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## **Iran pastor Fathi's appeal fails, against extra year in prison and 74 lashes**

World Watch Monitor (02.06.2015) - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/06/3878521/> - An Iranian pastor serving a six-year prison term has failed in his appeal against a further sentence of 74 lashes and an additional year in jail - for the alleged possession in his cell of two litres of alcohol. This latest news about Farshid Fathi was first reported by Iran-focused Mohabat News on 30th May.

Middle East Concern (MEC) reports that the alcohol was found on Fathi's prison ward in April 2014 during a raid by guards when he was in Evin Prison. MEC says that security officials attributed the alcohol to Farshid, who strongly denies this claim.

Such cases are usually addressed by a judicial court but Fathi's case was submitted to the Revolutionary Court. Fathi, who has been in prison since 2010, denied the accusation when he appeared in the court in December 2014, after he had been transferred to Rajaei-Shahr prison in August 2014.

His lawyer's appeal has now failed to overturn the original 'extra' sentence from December.

About 60 other Christians, many belonging to house churches in Tehran and other cities, were arrested at the same time as Fathi on the day after Christmas in 2010. Most of those have now been released.

The governor of Tehran, Morteza Tamadon on January 4, 2011 described the detained Christians as "extremists" who "penetrate the body of Islam like corrupt and deviant

Fathi, who is a 35 year old father of two, was imprisoned without trial in Evin prison. After 15 months of uncertainty he was tried in January 2012, being accused of "action against the regime's security, being in contact with foreign organisations, and religious propaganda" according to a source. Details of his court trial have not been published.

Iran's Supreme Leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei had made a speech in October 2010 saying that house churches should be dealt with. A new wave of surveillance and arrests against Christians followed soon after, with leaders of house church groups such as Farshid Fathi especially singled out for longer detentions. Born into a Muslim family, Fathi became a Christian at the age of 17 and at the time of his arrest in 2010 he was working full time as a pastor and leader of house churches.

Fathi is serving his sentence alongside another man, Alireza Seyyadian, who was also imprisoned for six years. Seyyadian was arrested as he was trying to leave the country for a Persian New Year vacation in March 2012, and was also transferred with Fathi to Rajaei-Shahr prison.

Seyyadian is a member of a group known as Church of Iran, which holds a non-Trinitarian theology. He was sentenced to 90 lashes and six years' imprisonment for acting against national security through collusion, gathering and propagating against the Islamic regime.

World Watch Monitor has reported on how the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office has previously labelled Fathi's prison conditions as "harsh".

### ***Beaten up***

He suffered a fractured foot and toe after being beaten up by security officials during the raid in which the alcohol was found and attributed to him.

Estimates from evidence provided by the American Center for Law and Justice, Article 18 and Middle East Concern, suggest that in May 2015 there were 90 people detained in Iranian prisons on account of their Christian faith and practice.

Several UN special reports and resolutions have condemned the violation of the rights of religious minorities. Prison authorities have sometimes discriminated against Christian detainees.

In Rajaei-Shahr prison, for instance, Christian prisoners were refused permission to participate in the prison Christmas celebrations.

Other prisoners have also had to face additional sentences. Ebrahim Firouzi had been due for release on 13th January, but has been kept in prison and was retried on 8th March of charges of 'acting against national security, gathering, and collusion'.

According to the 2015 World Watch List by Open Doors International, a charity that supports Christians who face hostilities because of their faith, Iran ranks seventh (up two points from last year) in the top ten countries where Christians are persecuted.

The main driver of persecution in Iran, it says, is 'Islamic extremism'; Christians from an Islamic background are especially targeted. Increasing numbers of Farsi [Persian] speaking churches have been forced to close; some of which have been there for both decades and centuries. This is a development that has not been seen in the history of the church in Iran, stated the World Watch List.

"Expectations were high when President Rouhani took office in 2013. However, his powers are limited and in the short run, no concrete changes are expected for religious minorities" says Open Doors.

Mohabat News reports that even Sunni Muslims cannot enjoy the least amount of freedom. As with Christians and other religious minorities, Sunnis are not allowed to build a mosque of their own in Tehran, the capital.

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## **Eighteen Iranian Christian converts sentenced to a total of 23 years in prison**

Mohabat News (25.05.2015) <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=2137> - The Revolutionary Courts in Esfahan, Rasht, Tonekabon, and Karaj have sentenced 18 Christian converts to 23 years and nine months in total over the past two months. These sentences have been confirmed in an appeals court and are final. Confirming this report, Mansour Borji, spokesman for the Article 18 Committee, said, "Although these prison sentences are final, some of these Christian converts are determined to appeal again to a higher court".

A number of Christian converts mentioned in this report were arrested in 2013 in Shahin-Shahr near Esfahan. Their names are: Nasrin Kiamarzi, Sarah Fouladi, Maryam Bateninia, Akbar Ahmadi, Bita Ja'fari, Abbas Kiani, Fatemeh Zareie, Masoumeh Dashti, Ramin Bakhtiarvand, Neda Fouladi, Samira Fouladi, and two unnamed individuals. The Revolutionary Court in Esfahan sentenced each of the above mentioned Christians to one year in prison and two years ban to leave the country for evangelism and forming house church gatherings.

Mr. Borji stressed that none of these individuals have a criminal history and they have been found guilty in a court for the first time. He said, "We did not have permission to publish the names of five of these Christian converts, so we just referred to their number and the place of their arrest in Rasht, Tonekabon, and Karaj". Earlier Mr. Borji had explained that the Christian converts in Esfahan were arrested in a raid on their house church in Shahin-Shahr on February 20, 2013. A month later, they were temporarily released on bail, and were free until their day of trial.

Regarding the current situation of Christians in Iran, Mr. Borji said, "The Islamic regime of Iran treats Christians cruelly, while Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad-Javad Zarif, claims that no one is in jail in Iran for their beliefs. Despite President Rouhani's promises in his campaign, not only do we see no relief of suppression of Christians, but we see an increase in the number of arrests and unfair sentences and the security atmosphere imposed by the Islamic regime on the Iranian Christian community still continues.

