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Christian converts leave Iran, facing combined 35 years in prison

Article18 (10.09.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3ivUSk7> – Three Iranian Christian converts whose appeals against a combined 35 years in prison were recently rejected want to let their supporters know they are safe and well outside the country.

The cases against Kavian Fallah-Mohammadi, Hadi Asgari and Amin Afshar-Naderi were tied up with those against the Iranian-Assyrian pastor Victor-Bet Tamraz and his wife Shamiram Issavi, whose appeals were also rejected.

Like Victor and Shamiram, the three converts are now safely outside Iran and told Article18 they wished to let everyone

know they are OK, albeit still suffering with the scars of a years-long battle in the courts only because of their membership of a house-church.

Amin, who was given the stiffest sentence – of 15 years – told Article18 he had lived “six years of uncertainty” since his arrest in December 2014 at Victor and Shamiram’s home, as they celebrated Christmas together.

He said the pressure he had been placed under in the years since had left him with a nervous tic, for which he has been prescribed medication.

“I miss my country, Iran, very much,” he said. “Before prison, I had travelled to foreign countries many times, but I never decided to emigrate. Today, I am very sad that I have been forced to seek refuge in another country, no matter how much better the conditions may be there.”

Kavian said he decided to flee after the ramifications of his 10-year sentence started to become apparent.

“I had no idea that when you have a criminal record that it means you don’t have a work permit, you can’t get an official job, and you have no idea how long you’ll have to remain in this state of uncertainty,” he said.

“It took two years [after my arrest] in all before they summoned me for my last defence, when they made other serious accusations against me, which made my case even more severe.

“Then, finally, the following year, they sentenced me to the 10 years in prison, and the delay to the process puts huge psychological pressure on you. Of course we appealed the verdict, but, finally, after another three years, when no official trials took place, the appeal court approved the verdict – very strangely without a face-to-face hearing that my lawyer could have attended.”

Kavian was recently summoned to begin his sentence, but has no intention to do so now that he is safely outside the country.

Neither Amin, nor Hadi have yet received any official summons.

Amin told Article18: "I say with tears that, according to the teachings of the Bible, we tried to be good citizens in Iran and not to act against the law, but the government inflicted serious injuries upon us with an iron fist and such cruelty.

"But we pray for the rulers, for those who harassed us, insulted and slandered us, humiliated and ridiculed us, tortured and destroyed us, harmed us and our families, confiscated our property. We pray for them and forgive them."

Article18 will soon publish video interviews with all three of the converts, as well as Victor and Shamiram.

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