christian community

According to reports, Ibrahim Firouzi, a converted Christian living in Robat Karim was arrested by security forces. With the persistence of the widespread suppression of Christian converts, especially in Tehran, on Saturday January 8, 2011, four plainclothes agents entered the home of Ibrahim Firouzi in the Keikavar Township in Robat Karim (located 20 kilometers southwest of Tehran), and conducted a complete search of his home after arresting him. These security forces seized some of his personal belonging including his bible and cellphone and took him to an unknown location.

According to this report, Firouzi, 26, was taken for initial interrogations after his arrest and was temporarily released on that day after giving a pledge.

He was summoned on January 9 by the Intelligence Agency and was released after answering a few questions. Firouzi was arrested on January 11 in his father's home when a number of plainclothes agents unexpectedly entered the home and was taken away without any explanations. There is no information on his whereabouts.

Despite his family's constant appeals to judicial and security officials, no explanations regarding his arrest has been given to them. Unofficial sources have said that the court has asked his family to post a 40 million toman (about 40,000 dollar) bail for their son's temporary release. (Mohabat News Website, Iran Press News website – Jan. 18, 2011)

Iran bans another Baha'i student from education

Shahrouz Shahid Zadeh, a Baha'i student in Yazd who was a third year university student in the School of Natural Resources Engineering in Yazd University was expelled from this university.

According to reports, Mr. Shahidzadeh, who had finished his fifth semester, was expelled. (Student Committee in Defense of Political Prisoners – Jan. 24, 2011)

Iran arrests another Christian man in Karaj



Behnam Irani, a Christian man was summoned today by the Karaj court because of a personal complaint against him. He was arrested and taken to an unknown location after he left the court.

This is while no one showed up in the court as a complainant.

Last week, a court in Karaj, sentenced him to one year of prison on charges of preaching and propagating Christianity'.

Irani was also arrested in 2006 when he was detained for 10 days in a solitary cell and on April 14, 2010 when he was detained for 76 days in a solitary cell in Rajayi Shahr Prison in Karaj. He was sentenced to 5 years of prison for this case on charges of propagating against the government and preaching Christianity by a revolutionary court branch. (Committee for Human Rights Reporters – Jan. 25, 2011)

Baha'i prisoner in critical condition denied medical treatment

The health of Baha'i prison Siamak Iqayi is in a dangerous state.

According to reports, he has been in Semnan Prison since November 6, 2011 to serve his 3 year prison term and has suffered four respiratory attacks during this time to the point that he was given oxygen and a pill to return to a somewhat normal state.

According to a specialist lung doctor, he is very sensitive to cigarette smoke. Despite this, he is kept in cellblock with more than 20 smokers and the door of the cellblock is sometimes kept shut the whole day.

Despite the fact that two doctors have stressed that Mr. Iqayi has to be hospitalized immediately for treatment, officials have done nothing to try to improve his condition.

Notably, there is a cellblock in Semnan Prison which imposes limitations for smokers. Despite Iqani's request to be transferred there, the head of the cellblock who introduces himself as a psychiatrist has said that he has to change his religion to be transferred. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Jan. 27, 2011)

February

Iran sentences Baha'i man to 5 years of prison

Nima Haqar, a Baha'i resident of Tehran, was sentenced to five years of prison on February 1 by the 28th branch of the Revolutionary Court headed by Judge Moqiseh.

Haqar was released from Evin Prison on March 3, 2009 after 37 days of detention. Notably he was summoned to the Intelligence Agency over the phone on February 1, 2009 and was arrested at the Intelligence Agency. (Population of Combat against Educational Discrimination – Feb. 2, 2011)



Iran arrests 9 Sunnis under false pretexts in Sardasht

Nine Sunni citizens were arrested in Sardasht only in the last month. According to reports from Sunni websites, they have been charged with being members of the al-Qaida and preaching Wahhabi Islam. This is while Sunnis in this

region are known for being lenient in their religion and Wahhabi influences have no history in this region. (Saham News Website – Feb. 2, 2011)

Iran arrests two Baha'is in Mashhad

Two Baha'i citizens identified as Ziaieh Es-haqi (Shoaie) and Mr. Farhad Amri were arrested in Mashhad. According to reports, security forces attacked the home of the Shoaie family and seized books, computers and documents and subsequently arrested Mrs. Es-haqi and Mr. Amri. Notably, Amri is the son-in law of Mrs. Es-haqi. There are still no reports on their whereabouts. (Population of Combat against Educational Discrimination – Feb. 2, 2011)

Iran arrests Sunni cleric in Tehran

According to reports, Abidollah Mosa Zadeh was arrested by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence. This Sunni cleric has been living in Tehran for a few years and is the representative of Mulavi Abdolhamid in this city. He went to Zahedan last week where he stayed for a few days and was arrested for unknown reasons upon his return to Tehran. He has been taken to an unknown location. (Sunni News – Feb. 8, 2011)

<http://www.iranpressnews.com/source/092100.htm>

Iran sentences Baha'i children rights activist to 4 years of prison



Afshin Heiratian who works for the rights of child laborers and homeless children was sentenced to four years of prison by the Tehran Revolutionary Court.

According to reports, one of his charges is writing and publishing several articles on child laborers and International Children's Day.

Heiratian was arrested on June 3, 2010 outside the Home of Artists building and after two months of detention, was released on bail.

This Baha'i man was put under severe pressure while in cellblock 209 in Evin Prison to make televised confessions. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Feb. 9, 2011)

<http://www.hra-news5.info/1389-01-27-05-29-40/6697-1.html>

Families fear for Baha'is jailed in Iran - Lead



Prison conditions are worsening for seven leaders of Iran's Bahai community who are staying in cramped cells with poor sanitation alongside common criminals, US-based relatives said Wednesday.