The first 2015 report by Ahmad Shaheed, the UN's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, indicates a decline in the situation of Iranian Christians. According to the report,

as of January 1, 2015, at least 92 Christians have been arrested or are awaiting trial for their faith. By comparison in 2014, 69 Christian converts were arrested by Iranian authorities and held in jail for at least 24 hours. This is all happening while Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, stated in his visit with the religious minority members of the Islamic Majlis (Parliament), that based on Islamic teachings, "followers of other religions should be treated with justice and fairness". Although Iran's Islamic regime does everything in its power to impose and promote Shi'ite Islam as the state religion, to pressure religious minorities and punish conversion out of Islam with capital punishment, the trend among Iranian Shi'ite Muslims to convert to other religions, especially Christianity, is ever increasing.

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## **Global campaign on 7th anniversary of arrest of seven Iranian Baha'i leaders**

BWNS (14.05.2015) - The Baha'i International Community has today launched a campaign to mark the seventh anniversary of the wrongful arrest and imprisonment of the seven former Baha'i leaders in Iran.

The campaign will run [until 21 May 2015](#). Events are being planned around the world by Baha'i communities and others to call attention to the plight of the seven, who were arrested in 2008. The plight of some 90 other Baha'is in Iran - as well as other prisoners of conscience there - will also be highlighted.

"What the events of the past year have demonstrated ever more clearly to the people of Iran and others from around the world who promote peace and concord is the stark contrast between the peaceful intentions and selfless service of the Baha'i community and the lamentable and inhuman acts of those who, under the influence of ignorant religious prejudice, continue to perpetrate injustices against you," wrote the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Baha'i Faith, in a letter to Baha'is in Iran earlier this month.

The campaign will take the theme "Seven Days in Remembrance of Seven Years for the Seven Baha'i Leaders." Each day in the next seven days, events will focus on a different member of the seven, who are Mahvash Sabet, Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm.

Facebook event pages in English and Persian have been set up as rallying points and a hashtag has been designated: #7Bahais7years. There is more background at [www.bic.org/7Bahais7years](http://www.bic.org/7Bahais7years)

The seven formed the entire membership of the now-disbanded ad hoc group tending to the spiritual and social needs of the Iranian Baha'i community in the absence of formally elected Baha'i leadership, which was banned in 1983.

Ms. Sabet was arrested on 5 March 2008, while the other six were arrested on 14 May 2008. In 2010, the seven were tried and wrongfully convicted on charges of "espionage" and "spreading propaganda against the regime," among other false accusations. They were sentenced to 20 years in prison, the longest terms of any current prisoners of conscience in Iran.

To read the article online, view photographs and access links: <http://news.bahai.org/story/1053>

***HRWF Prisoners List***

The seven Baha'is were on HRWF Prisoners Lists in 2014, 2013 and 2012. The detailed cases of about thirty other Baha'is are to be found at <http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Iran-FBL-2014.pdf>

**Fariba KAMALABADI TAEFI, Jamaloddin KHANJANI, Afif NAIMI, Saeid REZAIE, Mahvash SABET, TAZANGI, Behrouz Azizi TAVAKKOLI and Vahid TIZFAHM**

**Ages:** Taefi 50, Khanjani 80, Naimi 51, Tazangi 54, Tavakkoli 61 and Tizfahm 40 years

**Date and place of arrest:** Sabat on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008 all others on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2008 in Tehran

**Charges:** Espionage, propaganda activities against the Islamic order, the establishment of an illegal administration, cooperation with Israel and acting against the security of the country

**Statement of the defendants:** Leaders of the Baha'i community in Iran

**Places of detention:** Evin (Tehran) and Gohardasht (Karaj)

**Court decision:** Sentenced to 20 years in prison in August 2010

**Other information:** In September 2010, the authorities informed the seven Baha'is orally that their 20-year sentences were reduced to 10 years. However, prison authorities told them in March 2011 that their original 20-year sentences had been reinstated.

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## **Two Iranian Christians sentenced to a total of ten years in prison**

Mohabat News (01.05.2015) <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=1899> - According to Mohabat News, Branch 28 of the central Revolutionary Court sentenced Ebrahim Firouzi, a Christian convert, to an additional five years in prison. He is already serving another sentence in Rajaei-Shahr prison. The same court sentenced Sevada Aghasar, an Iranian-Armenian Christian, to five years in prison. Mr. Aghasar is currently free on bail.

The Iranian court, announced their new charges as "action against national security through collusion and gathering".

Mr. Firouzi's attorney says, the five year sentence is the highest possible punishment for the charges laid against his client. He also stated that this is an initial ruling and they plan to appeal it.

Ebrahim Firouzi is a Christian prisoner currently held in ward 10 of Rajaei-Shahr prison together with other Christian prisoners. He, as well as his Christian inmates, are held in the same ward as dangerous criminals, which is against the law of classification and separation of inmates. He visited his lawyer for the first time in a court hearing on March 8, 2015.

Mr. Firouzi was initially arrested on August 25, 2013. Prior to that he had been convicted of several charges including propaganda against the Islamic regime, evangelism, contact with anti-Islamic agents abroad and founding a Christian website, for which he was sentenced to one year in prison and two years of exile to the remote town of Sarbaz. Although he completed his initial sentence on January 13, 2015, Iranian authorities kept him in prison for new charges.

Sevada Aghasar is another convict in this case, and was given a five year sentence. He is an Iranian-Armenian resident of Tehran who had been temporarily released on Sunday March 2, 2014, after enduring six months in ward 350 of Evin prison.

Mr. Aghasar appeared in the same court as Mr. Firouzi on March 8, 2015, and was charged with action against national security through collusion and gathering. Mr. Firouzi appeared in court first and Mr. Aghasar was tried immediately after him on the same day. Should the appeal court approve his sentence, Mr. Aghasar will be sent to prison to serve his five year sentence.

A report of Aghasar's arrest, published about two years ago, states that he was arrested together with Ebrahim Firouzi and Masoud Mirzaei on August 21, 2013, as they were meeting in Mr. Mirzaei's work office.

At the time of that arrest, knowledgeable sources told Mohabat News that Ebrahim had said that he was supposed to report to the judicial authorities on Saturday to serve his one year sentence in prison. Thus, the purpose of Ebrahim and Sevada's visit to Masoud's office was solely to visit friends and say goodbye to them. Now, two of these friends are being sentenced to ten years in prison for a simple farewell visitation.

Sevada Aghasar, is an Iranian Armenian citizen and a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church. On another occasion, Aghasari's house had been searched by the authorities and some of his belongings were seized in connection with the arrest of a Christian convert.

