

# IRAN: 22 Baha'is began New Year in prison

By Kian Sabeti

Iran Press Watch (28.03.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2Z5VLXm> – The last month of the Persian year 1397 (corresponding to 2018-2019 in the Gregorian calendar) was an eventful month for Baha'i prisoners. On one hand, some of them were released; on the other hand, trials, indictments, arrests and searches of their homes continued for these citizens in various cities in Iran.

On February 11th, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, 17 prisoners who had less than a year remaining of their sentences were pardoned and released in Shiraz, Mashhad, Ghaemshahr, Isfahan, Sanandaj and Yazd.

Pouya Tebyanian, one of the prisoners, was released from prison in Semnan, upon the completion of his seven-year sentence. Shayda Ghodousi, a Baha'i prisoner in Gorgan, who had been sentenced to five years in prison, after serving one-third of her sentence was released on probation in the last days of the Persian year (which ended March 20). Maryam Ghaffar Manesh and Atosa Ahmadaee were also released from Evin prison, after serving respectively 6 months and 45 days of temporary detention.

As reported by Iranwire, on March 11 security agents in Tehran arrested two Baha'i brothers, Hamid Nasserri and Saeed

Nasseri. Hamid Nasseri was arrested on the street in front of his business, and Saeed after going to the Evin detention center to inquire about the condition of his brother Hamid and of his wife Afsaneh Emami (Nasseri). At the time of Saeed's arrest, 40 days had passed since the arrest of his wife, Afsaneh Emami (Nasseri). Afsaneh Emami (Nasseri) was released on bail in the final days of the year, but Saeed and Hamid Nasseri still remain in detention.

The sentence against Ghazaleh Bagheri Tari, the Baha'i from Tehran, who was tried in December 2018, was issued in February of this year. She has been sentenced to five years in prison for the crime of "activities against national security because of membership in the Baha'i administration". Ghazaleh Bagheri was arrested by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence in September 2017, during a religious gathering at her home, and was released on bail three weeks later.

Kaviz Nouzdahi is another Baha'I whose sentence was announced in February. A source with knowledge of the case told Iranwire: "The court hearing for Kaviz Nouzdahi was held in late December 2018 in Branch 4 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Mashhad, presided over by Judge Mansouri. Of course, on the day of the hearing the judge was not present, and the hearing was conducted by the court counselor, Mr. Farhikhteh. The charges against Mr. Nouzdahi were "cooperating with hostile foreign governments" and "membership in an anti-regime organization". The judge did not permit the defendant's attorney to be present in court or review the case file. Their excuse was that the attorney named by Mr. Nouzdahi was not on the judiciary's list of approved attorneys, and that the court hearing was conducted without the attorney present. Article 48 of the New Penal Code states that in crimes against domestic or international security as well as organized crime,

in the preliminary investigation phase the parties in the case must select their attorney or attorneys from among those approved by the head of the judicial branch.

According to the verdict issued, Kaviz Nouzdahi was acquitted of the charge of cooperation with foreign governments, and was convicted for the charge of membership in an anti-regime organization (i.e., membership in the Baha'i administration), and sentenced to four years in prison.

Another Baha'i citizen, Neda Mokhtari, was also sentenced to four years in prison by the verdict of Branch 5 of the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad presided over by Judge Mazlumi for the crime of "teaching the Baha'i Faith".

Twenty two Baha'i citizens began Naw-Ruz (the Persian New Year) 1398 on March 21, 2019, away from their homes and families in Iranian prisons. They were sentenced in Iranian courts to a total of 105 years of imprisonment. The verdicts against these Baha'is were issued based on articles 498, 499 and 500 of the Islamic Penal Code.

Article 498 of the code states: "Any person with any ideology who forms or leads a group, society or sub-group of more than two people, under any name or title, domestically or abroad, with the goal of disrupting national security, who is not considered a combatant, shall be sentenced to prison for two to ten years."

According to article 499 of this law: "Any person holding a

membership in one of the groups, societies or sub-groups mentioned in article 498 shall be sentenced to three months to five years in prison, unless it is proven that they were unaware of its goals.”

Article 500 also states: “Any person engaged in any way in propaganda activities against the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or in favor of anti-regime groups and organizations, shall be sentenced to three months to one year in prison.”

The punishment for teaching the Baha’i Faith, membership and activity in this religious community is determined based on these articles of the law.

In Evin prison, four instructors of the Baha’i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) are currently serving sentences for the crime of teaching youth who were deprived of a university education; Hassan Momtaz, Peyman Kooshkbaghi, and Negin Ghedamian, each with five year prison sentences, and Azita Rafizadeh with a four year prison sentence, are currently in Evin prison. Peyman Kooshkbaghi and his wife Azita Rafizadeh are among the incarcerated married couples who spent the final days of the year away from each other and from their young child.

Adel Naimi with a 10 year sentence, Farhad Fahandej with a 10 year sentence, Vahed Kholousi with a 5 year sentence, and Afshin Seyyed Ahmad with a 3 year sentence, are the four prisoners in Rajai Shahr prison in Karaj. Shahnám Jazbani is the only Baha’i prisoner in Gonbad-e-Kavoos in Golestan province. He has been sentenced to 5 years in prison.

Isfahan, with 13 Baha'i prisoners, has the highest number of Baha'i prisoners in Iran. Nine of these prisoners were transferred to the Isfahan prison from the town of Baharestan. Of the nine, Sepideh Rouhani, Bahareh Zaini, Foujan Shahidi, each with a 3 year sentence, are incarcerated in Dowlatabad prison in Isfahan. Anousheh Raeineh, Afshin Bolbolan, Milad Davardan, Farhang Sahba and Ali Sani, each with a six year sentence, and Saham Armin, with a 3 year sentence, are the other six prisoners from Baharestan who have been transferred to Dastgerd prison in Isfahan to serve their sentences.

In addition, Sohrab Taghipour, with a 5 year sentence, and Manouchehr Rahmani, Mohsen Mehregani and Farzad Homayouni, each with a 20 month sentence, are four Baha'is from Isfahan who began the Persian New Year in that city's central prison.

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