Iran drew international condemnation in 2008 for arresting leaders of the Bahai faith, which has no clergy. The religion was founded in Iran in 19th century and is anathema to the nation's Islamic clerical regime.

Relatives said the seven Bahai were each given 20 years in prison and that the sentences were later lowered to 10 years, although the reduction was made known verbally and not through any official statement.

Iraj Kamalabadi, whose sister Fariba Kamalabadi is among the seven, said the Bahai leaders were transferred last year to Gohardasht prison where violent criminals stay in lice-infested cells next to overflowing sewers.

I don't think that there is any light at the end of the tunnel at this point of time,' Kamalabadi said in a meeting with the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, an autonomous government body.

Their condition continues to deteriorate and there is no improvement so far that we have seen,' he said.

Kamal Khanjani, the brother of jailed 77-year-old Bahai leader Jamaloddin Khanjani, said that five prisoners were crammed into each cell measuring three by five meters (10 by 16 feet).

Khanjani said he was allowed to speak by telephone once with his brother and, 'because of his age and the condition of his prison, I knew his health was deteriorating'.

But when he was talking to me, his voice was wonderful and strong,' Khanjani said.

The relatives were optimistic on one point -- they believed the Bahai have won sympathy among prisoners through their deeds and backgrounds. Jamaloddin Khanjani is a successful businessman, while Fariba Kamalabadi is a developmental psychologist.

In general, the Iranian people have developed further respect and are a lot more sympathetic to their plight,' Iraj Kamalabadi said.

Iran tried the Bahai leaders on charges of spying for foreigners, spreading corruption, undermining Islam and cooperating with Israel...

The Bahai faith now has seven million followers around the world, including 300,000 in Iran -- where its members are barred from higher education and government posts.

Leonard Leo, the chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, called Iran's treatment of the Bahai community 'outrageous' and supported intensified pressure by the United States.

Leo pointed to the Iran Sanctions Act signed last year by President Barack Obama. The law takes aim at Iranians involved in human rights abuses, adding the issue to US concerns with the Islamic republic such as its nuclear program.

There are many other things, hopefully, that we can do in waging a broad-based campaign to stop the repression and to defend the rights of not only your family members and brethren but any other Bahais,' Leo said. (AFP – Feb. 9, 2011)

Iran arrests Baha'i man in Sari



Behzad Zabihi Mahforouzaki, a Baha'i resident of Sari was arrested this morning.

According to reports, he was summoned to the Intelligence Agency and was arrested after going there.

Before this on January 30, six intelligence agents searched his home and his eyeglass shop and seized his books, CD's, religious pictures and computer. These agents then threatened that they would close down his shop and summoned him to the Intelligence Agency to answer some questions.

Mr. Zabihi is still detained and his family has no information on his whereabouts. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Feb. 22, 2011) <http://www.hra-news.org/1389-01-27-05-24-07/6989-1.html>

Baha'i man sentenced to three years of prison and a fine

Payam Eghsani, a Baha'i resident of Tehran was sentenced to three years of prison and a 400,000 toman (about 400 dollar) fine by the 28th branch of the Revolutionary Court.

Eghsani was arrested before on January 14, 2009 along with 11 other Baha'is and his home was searched by security forces. (Committee of Human Rights Reporters – Feb. 27, 2011)

<http://www.rahana.org/archives/36723>



March

Iran continues its harassment and persecution of Dervishes in Iran

On Saturday, 10 Gonabadi Dervishes were tried en masse in Borujerd. One of the lawyers of the Dervishes said after the trial that a new date was announced to see to the other charges of Dervishes in the future. At the same time, 189 other Dervishes were been summoned to court...

Before this, the representatives of the Dervishes had announced that 189 Dervishes were group trialed, a charge which was denied by the Borujerd Judiciary.

The Borujerd Judiciary said on March 5 that the Dervishes were charged with 'disrupting public order', spreading propaganda against the government and insulting'. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Mar. 6, 2011)

Iran arrests Baha'is in Kerman and Tehran

The Revolutionary and Public Prosecutor of Bam announced the arrest of a number of Baha'i citizens in Bam, Kerman and Tehran.

According to the state-run ISNA news agency, Mohammad-Reza Sanjari, the Bam Prosecutor said that these people were identified and arrested during a nine month working period of intelligence agents.

He said that they were arrested for encouraging and spreading Baha'ism under the cover of educational and cultural activities in a number of kindergartens in Bam, Kerman and Tehran'...

The human rights activists in Iran reported on March 5 that Sahar Biram Abadi, a children's rights activist who is a Baha'i resident of Kerman and worked in a charity for children in Bam was arrested. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Mar. 12, 2011)

Iran arrests four Baha'is in Semnan

Four Baha'i residents of Semnan identified as Zohreh Tabiyanian, Elham Motearefi, Taraneh Ehsani and Puya Tabiyanian were arrested by intelligence agents.

According to reports, at 7 am today, Semnan Intelligence agents went to the home of Ms. Zohreh Nik Ayin (Tabiyanian), Elham Rozbehi (Motearefi), Tareneh Ehsani and Puya Tabiyanian and after showing them a copy of a search warrant which did not even resemble a real search warrant, entered the home.

These forces arrested all four of them after searching the home and confiscating some of their belongings. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Mar. 12, 2011)

Iran arrests Sunnis in Kurdistan

In the past few days, at least three Sunni residents of Saqez and Baneh in Kurdistan were arrested by security forces. According to reports, Kak Mohammad-Jamal Habaki who is a follower of Kak Ahmad Moftizadeh was arrested on March 8 in Saqez and was taken to an unknown location.