According to the first 2015 report of Ahmad Shaheed, UN's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, at least 92 Christians have been in Iranian prisons for their faith since January 2015. The report also states that in 2014 alone, 69 Christian converts were arrested and held in custody for at least 24 hours.

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## **Iranian Ayatollah warns against house churches in Iran!**

Mohabat News (01.05.2015) <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=1979> - According to Mohabat News, Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani, an Iranian Islamic religious expert who is known for his exaggerations, warned against anti-Shi'ite activities in Khuzestan province (western Iran). He told Islamic seminary students and professors of the Islamic seminary of Masjed-Soleiman in the religious institute of Imam-Sadeq in Qom, "Enemies of the Islamic revolution and the Islamic regime of Iran are investing money and providing means to make the people of Khuzestan turn their back on Shi'ite Islam. However, we should be cautious, and not let house churches be planted, or Wahhabis promote their faith in people's homes".

Ayatollah Sobhani, whose speeches are mostly reflected in the Revolutionary Guard supported media, like Farsi news agency, had stood strongly against Christianity in the past. By giving false statistics and information he had tried to provoke security authorities and intelligence services into pressuring Christians and Ayatollah Sobhani in Iran.

As one of the professors at the Islamic seminary of Qom, he had already warned against a growing tendency towards Christianity among Iranian youth and acknowledged that 600 young people in Neishabour have become Christians. In another instance, during a Quran interpretation session in Qom, he said, "If Christians are willing, we are ready to have a debate with them today".

The increasing tendency of Iranian society towards Christianity, especially in recent years, has become a major concern for the Islamic regime and more specifically for the Shi'ite religious system. One of the means the Islamic regime uses to eliminate non-

Shi'ite religious including Christianity, is to raise unsubstantiated accusations, ranging from insulting to moral and financial accusations or spying for the U.K. and Israel.

On the other hand, pro-regime Islamic clerics create a wave of unsubstantiated claims to provoke government and intelligence officials, to try to prevent Christianity from growing in Iran.

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## **Suppression and “Climate of fear” reign in Iran for religious minorities**

By Kyle Wagner for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (28.04.2015) - “Iranians must unite to liberate their country and the Middle East from this nightmare,” declared Dr Sanabargh Zahedi, an Islamic scholar and opposition leader in Iran. He was speaking of the repressive regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was established in 1979, following the revolution that deposed the Shah. Since that time, the human rights of Iranian citizens have been systematically violated and the activities of religious minorities severely curtailed.

Zahedi's remarks were made at a conference at the European Parliament on religious freedom in Iran, which took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> April under the sponsorship of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). MEPs Andrew Lewer and Peter Van Dalen organised the event on behalf of the ECR's internal working group on the freedom of religion. Christians, Baha'is and other minority religious and belief groups live daily in a “climate of fear,” said Lewer, despite hopes for reform after the election of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013. While world attention has been riveted on the outcome of nuclear negotiations with Iran, grave violations of human rights continue to be perpetrated against religious believers that are viewed by the regime as being fundamentally at odds with the state.

Harrowing testimony was presented by several speakers, many of whom remained anonymous in order to ensure their security in Iran. Chrissy Taylor of Elam Ministries told stories of Christians whose homes had been raided by security forces, who were beaten, arrested and sentenced to prison for their faith. Human Rights Without Frontiers has documented several of these cases in its 2014 world report on freedom of religion or belief.

Rachel Bayani, representative to the European Union for the Baha'i International Community, appealed for states and international organisations to view Iran's treatment of the Baha'is as a litmus test to determine Iran's sincerity in other international negotiations, including the ongoing nuclear negotiations. She noted that any mention of the Baha'is promptly ends all discussion with Iranian diplomats and officials. Despite this she feels that this is a conversation that must be had and cannot be allowed to die.

John O'Rourke of the European External Action Service (EEAS) offered a variant opinion, saying that the international community is limited in its ability to change the domestic policies of sovereign states. The best way to improve the standings of religious minorities in Iran, he said, is to continue open discussions without explicitly bringing the issue to bear on relations with Iran.

The use of “push” or “pull” factors for changing the situation of religion and belief minorities in Iran will be largely determined by EU and US decision makers; however, the clear consensus at the conference was that increased attention is urgently needed toward those in Iran who suffer discrimination and repression for reason of religion or belief.

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## **Christian convert conditionally released before Persian new year**

Mohabat News (28.03.2015)

[http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10076:christian-convert-conditionally-released-before-persian-new-year&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279](http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10076:christian-convert-conditionally-released-before-persian-new-year&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279) - Mojtaba Seyyed-Alaedin Hossein was conditionally released from Adel-Abad prison on March 18, 2015, just a couple of days before Iranian New Year. He endured more than three years in prison.

His conditional release was granted after receiving three months of pardon for his artistic activities in prison.

[Esmaeil \(Homayoun\) Shokouhi](#), another Christian prisoner was also granted a 10 day leave permit. Earlier, on November 10 2014, Mr. Shokouhi was conditionally released after serving 2 years and 8 months in prison. However, a few days after his release, a Revolutionary Court judge announced that this conditional release should not have been granted and requested that Mr. Shokouhi be taken back to prison.

A group of Christians, including [Mojtaba Seyyed-Alaedin Hossein, \[\(Shiraz in Fars province, 934 KMs south of Tehran, the capital\)\] Esmaeil \(Homayoun\) Shokouhi, Vahid Hakkani, and Mohammad-Reza \(Kourosh\) Partoei](#), were arrested on February 8, 2012 during a raid by security authorities on their houses. One of the houses that were raided was being used as a meeting place for Christian believers. The Revolutionary Court of Shiraz sentenced each of these men to three years and eight months in prison for "attending house churches, evangelism, contact with foreign Christian ministries, propaganda against the Islamic regime through evangelism and disrupting national security".

Christians actively evangelizing among Farsi-speaking Iranians have been subject to arrests and severe punishment by the Iranian authorities in recent years.

Mansour Borji, spokesman of the Article 18 committee, believes that raising security accusations against Iranian Christians is used as a cover to justify a crack down on religious activities of Christians in the country. Mr. Borji added, "In order to avoid international controversy, the Iranian regime accuses prisoners of conscience of security charges and restricts their religious freedom through ambiguous and irrational interpretations of law".

In his latest report, Ahmad Shaheed, the UN's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, expressed his deep concerns over the violation of religious freedom in Iran and pointed out that currently there are 92 Christian prisoners in Iranian prisons.

