

Iranian Christian prisoners to go on hunger strike

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (08.02.2017) - Two Christian prisoners, Hadi Asgari and Amin Afshar Naderi, who have spent the last six months in jail in uncertainty, have threatened to go on a hunger strike. Hadi Asgari has been suffering from kidney infection in prison and as of now has not received any proper medical attention.

Hadi Asgari and Amin Afshar Naderi have been held in prison for the last six months in Ward 4 of the Evin prison. They seek fair treatment of their case and adequate medical care in prison, and as such have decided to go on hunger strike should the authorities keep them in uncertainty for a longer period.

Reports indicate that these Christian men have not been interrogated nor has their lawyer been able to review their case. All the requests made by their families to obtain information about their situation have been turned down as well.

It is thought that this long waiting period is also used to fabricate false evidence against such prisoners to be used in court.

They could spend months or even years in solitary confinement without going through the common judicial process. This long period of waiting in prison often breaks the prisoners emotionally and causes lasting mental and physical damage.

Hadi Asgari and Amin Afshar Naderi were arrested on 26th August 2016, together with other Christians - Amir Saman Dashti, Ramil Bet-Tamraz, and Mohammad Dehnavi - at a family party in a garden in Firouzkouh county, north of Tehran. They were not only charged with having a non-Islamic party but also with possession of Bibles and Christian material, which is a crime in the country. Even though they were not having a worship session during their gathering, the mere possession of Christian material amongst them is considered an offence.

Eye witnesses reported that Mr. Afshar Naderi protested against the police's harsh treatment of the guests, but in response police beat him and began searching the premises. They found three Bibles there and added them to the list of confiscated items.

Ramil Bet-Tamraz, is the son of Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz, former leader of the Shahr-Ara Assyrian Pentecostal Church in Tehran. Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz had been arrested himself in December, 2014 while celebrating Christmas with friends and family. In that incident, Amin Afshar Naderi was released on bail on 10th February after spending thirty-six days in jail, during which he was frequently interrogated. He spent one month of his arrest in solitary confinement.