He is a chemistry teacher in Saqez schools and was arrested in his place of work. There are unconfirmed reports that he was transferred to the Sanandaj Intelligence Agency on Wednesday.

There is still no news on his whereabouts and why he was arrested.

This is while Yasin Qaderi and Osman Abdi who are also followers of the late Kak Ahmad Moftizadeh were arrested on January 4 in Baneh by security forces. They were initially taken to the Central Sanandaj Prison and were then returned to Baneh. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Mar. 13, 2011)

Security forces burn more than 300 bibles in Salmas in ongoing harassment of Iranian Christians

The Smuggled Goods Inspection Bureau burned 300 bibles with the coordination of security forces and Revolutionary Guards Corps. These bibles were found in a bus going through a checkpoint.

According to reports, on Saturday February 8 more than 300 bibles were found by the Smuggled Goods Inspection Bureau with the cooperation of the RGC in West Azarbaijan's Salmas. Other smuggled goods including alcoholic beverages were also found. These goods were burned during a ceremony by security forces in Darishak Village.

This is while in a similar measure in June 2010, security forces burned hundreds of bibles in Sardasht and reports of this measure were openly covered by state run media.

Notably, Iranian Christians are banned from printing the bible and have to provide this book from outside of the country which is mostly banned from legal methods. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Mar. 13, 2011)

All Baha'i employees of Tehran factory fired on eve of Persian New Year

Two months after the arrest of the head of the Achilan Dar Factory and five of its employees by agents of the Revolutionary Guards Forces Intelligence Department, all the Baha'i employees and workers of this factory in Tehran and Mashhad were fired on orders of the RGC Intelligence Department.

According to reports, it is still not clear how many people were fired but more than 25 Baha'is were fired on the eve of the Persian New Year. (Human Rights Activists – Mar. 19, 2011)

Iran arrests three bookstore employees for selling Baha'i books

Three employees of a bookstore in Kermanshah were arrested and transferred to the Dizel Abad Prison in Kermanshah.

According to reports, security forces went to the Payizan Bookstore in Kermanshah and arrested three of its employees on charges of selling Baha'i books. They were transferred to Dizel Abad Prison a few days ago after being interrogated. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Mar. 21, 2011)

April

Two Kurd traders targeted by security forces in critical condition in hospital

In the beginning of the (Persian) New Year, two Kurd traders identified as Jamal and Farshad were shot and wounded by security forces. Three weeks after this incident, the condition of these two young men is still deteriorating. Jamal, who is in a hospital in Sanandaj, has lost one of his legs and doctors have told his family that they have to cut off his leg. Farshad has lost one of his eyes after being shot at and a bullet hit his left thigh. Despite this, he refuses to go to the hospital in fear of being arrested and was only given first aid in a hospital in Iraq's Kurdistan. (Iran Press News – Apr. 5, 2011)

Christian convert beaten and harassed in prison

Ibrahim Firouzi is a Christian prisoner who was taken to Revolutionary Court after more than three months of detention to defend himself.

He was returned back to the Rajayi Shahr Prison in Karaj after being beaten by a security agent.

According to reports, on April 18, he was taken to the Robat Karim police station to be present in a trial in the Revolutionary Court in this city. After defending himself in court, he was once again transferred to Rajayi Shahr Prison.

This 26 year old man was detained in the Robat Karim police station for one night where he was beaten by an officer identified as Seyed Habib Moussavi Far. The heads of the police station also deprived him of food and water while he was detained there.

Ibrahim Firouzi is a Christian convert from Robat Karim and was arrested by security forces on January 11, 2011 during a raid to his home. After multiple interrogations, he was taken to the Rajayi Shahr Prison in Karaj.

His first court session was on January 29, 2011 in the Robat Karim Revolutionary Court where he was charged with evangelical activities, possessing a bible, having communications with foreign elements and apostasy. One of his friends said in this regard, —because of his financial state; he was unable to hire a lawyer. After the first court session, judicial officials issued a 40 million toman (about 40,000 dollar) bail order for him but his family was not able to pay the bail and he is still in prison. (Iranian Christians News Agency Mohabat News – Apr. 24, 2011)

Kurd man shot and injured by security forces in border region

On Tuesday April 26, security forces in the Doleye region in the town of Marivan opened fire on a number of Kurd citizens under the suspicion that they were carrying smuggled goods. As a result of the barrage of bullets, a man identified as Mohammad Tavana was severely wounded. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Apr. 28, 2011)

May

71 year old Baha'i prisoner beaten in Tankabon Prison, denied medicine

Vajiollah Mirza Golpour, a Baha'i prisoner detained in the Tankabon Prison by the Ministry of Intelligence was beaten.

This Baha'i prisoner was transferred from the Sari Intelligence Agency to the Kachoyi Detention Center and then to the quarantine section in Tankabon Prison.

According to informed sources, Mirza Golpour was severely beaten in the head and legs and was put under pressure to confess.

Interrogators on his case and prison officials have denied this 71 year old prisoner his heart medicine for the past six days. (Committee of Human Rights Reporters – May 4, 2011)

Christian Pastors and Churchgoers Sentenced to Death and Imprisonment

Religious Practices and Proselytizing Treated as Criminal Acts



From left: Pastor Abdolreza Ali-Haghnejad, Zainab Bahremend, and Pastor Behrouz Sadegh-Khanjani

Iranian authorities should end the judicial persecution of members of the evangelical protestant Church of Iran and other churches, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran said today.

Specifically, the Campaign appeals to Iran's Judiciary to overturn criminal sentences of church members including a death sentence for Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani and prison term for Pastor Behrouz Sadegh-Khanjani.

Iranian authorities must stop targeting religious groups and practices they find threatening, acts which violate international and Iranian law, said Aaron Rhodes, a spokesperson for the Campaign.