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## **Imprisoned Baha'i educator wins Raha Südwind Award**

*Faran Hesami, Winner of the Raha Sudwind Award*

Iran Press Watch (16.03.2015) - [www.iranhrc.org](http://www.iranhrc.org) Südwind is dedicated to honor and celebrate individuals who have a share in the promotion and protection of human rights

in Iran. Südwind has consultative status with the United Nations in the field of development and narrowing the gap between countries of the global North and South.

This organization, under the All Human Rights for All in Iran project, has designated certain awards to recognize the efforts of human rights activists in Iran. Last year this award (1) was given to Parvin Zabihi, Zhila Karamzadeh Makvandi, Naseem Soltanbeigi, Rasoul Bodaghi, Majid Tavakoli, and Reza Shahabi, and also a special award was offered in memory of the late Faramarz Mohammadi for his anti-war efforts.

The delegation of Südwind judges included Shirin Ebadi, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, lawyer, former judge of the court, and a human rights lawyer; Aaron Rhodes one of the founders and principal investigator of the Freedom Rights Project, and prior executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights; Karolina Januszewski, human rights lawyer and member of the Südwind Board of Directors, who elected other individuals from Human Rights Activists in Iran such as the Kordpour brothers and Hakimeh Shokri, and Faran Hesami who is a Baha'i currently in prison, as the winners of the Raha Award.

Faran Hesami is a psychologist and professor at the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), who has been sentenced to four years in prison, and is now serving her sentence in the women's ward of Evin prison.

She completed her study of psychology at BIHE, and went to Canada's Carleton University to pursue a Master's degree in the same field. After returning to Iran, this Baha'i resident began her collaboration with a welfare organization as a family counselor, and continued to serve the people. She expanded her activities by translations and writing educational and training articles for various publications, as well as translations of various books; also she has authored four books in the areas of parenting and sexual abuse of children, which have been published in Iran under her own name Faran Hesami.

Two of her books, "Guide to the treatment of children who have experienced sexual abuse" and "Prevention of child sexual abuse", were reprinted while the author was in prison under charges of conspiring against national security.

Her Husband, Kamran Rahimian, also a graduate of Carleton University, is spending time in Rajai Shahr Prison due to charges of collaboration with BIHE. Currently Kamran Rahimian's mother has parental responsibility for the young child of this Baha'i couple.

### ***Prison on the charge of teaching the Baha'is***

Faran Hesami, 39, and her husband were summoned to Branch Five of the Evin Prison Court in the summer of 2011, and were arrested on the spot. Faran Hesami was transferred to the women's ward of Evin Prison on charges of membership in the Baha'i community and gathering and colluding to disturb national security. She was in temporary detention for 77 days, and was released after posting bail of approx \$95,000.

Judge Abolghassem Salvati, head of Branch 15 of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Court, sentenced this Baha'i to four years in prison. This sentence was confirmed by Judge Movahed of Branch 54 of the appeals court in the summer of 2012. On 15 July of the same year, although Ms. Hesami still had not been notified of the outcome of her appeal, as she appeared at Evin prison court to follow up on the case of her husband, she was arrested to start serving her four year sentence. The arrest was made without prior notice, moreover Faran Hesami's request to bid farewell to her three-year-old son was rejected.

### ***Experience of imprisonment and exile in childhood***

The parents and sister of this political prisoner had been arrested in late 1980 / early 1981. Faran Hesami, at the age of 9, witnessed security forces invading their home and detaining her father, mother and sister. His father spent 13 months in prison and 5 years in exile.

During her grade school years, she was suspended from school twice due to her belief in the Baha'i religion, and after finishing high school, she studied at BIHE. Since Baha'is have been denied the right to study at universities in Iran, should their Baha'i belief become known, since the Islamic Revolution, the Baha'is established an underground educational institution which afforded the children of these families the possibility of continuing with their higher education. After studying at Carleton University in Canada, she began teaching at this virtual university.

Artin, the imprisoned couple's young son, has been visiting his parents at prison once every few weeks since the age of two.

1. See <http://www.iranhr.org/?p=1081>

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## **Former Pastor of Pentecostal Church released from prison**

Mohabat news (11.03.2015)

[http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9989:former-pastor-of-pentecostal-church-released-from-prison&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279](http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9989:former-pastor-of-pentecostal-church-released-from-prison&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279) - Assyrian pastor, Victor Bet-Tamarz and two Christian converts had been arrested as they were celebrating Christmas, on December 26, 2014 in a residential house in northwestern Tehran. All three were eventually released on bail from Evin prison.

Of the three detainees, Amin Afshar Naderi was first released on February 10, 2015 after posting a heavy bail of 100 million Tomans (Approx. 40,000 USD). Mr. Naderi spent 36 days in jail, of which he spent 30 days in solitary confinement. After his release, intelligence officers summoned him once to an unofficial building for additional interrogation. Mr. Naderi is 26 years old and is an employee of the private sector.

The other Christian convert arrested with Pastor Victor is Kavian Fallah Mohammadi. He was released one week after Mr. Naderi on a bail equal to Mr. Naderi's. Iranian authorities explained that the reason for this one week delay between these releases is that Mr. Mohammadi is a resident of a northern province and submission of a title deed to the Revolutionary Court from those provinces takes some time. Only during this one week he was transferred out of solitary confinement and into the general ward of Evin prison.

Pastor Victor Ben-Tamarz was released several days later on March 1, 2015, after enduring 65 days in prison. His release was also made possible by posting an expensive property title deed. All these individuals are only free until the day of their trial. Despite Pastor Victor's old age, he spent most of his jail time in solitary confinement and suffered from numerous health problems. He is still suffering from health problems caused during his imprisonment in Evin prison.

All three Christian men should wait to be summoned to court for their trial and are banned from all Christian activities until that time.

Pastor Victor Bet-Tamarz is the former pastor of the Shahr-Ara Pentecostal Church in Tehran. He served God at that church for more than three decades. In addition to his ministry among Assyrians, he was active among Farsi-speaking Iranians as well. He held Farsi services at his church until security authorities shut them down and dismissed him as the pastor of the church on March 31, 2009. The Assyrian member of Iranian Parliament (Majles), played a key role in the cancellation of Farsi services and dismissal of Pastor Victor.

