

IRAN: Amnesty launches writing campaign for release of four Iranian Christians

World Watch Monitor (24.08.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2PBo771>
– Amnesty International (AI) has launched an Urgent Action calling for the release of four Iranians sentenced to a combined total of 45 years in prison “solely for practising their Christian faith”.

Its report calls for urgent action from the Iranian government to “quash the convictions and sentences of Victor Bet-Tamraz, Shamiram Isavi, Amin Afshar-Naderi, and Hadi Asgari, as they have been targeted solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedoms of religion and belief, expression, and association, through their Christian faith.”

All four are currently free on bail, awaiting the outcome of their appeals.

Amnesty urges supporters to write to the government asking it to “stop harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and imprisonment of Christians, including converts, in Iran”.

It also includes a call to “respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt or change a religion or belief of one’s choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one’s religion or

belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching, as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party”.

The Assyrian pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz and wife Shamiram Isavi were both jailed for church-related activities.

He was arrested with two members of his church in 2014 as they celebrated Christmas together. The government had already closed the Tehran Pentecostal Assyrian Church which he led, in 2009. He was found guilty of “conducting evangelism” and “illegal house-church activities”, among other charges, and given a 10-year prison sentence. His appeal was heard in June.

His wife is appealing against her own five-year prison sentence for “acting against national security and against the regime by organising small groups, attending a seminary abroad and training church leaders and pastors to act as spies”.

Their son Ramil is was also handed a four-month jail sentence last month, for “acting against national security” by being involved with illegal house churches.

The other two Christians, Amin Afshar-Naderi and Hadi Asgari, are converts who were sentenced alongside Bet-Tamraz to also ten years in jail, though Afshar-Naderi has five years more for “insulting the sacred” (blasphemy). According to Amnesty he shared a Facebook post from someone else “that adopted a Quranic writing style about the sharp rise in the price of chicken in Iran”.

They are the two remaining detainees from an initial group of five arrested while picnicking in the Alborz Mountains north-east of the capital Tehran in August 2016.

In 2017 Asgari and Afshar-Naderi went on hunger strike to protest against being denied medical treatment, having reportedly suffered ill health. Middle East Concern reported that Asgari had faced “particularly intense pressure” during his interrogation.

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