It is deeply hypocritical to criticize European countries for discriminatory policies against Muslims while the Iranian government throws Christians and members of other minority religions into prison and sentences some to death, Rhodes added.

During the 16th special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, in April 2011, the Iranian government criticized the EU and US for discrimination against religious minorities. On 12 April 2011, Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Hosseini said, We expect European countries to guarantee the individual and social freedoms of Muslims, according to the state-controlled Press TV.

Throughout 2010 and 2011, dozens of members of the nationwide protestant group, the Church of Iran, have been criminally prosecuted and punished merely for their religious beliefs and practices. On 1 May 2011, the Revolutionary Court in the northern city of Bandar Anzali tried eleven church members, including Pastor Abdolreza Ali-Haghnejad, and Zainab Bahremend, the 62-year-old grandmother of two other defendants, on charges of acting against national security.

The Court is scheduled to issue its verdict on 11 May. Authorities have also charged church members in Bandar Anzali with consumption of alcohol and inappropriate hejab (Islamic headscarf). These charges are reportedly based on their participation in church services in private homes, where some attendees drink wine as part of ritual communion, and women do not observe hejab.

Christianity is a recognized religion under the Iranian Constitution and despite some discrimination, the Islamic Republic has afforded Iran's historic and ethnic Orthodox Christian communities with a modicum of space to practice their faith. However, Protestant leaders have told the Campaign that, especially within the last six years, the Iranian government has increasingly targeted Protestant groups.

Protestant groups in Iran are comprised primarily of converts and often engage in proselytizing. Moreover, Iranian courts and officials have begun to view these groups in political terms, trying Protestant believers and leaders in Revolutionary Courts, which are reserved for political and national security offenses.

On 5 April 2011, the First Branch of the Revolutionary Court in the southern city of Shiraz sentenced Pastor Behrouz Sadegh-Khanjani of the Church of Iran, and five other church members, Parviz Khalaj, Amin Afshar Manesh, Mehdi Forutan, Mohammad Baliad, and Nazli Makarian, with a year in prison for —propaganda against

the regime. Authorities, however, acquitted the Christians on the count of —acting against national security. Sadegh-Khanjani and his fellow Church members have appealed the court's decision.

Firouz Sadegh-Khanjani, brother of Behrouz and member of the Church of Iran's National Council, told the Campaign, —So now [authorities] are elevating being Christian to a political crime. Basically they are saying if you're Christian, then you must be against the regime. This might sound laughable but this is the view they are moving forward with.

Firouz Sadegh-Khanjani told the Campaign that his church attempted to avoid being seen by authorities as a clandestine political organization. —For ten years our church has been reporting to the Ministry of Intelligence, letting them know about all our activities. So we are not an underground organization. My brother doesn't even travel from one city to another without letting them know first, he said.

Authorities also dropped the apostasy charges against Behrouz Sadegh-Khanjani and five other Church members. However, all six Christians still face a charge of —insulting Islamic sanctities (i.e. blasphemy) in Shiraz's Criminal Court.

Mohammad Taravatrooy, lawyer for the Christians, told the Campaign, —Neither them nor me as their lawyer, accept such charges, because they did not commit any actions which could be construed as insulting the sanctities, or could appear as propaganda.... I think that the state mostly intends to use such cases to serve as means to prevent religious proselytizing.

On 22 September 2010, the 11th Circuit Criminal Court of Appeals for the northern province of Gilan upheld the death sentence and conviction of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani for apostasy. Apostasy, the act of renouncing one's religion, is not a crime under Iran's Islamic Penal Code. Instead, the presiding judge in Nadarkhani's case rested his opinion on texts by Iranian religious scholars.

Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, Nadarkhani's lawyer, explained to the Campaign that there is neither mention of apostasy as a crime in Iran laws, nor any consensus about apostasy in Islamic jurisprudence.

Many clerics such as Ayatollah Ardabili are skeptical in relation to apostasy being considered a crime. Dadkhah, who is facing charges of having been a founder of the Defenders of Human Rights Center himself, added that, Regardless... Iran is bound by international norms and accepts the basic principles of human rights law. Article 27 of the Vienna Convention expressly states that no government can, because of its domestic laws, ignore international treaties. So after careful evaluation we conclude that the death sentence of this person or other persons in such a situation is not allowable.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party, guarantees a person's freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice ... to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. Article 18 also requires that, —No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

The Iranian government knows full and well that its international obligations prohibit religious discrimination, and mandates the protection of freedom of religion and conscience, said Rhodes. —The Judiciary should overturn these recent prison sentences and death sentences and stop persecuting Protestants and all other religious minorities. (International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran – May 4, 2011)

Iran subjects Baha'i prisoner to degrading public punishment

Sources in the Baha'i society in Iran said that a Baha'i man in the province of Mazandaran was paraded around the town of Tankabon with shackles after being violently interrogated.

The friends and family of 71 year old Vajiollah Mirza Golpour said that he was taken to Tankabon and was interrogated there after he was summoned by the Sari Intelligence Agency...

Those close to Vajiollah who asked to stay anonymous said that on Tuesday he was paraded around town in public with shackles to be put under more pressure.

According to this source, his head was pounded on a wall and was kicked in the stomach during the interrogations. (Daneshju News website – May 5, 2011)

Dervishes in Gonabadi Order Summoned and Sentenced to Lashes, Prison, and Exile

A lawyer close to the case of dervishes from Gonabad described the status of those arrested for the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. —On Wednesday, 13 April, eight dervishes by the names of Abdolreza

Kashani, Shokrollah Hosseini, Alireza Abbasi, Ali Kashanifar, Mohammad Marvi, Nazarali Marvi, and Zafarali Moghimi, all of whom had been sentenced to five months in prison, 50 lashes, and one year's exile on charges of "disrupting public order through assembly in front of Gonabad Justice Department and Prison," were arrested in coordinated and simultaneous operations in the towns of Beydokht, Gonabad, and Ghoochan, and were all transferred to Vakilabad Prison in Mashad, he told the Campaign.