[Pastor Victor, his wife, their son, as well as 12 Christian converts](#) had gathered on December 26, 2014 to celebrate Christmas, when plain-clothed security authorities raided their gathering. The authorities disrupted the celebration and put them all in custody.

All detainees, but three, were released after a written interrogation and signing a disclaimer on the spot. The three who weren't released, namely Pastor Victor and two Christian converts Amin Afshar Naderi and Kavian Fallah Mohammadi, were transferred to Evin prison immediately.

Reports indicate that after their transfer to Evin prison, their heads were shaved in the same way as convicted criminals, and they were taken to solitary cells. They were subjected to several interrogation sessions and held under custody for a long period before being officially charged. Even their families did not have a clear understanding of their situation for a lengthy period.

After Pastor Victor Bet-Tamarz's case was publicized, in a statement, the British Foreign Office expressed its concern over the continuation of Pastor Bet-Tamarz and two Christian converts' imprisonment. The statement expressed deep concerns of the British government over the continuing oppression and harassment of Iranian religious minorities, including Christians, by the Iranian government. It also mentioned that the British government and international community expect the Iranian regime to adhere to international conventions with regards to freedom of religion and freedom of speech of which it is a signatory.

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## **The persecution of Christians in Iran: report launched**

APPG on FoRB (10.03.2015) <https://freedomdeclared.org/news/the-persecution-of-christians-in-iran-report-launched/> - Today the Christians in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group and the All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief launched a joint report on [The Persecution of Christians in Iran](#).

In the introduction to the report, the Co-Chairs of the Enquiry, David Burrowes MP and Baroness Berridge of the Vale of Catmose, write:

"This is a subject that weighs heavily on our hearts, particularly following our initial Inquiry, where MPs visited the Middle East in 2012 to meet personally with Iranians who had endured severe maltreatment in their homeland because of their faith.

It was with cautious optimism that we watched Hassan Rouhani become President of Iran in August 2013. We joined with many Iranians in hoping that his influence would soften Iran's harsh policies toward the nation's religious and ethnic minorities.

Sadly, we have been disappointed that his positive promises and moderate language have not translated into any meaningful improvement. The persecution remains as severe today as it was in 2012, when the Christians in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) produced its first report on the Persecution of Christians in Iran."

The report concludes that Iran's Christians and other persecuted religious minorities are faring no better under the supposedly moderate Rouhani than they did under his presidential predecessor.

The report is based on evidence gathered from Iranian witnesses during hearings in Parliament, and written submissions by human rights experts, including Dr Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It cites President Rouhani's campaign pledges to provide justice for religious minorities, but goes on to conclude on the basis of the evidence examined that respect for freedom of religion or belief has not improved since the 2013 election, and for some Christians it has worsened. Though the inquiry focused on the plight of the Christian community, the report recognises that the persecution of other religious minorities also persists very strongly.

Baroness Berridge, chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief, said: "The panel heard first-hand testimony about the daily pressures and traumas that Iran's Christians face, simply because of their faith. I am particularly concerned about the harsh treatment of those who convert to Christianity from Islam. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes clear that every person has the right to freedom of religion or belief, including the right to convert: to change one's faith or beliefs. We hope, pray and labour for a day when Iranians of all faiths and none can live in their homeland without fear of persecution or harassment, with the full spectrum of their rights protected."

The report was launched at a meeting in the Houses of Parliament addressed by Tobias Ellwood MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It has been widely reported in the media, including [this report on Premier](#) after their radio interview with Baroness Berridge.

View the report: [http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf?utm\\_source=Newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=Iranian+President%27s+broken+promises+to+minorities&utm\\_campaign=Iranian+President%27s+broke+n+promises+to+minorities](http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Iranian+President%27s+broken+promises+to+minorities&utm_campaign=Iranian+President%27s+broke+n+promises+to+minorities)

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## **Prison Imam files additional complaint against imprisoned Pastor**

Mohabat news (08.03.2015) -  
[http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9977:prison-imam-files-additional-complaint-against-imprisoned-pastor&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279](http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9977:prison-imam-files-additional-complaint-against-imprisoned-pastor&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279) On Thursday, March 5th, the Imam of ward 10 of Rajaei-Shahr prison in Karaj ordered Christian prisoners to give their Bibles to him for inspection, but Christian prisoners refused to follow the order.

One of these Christian prisoners told Mohabat News, "The Imam of our ward, called Mr. Mortazavi, arbitrarily issued an order to confiscate our Bibles for inspection. Since we had

received our Bibles with legal permission from the Superintendent of the prison, we refused to hand them over to the Imam".

He continued, "The Imam seemed very troubled by our opposition, and falsely filed a complaint against Pastor Farshid Fathi, in which he accused Pastor Fathi of insulting him. This may result in an additional 2 year prison sentence for him."

Each ward in Iranian prisons has an Imam, assigned by the cultural department of the prison, with no legal authority to inspect or punish prisoners.

Pastor Fathi recently dealt with another accusation, for which he was sentenced to an additional year in prison. He appeared in Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court on December 29, 2014, where [he received the additional sentence](#). He was accused of possessing alcoholic beverages in prison. He denied this allegation before the judge.

Pastor Fathi appealed the decision and is [still waiting to hear from the appeals court](#). Now with this new complaint, it is not clear whether he will receive additional time in prison or not.

On August 19, 2014, Pastor Fathi was transferred out of ward 350 of Evin prison and into Rajaei-Shahr prison in Karaj.

He was arrested on December 26, 2010, in a broad campaign by the Iranian government to arrest Christians. He was eventually sentenced to six years in prison. Many more Christians, mostly members of house-churches, were arrested as a result of that campaign in Tehran as well as other cities across the country.

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## **Iranian pastor released from prison but others arrested same day remain**

### ***Yet Ayatollah denies aggression against non-Muslims under Islamic Republic***

WWM (27.02.2015) - After spending more than one year in prison, for 'collusion against the [Iranian] government' and 'evangelism,' Iranian pastor Rasoul Abdollahi has been released from prison.

Abdollahi, a leader in Iran's house church movement, was arrested Dec. 26 2010 and released last week, Feb. 16. His arrest was the same day as a number of other Christians during a widespread crackdown on church activity.

According to agency Middle East Concern, his release came with strict conditions preventing him from participating in Christian activities; any violation would result in his re-arrest and requirement to fulfil his original sentence.