Also on Wednesday, 13 April, Nourali Tabandeh, leader of the Gonabadi Nematollahi order, was summoned by a Tehran investigative court on behalf of the Justice Department in Gonabad on charges of —threatening public hygiene through burial of deceased individuals inside Beydokht's Soltani Cemetery. On 17 April, Tabandeh's lawyer, Gholamreza Harsini, appeared before the court, but judicial authorities insisted on Tabandeh's appearance in order to inform him of his charges.

According to reports, hundreds of dervishes and followers of the Gonabadi order have gathered in Beydokht to show their support and solidarity to their leader, Nourali Tabandeh, and to voice their protest at the recent arrest of several Beydokht dervishes.

High government authorities have not yet reacted to this issue, but local authorities reactions indicate threats against dervishes for their arrests and imprisonment and demolition of Beydokht's Soltani Cemetery. On Tuesday, 20 April, a meeting was held for several hours inside the Gonabad Prosecutor's Office in which the Prosecutor and Chief of Police, along with several lawyers representing the dervishes were present. The meeting ended after the Prosecutor, Zeinali, stated that charges raised against Mr. Tabandeh and the case raised against him...will be resolved within 72 hours. Despite the silence, order, and peaceful presence of the dervishes, after this meeting a large number of plainclothes forces, Special Forces, and Basij forces from different regions of the province were dispatched to Beydokht and surrounded Soltani Cemetery. Slowly over the next 24 hours, the town of Beydokht assumed a military and security atmosphere, to the point where local people and travelers comings and goings were strictly controlled by these forces. But suddenly, most of these forces were removed from the region and returned to military bases. On Saturday, 23 April, a group of lawyers representing the dervishes went to the Prosecutor's Office in Gonabad and asked the prosecutor to keep his commitment to solve the Beydokht problems and issues. Despite earlier negotiations on 20 April, however, the prosecutor suddenly changed his position and threatened the dervishes with judicial action, destruction of the Beydokht Soltani Cemetery, and definite prosecution for Dr. Tabandeh, due to the US President Barack Obama's Nowruz message in which he supported the dervishes, the lawyer told the Campaign.

In issued statements, the dervishes explained that the summons for Dr. Nourali Tabandeh Majzoob Alishah, the leader of the order, and the demolition of Beydokht Soltani Cemetery, the capital of spirituality and Sufism, may appear to be minor to outsiders, but for the dervishes it is unforgivable and impossible to ignore.

The dervishes vow to resist these illegal actions at any cost.

The dervishes also announced that they are not approaching the issue from a position of power, they do not wish to threaten anyone, they do not want to fight and confront, their view is of national solidarity and maintaining the unity of Muslim society, and in both words and actions they seek peace, tranquility, patience, and forgiveness, the source told the Campaign.

It is worth mentioning that upon pressure by security organizations, the town of Gonabad's Health Network forbade burials of the deceased inside Beydokht Soltani Cemetery in March 2009. Since then, through reports by the Intelligence Office and complaints filed by the Health Network, family members of deceased individuals and the facility's caretaker have been summoned to court and sentenced to prison. The Gonabadi Nematollahi Order's

leader is ultimately in charge of the endowed property, the source added. (International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran – May 9, 2011)

Iran raids homes and arrests dozens of Baha'is in Iran in new crack down

Security forces and intelligence agents entered the homes of a large number of the heads of the Baha'i Free Science University (BIHE) and arrested a large number of them. These arrests are ongoing and according to informed

sources, reports of the arrest of 12 people have been confirmed so far.

The names of the detainees are as follows: Vahid Mokhtari, Mahmoud Badavam, Ramin Zibayi, Amir Houshang Amir Tabar, Foad Moqadam, Shahin Negari, Soheil Qanbari, Kamran Mortezaei, Afrouz Farmanbardari, Mehran Behmardi, Amanallah Mostaqim. The arrest of Navid Assadi has still not been confirmed.

The homes of Rohollah Haq Projeh, Hassan Momtaz, Sina Rahimi and Enisa Rahimi, Houshang Meisaqian, Shahnaz Samiei, Mr. Taleie and Tolo' Golkar were also searched.

The arrests and house searches were carried out in Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Zahedan and other cities. Notably, 12 bags full of books and personal items were confiscated from the home of Amanallah Mostaqim in Shiraz. The detainees were the heads of the Free Science University affiliated with the Baha'i society in Iran which was founded in reaction to the violation of the right to education of Baha'is



in Iran. (Committee of Human Rights Reporters in Iran – May 22, 2011)

Baha'i man sentenced to 4.5 yrs. of prison

Houshang Fananian, a Baha'i resident of Amol was sentenced to four and a half years of prison on charges of being a member of anti-government groups and organizations, propagating against the government and insulting the leader. This 48 year old resident of Amol was arrested on March 13, 2011 by agents of the Sari Intelligence Agency in his place of work and was transferred to the Sari Kachouyi Prison. He was sentenced to 3 years of prison for membership in anti-government groups and organizations, one year of prison for propagating against the government in favor of these groups and six months of prison for insulting the leader. (Student Committee in Defense of Political Prisoners – May 24, 2011)

Baha'i student expelled from university because of religion

Another Mazandaran University student was expelled from this university because of her religion.

Delara Darabi, who was in her eight semester of physics in Mazandaran University and had no political or disciplinary cases in the university in the past 4 years was summoned by the university's Disciplinary Committee and was prevented from going to class.