Initially arrested by Iran's Intelligence Ministry, he was detained and [interrogated for two months](#) before being released on bail and then sentenced to three years in prison in December 2013. Abdollahi, along with Rev. Farshid Fathi and other Christians sentenced at the same time, was then detained in Evin Prison, Tehran.

### ***Farshid Fathi still in prison***

Born into a Muslim family in Iran, Fathi became a Christian at age 17. By 2010 he was working full-time as a pastor and leading a network of house churches in Iran. Now 35, he is married with two young children, and has been separated from his family since Christmas 2010.

In 2012 Fathi was sentenced to six years in Evin prison, after 15 months in detention. [World Watch Monitor](#) has reported on how the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office labelled his prison conditions as "harsh".

In April 2014, Fathi suffered a fractured foot and toe after being beaten by security officials during a raid on political prisoners in Evin. In Dec. last year Fathi received an additional sentence of one year in prison.

### ***Iran's Supreme Leader: "Non-Muslims have never been harassed ..."***

Meanwhile Iran's Supreme Leader, Seyyed Ali Khamenei, has said that "after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, there is no record of aggression by Muslims against non-Muslims" according to Iranian-funded [Press TV](#).

[Mohabat News](#) an Iranian Christian news agency quoted Khamenei as saying:

"Such treatment of non-Muslims is non-existent in the history of our Islamic regime. Even our hot-headed conservative youth do not allow themselves to attack a non-Muslim...based on Islamic teachings, followers of other religions should be treated with justice and fairness... Muslims in Europe and America face death threats. There is a great propaganda campaign against them, and their places of worship are under constant attack" he said.

Khamenei was speaking at a meeting in the Islamic Parliament with members of Iran's recognised religious minority (RRMs). RRM's include Christian ethnic Armenians, Assyrians and Chaldeans as well as Jews and Zoroastrians. Religious minorities in Iran are classified into two categories: recognised and unrecognised. Unrecognised minorities are individuals who were previously Muslim and chose to leave Islam.

Unrecognised minorities are considered to have committed apostasy (i.e. rejection of Islam by a Muslim) – in Sharia law courts it can be punishable by a death sentence for men and life in prison for women.

### ***Recurring evidence of intolerance***

Khamenei's claims of Iran's religious freedom, and tolerance of people of all faiths, come in spite of recurring evidence of intolerance. Large numbers of religious minorities have been imprisoned and executed since the establishment of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Estimates from evidence provided by the American Center for Law and Justice, Article 18 and Middle East Concern, suggest that in December 2014 there were 92 Christians detained in Iranian prisons, only 13 of whom are serving court-issued sentences.

This treatment has been for both RRM's such as Armenian Christians Sevada Aghasar and Allen Dirigorosyan, and Assyrian pastor Victor Beth Tarmez, unrecognized religious minorities such as Pastors Rasoul Abdollahi and Farshid Fathi, born into Muslim families and therefore considered apostates for renouncing Islamic beliefs.

Several UN special reports and resolutions have condemned the violation of the rights of religious minorities.

According to the 2015 World Watch List by Open Doors, a charity that supports Christians who face hostilities because of their faith, Iran ranks seventh (up two points from last year) in the top ten countries where Christians are persecuted.

The main driver of persecution in Iran, it says, is 'Islamic extremism'; Christians from an Islamic background are especially targeted. Increasing numbers of Farsi [Persian] speaking churches have been forced to close; some of which have been there for both decades and centuries. This is a development that has not been seen in the history of the church in Iran, stated the World Watch List.

"Expectations were high when President Rouhani took office in 2013. However, his powers are limited and in the short run, no concrete changes are expected for religious minorities" says Open Doors.

Mohabat News reports that even Sunni Muslims cannot enjoy the least amount of freedom. As with Christians and other religious minorities, Sunnis are not allowed to build a mosque of their own in Tehran, the capital.

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## **Christian convert still in prison although his prison term is over**

Mohabat News (20.01.2015)

[http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9740:christian-convert-still-in-prison-although-his-prison-term-is-over&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279](http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9740:christian-convert-still-in-prison-although-his-prison-term-is-over&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279) - Ebrahim Firouzi is a Christian convert who has been arrested several times for his Christian activities. In his [last appearance in court](#) on July 13, 2013, he was sentenced to one year in prison and two years of exile to the remote town of Sarbaz, in Sistan and Baluchestan province for propaganda against the Islamic regime, Evangelism, connection with enemies and "anti-regime networks" abroad, and starting a Christian website.

The sentence was given to him for his earlier accusations. Therefore, taking into account the number of days he has been detained, his prison term should have been over on January 13, 2015. However, he is still being held in prison.

In the meantime, another case has been opened for him in branch 28 of the Revolutionary Courts for "propaganda and action against national security", but so far his judge has refused to deal with this case.

An individual close to Ebrahim Firouzi told Mohabat News, "The judge has issued a 200 million Toman bail (approximately \$73,000 USD) for Ebrahim's release, but when his family went to post the bail, they were rejected".

The individual, whose identity cannot be disclosed for security reasons, added, "Last January Ebrahim Firouzi was taken to a court where he denied all accusations. The judge told him since you denied your accusations, you will need to wait for the prosecutor to appear at the court with you".

It is now a year after that court appearance, he has never been called to court again.

Mr. Firouzi is currently being held in Ward 10 of the Rajaei-Shahr prison in Karaj, together with another Christian prisoner, [Farshid Fathi](#).

In another incident, the authorities at [Rajaei-Shahr prison held a Christmas celebration](#) for the inmates and intentionally prevented Christian prisoners from attending the celebration which was held in the Central Hall of the prison.

It is evident that the pressure on Iranian Christian prisoners continues and is a clear example of the Islamic regime's systematic violation of Human Rights. In this regard, the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom listed Iran as a country where religious freedom is being "seriously" violated and warned that the situation is getting worse in the country.

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## **Christian converts face criminalization of their faith**

### ***New Report Finds Severe Restrictions on Religious Practice; Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions Common***

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (16.01.2015)  
([http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians\\_report\\_Final\\_for-web.pdf](http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf)) –

*The report is based on interviews with 31 Christians throughout Iran from April 2011 to July 2012, drawing on extensive first-hand testimony by Iranian Christians, lawyers who have represented Christians in Iran, Christian rights advocates, and Iranian Christian journalists, as well as relevant Iranian court verdicts, religious edicts by Shi'a jurists and Iranian laws.*

The Iranian authorities should immediately end their systematic persecution and prosecution of Protestants and Christian converts, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran said in a new report released today.

The 73-page comprehensive report, *The Cost of Faith: Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran*, documents a pattern of rights violations that extends to all walks of life for Protestant converts in Iran: they face severe restrictions on religious practice and association, arbitrary arrests and detentions for practicing their faith, and violations of the right to life through state execution for apostasy and extrajudicial killings.

"The egregious violations of Christians' rights, which include not only the inability to freely practice their religion, but also the threat of torture and death at the hands of state officials, go against all international law. The international community must let the Iranian government know this is unacceptable," said Hadi Ghaemi, Executive Director for the Campaign.

The report is based on interviews with 31 Christians throughout Iran from April 2011 to July 2012, drawing on extensive first-hand testimony by Iranian Christians, lawyers who have represented Christians in Iran, Christian rights advocates, and Iranian Christian journalists, as well as relevant Iranian court verdicts, religious edicts by Shi'a jurists and Iranian laws.

The report documents the systematic arbitrary arrest and detention of Christian converts. For example, Farshid Fathi, a 33-year-old Christian leader from Tehran was detained in December 2010 as part of a Christmas crackdown on Christians and subsequently charged with "acting against national security," "contact with enemy foreign countries," and "religious propaganda." The Judiciary has sentenced him to six years in prison which he is currently serving.

Since 2005, authorities have arrested and prosecuted Protestants most often for security crimes against the state. Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, noted in September 2012 that over 300 Christians have been arbitrarily arrested and detained throughout the country since 2010.

Christian detainees are often denied due process and basic rights. They are held in prolonged detention without formal charges, trials are held without access to counsel, or, if there is counsel, without access to court files, and ill treatment is common during detention.

Leading Iranian officials allege, without any substantiation, that Christian converts are part of a foreign inspired "soft war" against the state. Hojjat Al-Islam Abbas Kaebi, a member of the influential Assembly of Experts, in October 2010 claimed, "... the Zionists and Westerners have targeted [through Christian converts] our society's identity and people's religion."

In numerous interviews conducted by the Campaign, Christian converts reported a consistent pattern of abuses by the government. Freedom to practice religion is severely restricted: the government has refused to allow the construction or licensing of any new church since the 1979 Revolution, it restricts church attendance and has closed many churches, it has shut down Iran's main Persian-language bible publisher and restricts the distribution of bibles, and it monitors and harasses church groups.

The Campaign's research reveals that interrogators, prosecutors and courts consistently refer to standard Christian practices, such as membership in a house church, evangelical activities, and participation in a Christian conference, as criminal acts, and security officers routinely confiscate standard Christian items such as bibles, religious literature, and crosses during arrests.

The report also found clear and consistent evidence of the threat to life for Christian converts. One leading Christian pastor, Hossein Soodmand, was executed by the state for apostasy in 1990; other church leaders who were sentenced to death for apostasy, including Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, were subsequently acquitted only due to intense international pressure. The Campaign's research revealed numerous reports of security officials threatening Christian detainees with execution on apostasy charges, and numerous cases of suspicious deaths involving Christian leaders whose investigations were so lacking in due diligence that government complicity in the killings or the cover-ups is strongly suggested.

The report also documents the systematic discrimination of Christian Protestants and converts in employment, education, in laws governing marriage and family, and in Iran's penal code.

Under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Iran is obligated to safeguard freedom of religion. While the Iranian government asserts that it respects the rights of its recognized religious minorities, in practice it does not do so.

"From apostasy charges that threaten the lives of converts to the imprisonment of church members involved in proselytizing, authorities have engaged in a pattern of human rights abuses that effectively criminalizes faith and manifestations of it," Ghaemi said.

The Campaign calls on the government of Iran to allow its Christian converts to freely practice their religion, without further threat or intimidation, as is required under international and Iranian domestic law.

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## **Christmas arrests in Iran: 11 still detained**

### ***Security forces raided Christmas celebrations in home, arrested three***

World Watch Monitor (15.01.2015) - As the US Secretary of State meets his Iranian counterpart in a bid to revive stalled talks over Iran's nuclear programme, human rights experts are keen that issues of freedom of religion are not overlooked.

This week, the UK Foreign Office has said that it's raised its concern with the Iranian government over the arrest and detention - in Iran's notorious Evin prison - of the former leader of the Assyrian Pentecostal Church in Tehran, as well as two others, whose whereabouts remains unknown.

The 60-year-old pastor Victor Beth Tarmez and the two Christian converts who were his guests were arrested when Iranian state security agents raided Tarmez's home during a Christmas celebration he was hosting on the evening of December 26; the gathering was considered to be "unauthorized and illegal."

Mansour Borji, from the Article18 committee of the Hamgaam ('taking steps together' in Dari) Council of Iranian churches told World Watch Monitor that Tarmez' family is concerned for his health as he's a diabetic. Borji also said details of the actual charge on which Tarmez is detained are still unclear.

Borji told WWM that Tarmez was forced to speak Farsi with his family on a very brief phone call from prison, instead of using their shared native language Assyrian, so that guards could monitor what was said.

The British Foreign Office has written: "The UK government is deeply concerned by the Iranian regime's ongoing persecution of religious minorities - including Christians. ... The UK and the international community expect Iran to live up to the right to freedom of religion and belief as set out in the Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

### ***During the raid***

According to [Mohabat News](#), an Iranian Christian news site, the agents temporarily arrested all 14 in the house at the time. Then they filmed all the detainees, forcing them to "introduce themselves to the camera and say why they were there and why they thought they were being arrested" and then asked them to "fill out an eight-page form printed on papers with the logo of the Ministry of Intelligence". Among those arrested were Christian converts with a Zoroastrian [ancient Iranian religion] background, who refused to fill out the forms arguing that this was a written interrogation and could result in a criminal record for them. They said they had not broken any law and should not be subject to interrogation."

The agents also confiscated the pastor's belongings including his computer and Bibles. They also searched the guests, seizing their identification cards and mobile phones.

### ***Pastor Tarmez repeatedly intimidated since 2009***

Tarmez is an Assyrian pastor officially recognized by the Iranian government; until 2009, he also worked as General Superintendent in Shahr-Ara Assyrian Pentecostal Church.