A person close to this student who lives in Sari said, Delara had written in all the university forms in the past four years that she followed the Baha'i faith but some time



ago after she was questioned by university heads and she announced that she was a Baha'i, she was told that she could not go to class for now.

She was constantly summoned after that by the Mazandaran University Protection Department and was finally expelled from university.

According to this report, this week the final order for her expulsion was issued but her family did not receive a written order about the university's decision despite constantly following this case. (Committee of Human Rights Reporters in Iran – May 24, 2011)

June

Two students expelled from university for following Baha'i faith

Nora Sahrang, a Baha'i resident of Bandar Abbas in southern Iran who studied accounting in the Qeshm University was denied the right to take the final exam and was expelled from this university for being a Baha'i.

Another student in this university, Ava Tavakoli, who studied anesthesiology at Qeshm University was told by the university that she cannot register for the next semester and has been expelled.

Notably, Baha'is in Iran have been denied the right to higher education since the Islamic Revolution. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Jun. 28, 2011)

July

Iran will annul death sentence for Christian pastor if he „repents“

Iran's Supreme Court has overturned a death sentence handed down to Yusef Nadarkhani, a Christian pastor accused of apostasy for having converted from Islam, his lawyer told AFP on Sunday.

The Supreme Court has annulled the death sentence and sent the case back to the court in Rasht (his hometown), asking the accused to repent," Mohammad Ali Dadkhah said.



Nadarkhani, now 32, converted from Islam to Christianity at the age of 19 and became a pastor of a small evangelical community called the Church of Iran.

He was arrested in October 2009 and condemned to death for apostasy under Iran's Islamic Sharia laws, which however allow for such verdicts to be overturned if the convicted person "repents" and renounces his conversion.

After his conviction was upheld by an appeal court in Gilan province in September 2010, Nadarkhani turned to the Supreme Court. His wife, who was initially sentenced to life imprisonment, was released on appeal.

The lawyer said the verdict had been read out to him on the telephone and that he needed to travel to Rasht, where Nadarkhani is being held, to see the ruling for himself.

Dadkhah said he himself was sentenced on Sunday by a Tehran court to nine years in jail and a 10-year ban on practicing law or teaching at university for "actions and propaganda against the Islamic regime."

The lawyer said he had been criticised for having cooperated with the Centre for the Defence of Human Rights, an organisation founded by Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi, as well as for giving interviews to

foreign radio stations. I have 20 days to lodge an appeal," he said. (AFP – Jul. 4, 2011)

Iran arrests two Christian converts in Yazd

Christians Vali Zahmatkesh and Mostafa Bushehri were arrested in Yazd.

These two Christians were arrested in their homes on June 25 in Yazd and are still in detention.

According to reports, 32 year old Vali Zahmatkesh became a Christian in 2008 and was transferred to Yazd because of his job near the end of that year. (Committee of Human Rights Reporters – Jul. 5, 2011)

Iran sentences Baha'i man to 4 years of prison



According to the ruling of a court of review, a Baha'i man from Amol was sentenced to four years of prison.

Houshang Fanayian who has been detained in Amol Prison for more than four months now was sentenced to three years of prison on charges of participating in a religious ceremony and being a member of the Baha'i society, and one year of prison on charges of being a member of Facebook and propagating against the government. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Jul. 11, 2011)

Iran sentences Dervishes to prison and flogging for protesting

Four Neimatollahi Dervishes were sentenced to prison terms and flogging by the first branch of the Sarvestan Public Court in Fars Province.

According to reports, 11 months after a strike by Neimatollahi Dervishes outside of the Sarvestan Governor's Office, four Dervishes identified as Farzad Darvish Sarvestani, Mohammad-Ali Sadi, Mohammad-Jalal Nikbakht Sarvestani and Hojjatollah Saiedi were sentenced to six months of prison and 40 lashes on charges of 'disrupting public order'. (Jaras Website – Jul. 14, 2011)

Iran carries out new wave of arrests of Baha'is

In the ongoing measures carried out against Baha'is by the security apparatus, more than 10 people in Isfahan and Yakan in Birjand were arrested.

According to reports, on the eve of Tuesday July 12, agents of the Intelligence Agency in Isfahan went to the home of Navid Parvini during a religious ceremony called the 'Feast' and after searching his home and seizing his computer, books and religious booklets, arrested Navid Parvini and his wife Negar Sobhanian. Keivan Dehqani, Farshid Badakhsh and a number of other Baha'is (about 12 people) in the ceremony were also arrested and taken to an unknown location.

Afsaneh Ferdusian (wife of Keivan Dehqani) who was at the ceremony with her four year old and nine month old children was sent home with a Taxi [by security forces] because her children were crying. She was told to wait for their call.

There is no information on the condition and whereabouts of the detainees thus far.

In Birjand, intelligence agents went to the home of another Baha'i man identified as Saied Mokhtari and after searching his home and seizing his personal and religious belongings, arrested him and took him to an unknown location.

These agents then went to his shop and seized his computer and some documents. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Jul. 14, 2011)

August

Iran increases suppression of Baha'i religious minority

According to Fars [state-run News Agency], an international immoral network which was active in a completely organized manner inside the county was identified and annihilated by the intelligence-security apparatus of the country.

The main leaders of this network and a significant number of active elements, who were all member of the Baha'i organization, participated in numerous feasts and sessions of the Baha'i sect in addition to leading meetings and getting special classes for advertising this sect...

The main members of this network were arrested in the cities of Tehran, Karaj, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yasouj and Avaz in Larestan. (Fars state-run Website – Jahan News state-run Website – Jul. 31, 2011)

<http://www.jahannews.com/vdchk6nzi23nq6d.tft2.html>



Iran beats and arrests two Christian converts in Azarbaijan



Security forces arrested two Christian converts in Azarbaijan identified as Vahid Roufeh Gar and Reza Kohnamouyi. They were taken to an unknown location.