He had been holding Farsi-speaking services for years at Shahr-Ara. Then, [as reported on this website](#), in March 2009, the Assyrian Member of the Iranian Parliament Yonathan

Betkolia announced that, by order of the Islamic Revolutionary Court, the church would be closed because it offered a Farsi-language service attended by converts from Islam. While the church was temporarily closed after Tarmez refused to stop Farsi-language services, it was later re-opened (after he had been demoted from leadership) with a new church leader, and services continued in Assyrian only.

The number of Assyrian Christians in the country is estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000.

Since 2009 Tarmez has continued his religious activities.

Borji told WWM that 2009 was the start of government pressure against churches which hold Farsi-language services. (Most recently, [we reported on the closure in May 2013 of the Assemblies of God church in Tehran](#)).

Borji explained to WWM: "Over the past five years, we have witnessed arrests of several Christians and Christian converts during Christmas holidays: the government is very sensitive about these days... Also in the last 5 years, seven churches that offered worship services in Farsi language were closed down or forced to cease their Farsi services.

### ***More Christmas arrests of Iranian Christians***

Borji also confirmed to WWM that eight other Christians were arrested on Christmas Day at a house church in Tehran province and have since been transferred to an unknown location.

They are Mehdi Kian, Ali Sadraddin, Mohammad Kazemi, Azin Faroudi, Mohammad Hossein Moridian, Maryam Narimani, Alireza Nasiri and Brother Matin.

Another organisation, Middle East Concern, reported that over the Christmas period a total of 24 arrests of Christians were recorded, although it added that, separately, five other Christians have recently been released from prison, some on bail and with conditions. One, Amin Khaki, had been held since March 2014.

### ***Iran No. 7 on World Watch List***

Iran ranks No. 7 on the 2015 World Watch List, two positions higher than the previous year.

The list ranks the 50 countries where living as a Christian is most difficult, and is created annually by Open Doors International, a worldwide ministry to Christians who live under pressure because of their faith

Open Doors said the ranking changed because of an increased deteriorating situation for Christians in Iran. It says "According to the Iranian state, only Armenians and Assyrians can be Christian. Ethnic Persians are by definition Muslim, and, therefore, ethnic Persian Christians are considered apostates. This makes almost all Christian activity illegal, especially when it occurs in Persian (Farsi) languages - from evangelism to Bible training, to publishing Scripture and Christian books, or preaching in Farsi".

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**Why are burial rights being denied to a Baha'i in Iran?**

World Religion News (11.01.2015) - What should have been a period of mourning for most people has turned into a political and religious scandal in Iran. A man named Shamel Bina, a Baha'i, died in late October, but has been denied burial rights in Iran for two months, leaving his family in mourning and without the ability to put their loved one to rest. This complicated religious and political move is garnering attention around the globe, as Bina's family simply wants to bury their relative.

The Baha'i are a group of individuals that conform to a monotheistic faith that emphasizes the unity of humanity. They have fallen under severe persecution in nations like Iran because the faith does not conform to the national faith of Islam. The Baha'i have had many different run-ins with the Iranian government, with this as only the latest disrespect levied against the faith. With Shamel Bina's body lying in the morgue for the foreseeable future, there are many people who are discouraged that there will be any allowances made for his burial rites in this case.

As most people are aware, the official religion of Iran is Islam. While they have strict laws that oversee this religion, they are considered by many to be blind to the plight of other religions. The Baha'i are one of these groups, and while there is some evidence to support that Iran is purposely seeing to their disadvantage, it definitely seems as though they are not doing anything to ease their burdens.

In fact, there are several cases that are similar to Bina's, where the government is inflicting hardships on this particular group. For the most part, they are attempting to make the Baha'i conform to the burial rites of Islam. Many people have been refused burial in Iran until their family is willing to do so without a casket. In some cases, they are simply not allowed to be buried in specific towns across the nation.

This latest blow to the Baha'i faith has prompted a variety of people to plead with the government to ease the legal restrictions that prevent them from burying their dead relatives. Old and young have come together to ask for the increasingly institutionalized discrimination to end. Even still, Shamel Bina's body goes unburied while the state still denies him the burial rites that his religion sees as necessary, with no word from the government as to whether this situation can be ameliorated.

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## **Former Assyrian Church leader and two Christian converts arrested**

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (07.01.2015) - Iranian security agents arrested an Assyrian pastor and two Christian converts who were his guests at his Tehran residence on December 26, 2014, according to Mansour Borji, Spokesperson for the Alliance of Iranian Churches.

Borji told the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran that the full reasons for the arrest of Pastor Victor Beth Tarmez, a former leader of the Tehran Pentecostal Assyrian Church, and his guests remain unknown, but that at the time of the raid on his home, agents stated that they were arresting the individuals because they "participated in an illegal gathering." The "illegal gathering" was a Christmas party Tarmez was holding at his home and his guests were Zoroastrian, Muslim, and Christian citizens.

"There was a Christmas party at Pastor Victor's home. He and his wife and son and 14 guests were there. When agents entered the home, first they searched all the personal belongings of the guests, then they videotaped their faces, and then they searched the

premises. Eventually, they arrested Pastor Tarmez along with two Christian converts and confiscated some property from the home,” Borji told the Campaign.

“During a short phone call to his family on December 29, Pastor Victor informed them that he is held at Evin Prison. We have no information about the status of the two Christian converts arrested on the same day. All we know is that they have not been released yet,” added Mansour Borji.

Asked whether Pastor Victor had been threatened or arrested before, Borji said “In 2009, Intelligence Ministry agents asked Pastor Victor to cancel his Farsi-language classes at the Church. He resisted and continued his classes. In the end, agents put pressure on the Church and the Church dismissed him from his position. But Pastor Beth Tarmez continued his religious activities.”

“Over the past five years, we have witnessed arrests of several Christians and Christian converts during Christmas holidays. The government is very sensitive about these days and even tells Farsi-language churches in advance that they can only have one gathering for Christmas, because they are worried that because of the Farsi language [used in the sermons], regular people would also come to church and listen to what is being said,” concluded Mansour Borji.

Despite official assertions that Christians enjoy full rights as citizens of Iran, the Christian community—particularly Evangelicals and Protestant communities that are seen as encouraging conversion to Christianity, suffers severe and widespread discrimination and persecution in Iran, as documented in the Campaign’s report, *The Cost of Faith: Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran*, and noted in the reports of the UN Secretary-General and the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Iran.

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