According to reports, security forces arrested these two men on July 15 after beating them. Their families still have no information about their whereabouts. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Aug. 8, 2011)

More than 50 Baha'is languishing in Iranian jails

While officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran claim in international assemblies and various interviews that no one is jailed because of his beliefs in Iran, according to official statistics, more than 50 Baha'is are jailed in various prisons in Iran. These Baha'is are either jailed on temporary arrest orders or are serving their prison terms. About the same number of Baha'is in various Iranian cities are awaiting trials or verdicts from courts of first instances or courts of review. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Aug. 17, 2011)

Ministry of Intelligence says it annihilated „Baha'i anti-religious network"

After intelligence and operational measures, the anonymous soldiers of Imam Zaman identified and annihilated a network of anti-religious elements that were destructing the religious beliefs of the people by using various techniques in the cyber environment [the internet].

According to the Public Relations Office of the Ministry of Intelligence, the administrators and main elements of this illegal website who were carrying out organized measures in line with insulting sanctities and the religious beliefs of the people,... were identified and arrested.

In investigations from the detainees, the role of some European embassies and Zionist elements including elements of the Baha'i sect were revealed in this anti-religious measure and the suspects also confessed to having connections to foreign elements. (ISNA state-run News Agency, Asre Iran state-run website – Aug. 18, 2011)

<http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/177674>

Iran arrests members of religious minorities in Rasht



The head of the Public Security Police of the Gilan State Security Forces Command Center said that 14 people were arrested on charges of being active in the diverted mystic sect of Sho'our Keihani in Rasht.

“There were reports from people that Sho'our Keihani classes were being held under the guise of sewing classes and the police looked into the issue”, Colonel Mehregan said...

“Police agents arrested 14 men and women who were in the class and discovered and confiscated a number of illegal books and software”, he added.

He said that further investigations were ongoing. (ISNA state-run News Agency – Aug. 20, 2011)

<http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1830286>

Iran arrests Christian man in Rasht

Christian convert Abdolreza Ali Haq Nejad was arrested by security forces in Rasht.

According to reports, Abdolreza Ali Haq Nejad known as Mathew was arrested on Wednesday August 18 in Rasht. This 39 year old Christian was arrested for the first time in 2006 for 12 days and was then arrested in 2010 for one month while in Shiraz. His case was referred to a court in his place of birth in the Anzali Port. He was reportedly arrested because of his evangelical activities in the church. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Aug. 22, 2011)

Two Dervishes flogged after end of prison term

Shokrollah Hosseini and Mohammad Marvi, two Neimatollahi Dervishes were sent to a one year exile after finishing their prison term in Vakil Abad Prison in Mashhad. These two Dervishes were sent to the town of Bojourn and Qouchan after five months of prison and 50 lashes.

In the summer of 2009, a group of Dervishes gathered outside of the Gonabad Judiciary in protest to the illegal measures of the Gonabad Prosecutor during which 24 Dervishes were arrested and later prosecuted. (Student Committee in Defense of Political Prisoners – Aug. 28, 2011)

Sunnis banned from holding Eid Fetr prayers in Tehran

The Society of the Sunni Representatives of the Islamic Council Majlis [parliament] wrote a letter to Ahmadinejad on Saturday August 27, requesting that Sunni residents of Tehran who are more than 1 million be allowed to hold Eid Fetr prayers. In an official announcement, Tehran officials banned the Eid Fetr prayers of Sunnis in this province. (Radio Germany Website – Aug. 29, 2011)

Security forces threaten Sunni clerics for holding Eid Fetr

The Intelligence Agency of various western cities in Iran called Sunni clerics threatening them not to announce Eid Fetr and not to hold prayers for this day.

According to reports, despite the pressure of security institutions on Sunni clerics in the past few days, Sunnis held Eid Fetr prayers in a number of mosques in the cities of Marivan, Javanroud, Kamyaran, Sanandaj and Saqez.

After prayers were held, the Intelligence Agency threatened a number of clerics over the phone who had led the prayers. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Aug. 30, 2011)

September

Iran arrests three lawyers

Three lawyers of Gonabadi Dervishes were arrested by the Shiraz Intelligence Agency.

According to reports, Amir Islami and Afshin Karampour, two lawyers of Gonabadi Dervishes were arrested on Sunday after being called to carry out negotiations at the Kovar Governor's Office in Fars Province.

On Wednesday morning, another lawyer named Omid Behrouzi was arrested by security forces.

Last Friday, during an attack by plainclothes agents against Gonabadi Dervishes in the town of Kovar in Shiraz, a number of Dervishes were injured and others were jailed. On Sunday, a Dervish identified as Vahid Banayi who was shot by security forces died in the hospital. (Human Rights Activists in Iran, Radio Farda website – Sep. 8, 2011)

The lamb of Iran

Yousef Nadarkhani a 34-year-old Christian cleric is facing death for apostasy against a faith he never held. The Islamic Republic of Iran has accused Mr. Nadarkhani a pastor of the evangelical Church of Iran of the capital offense of forsaking Islam.

Mr. Nadarkhani was arrested in his home city of Rasht in October 2009 after he questioned Islamic control over religious instruction of Iranian children. He was charged initially with illegal protest but that was raised to the more serious crimes of apostasy and evangelizing Muslims.

He was convicted and sentenced to death. Mr. Nadarkhani's wife was handed life in prison. His attorney Iranian human rights lawyer Mohammed Ali Dadkhah was convicted separately of —actions and propaganda against the Islamic regime and sentenced to nine years in prison and barred from practicing law for a decade...

In the fall of 2010a Revolutionary Tribunal affirmed the death sentence and the case was appealed to Iran's Supreme Court. In June the high court asked the lower court in Rasht to review whether Mr. Nadarkhani had been a practicing Muslim at the age of maturity which is 15 in Iran. Prosecutors acknowledged that he had never been a Muslim as an adult but said that the apostasy law still applies because he has —Islamic ancestry. Hearings are being held this week to give Mr. Nadarkhani the opportunity to recant his faith and avoid



execution. On Sunday when asked to repent his Christian beliefs Mr. Nadarkhani replied—Repent means to return. What should I return to? The court pressed that he should return —to the religion of your ancestors Islam. Mr. Nadarkhani said I cannot.

Mr. Nadarkhani may face execution as early as Thursday. The U.S. State Department has registered a protest but Tehran has shown no response to international pressure. Members of international church groups are fasting and praying for Mr. Nadarkhani who remains committed to his beliefs even facing the gallows. —I don't need to write anything further about the basis of faith he wrote to his supporters earlier this year. —Let us remember that beyond beautiful or painful feelings only three things remain: Faith, Hope and Love. It is important for believers to make sure which kind of Faith, Hope and Love will remain. (The Washington Times – Sep. 27, 2011)

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/sep/27/the-lamb-of-iran>

October

State-run daily charges death row Christian pastor with rape and extortion in the face of international outrage

Fars state-run News Agency: Yusef Narderkhani's charges are "multiple counts of rape and extortion".

Western media have used the case of a rapist and extortionist in the province of Gilan as a pretext to claim that the Iranian Judiciary has sentenced to death a person who has left Islam and has become a "priest".

This is while according to information from informed sources, this person named Yusef Narderkhani has been sentenced to this punishment [death] on charges of carrying out violent crimes such multiple counts of rape and extortion and this has no links to the issue of him leaving his religion. (Fars state-run News Agency – Oct. 1, 2011)

<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13900708000482>

Lawyer for Iran pastor expects verdict within days

The lawyer for Yusef Nadarkhani, an Iranian pastor facing possible capital punishment for apostasy, said a verdict was expected from Saturday and denied rumours that his client had been handed a death sentence.

'I am waiting for a verdict from Saturday,' Mohammad Ali Dadkhah told AFP on Thursday.

The judiciary chief of northern Gilan province, where Nadarkhani lives, also denied that a death penalty verdict had been issued against the pastor, Iran's English-language Press TV reported on its website.

'There has been no execution order ... It is up to the court to finally decide the verdict after studying his case,' Mohammad Javad Heshmati was quoted as saying.

'Yusef Nadarkhani has been charged with a crime and is in a prison based on an arrest warrant issued against him,' Heshmati said, without elaborating.

Nadarkhani, now 32, converted from Islam to Christianity at the age of 19 and became pastor of a small evangelical community called the Church of Iran.

He was arrested in October 2009 and condemned to death for apostasy under Islamic sharia law, which allows for such verdicts to be overturned if the convicted person 'repents' and renounces his conversion.

After his conviction was upheld by an appeals court in Gilan province in September 2010, Nadarkhani turned to the Supreme Court.

In July, the Supreme Court overturned the death sentence and sent the case back to the court in his hometown of Rasht, in Gilan province...

On September 30, Gilan's deputy governor general said Nadarkhani should not face the death penalty for apostasy, but also referred for the first time to 'security crimes' allegedly committed by the pastor whom he labelled as 'Zionist'.

However, Nadarkhani's lawyer has stressed that the trial of the pastor in the Rasht court focused only on the charge of apostasy, and no other Iranian officials have so far spoken publicly about the case.

The deputy governor general's remarks came one day after the pastor's lawyer told AFP he was optimistic that his client had 'convinced' the court and would be freed despite refusing to repent. (AFP – Oct. 6, 2011)

Iran sentences 56 Sunni missionaries to 164 years of prison

Fifty-six arrested Sunni missionaries from the towns of Saez, Mahabad, Sardasht, Bukan, Sanandaj, Javanroud, Piranshahr and Ashnavieh were sentenced to 164 years of prison.

These Sunni missionaries went on a hunger strike from October 6 in protest to discriminatory treatment and the violation of their rights in prison. (Human Rights Activists in Iran – Oct. 10, 2011)

Iran court refers pastor's case to supreme leader: lawyer

The court case of an Iranian pastor facing a possible death sentence for apostasy is being referred to Iran's supreme leader, the pastor's lawyer told AFP on Monday.

'The court has decided to ask the opinion of Mr (Ali) Khamenei,' Iran's supreme leader, in the matter of pastor Yusef Nadarkhani, lawyer Mohammad Ali Dadkhah said.

Ayatollah Khamenei has ultimate authority in the Islamic republic.

However the move to involve him in the case is unusual, and suggested that a final verdict in the case -- which has garnered international attention -- could be delayed.

Nadarkhani's lawyer had previously been expecting a verdict any time from last Saturday.

Nadarkhani, a 32-year-old pastor of a small evangelical community called the Church of Iran, was arrested in October 2009 and condemned to death under Islamic sharia law for converting to Christianity when he was 19.

Sharia law allows for such verdicts to be overturned if the convicted person 'repents' and renounces his conversion.

After his conviction was upheld by an appeals court in Gilan province in September 2010, Nadarkhani turned to the supreme court.

In July, the supreme court overturned the death sentence and sent the case back to the court in his hometown of Rasht, in Gilan province...

On September 30, Gilan's deputy governor general said Nadarkhani should not face the death penalty for apostasy, but also referred for the first time to 'security crimes' allegedly committed by the pastor whom he labelled a 'Zionist.'

But Dadkhah said the only charge stated in the case was related to apostasy. (AFP – Oct. 10, 2011)