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IRAN – GERMANY: Germany denies refuge to Christian convert

Germany denies refuge to Christian convert – after family member tortured, killed for his faith

An Iranian Christian convert in Germany faces likely death for his faith as deportation looms

Court deems it “unlikely” that a person would have really converted to Christianity after family member was killed for his beliefs

ADF International (11.08.2022)- <https://bit.ly/3dAYd48> – A 44-year-old Iranian cabinetmaker who converted to Christianity has been denied protection in Europe, facing likely imprisonment or death upon return to his home country. The European Court of Human Rights has dismissed his attempt to appeal the decision on the basis of his right to freedom of religion. The 44-year-old is now threatened with deportation to Iran.

“No one should be persecuted for their faith. Iran is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for Christians, and converts are particularly at risk. In the last year, religious persecution has greatly worsened. So-called “religious deviants” can be given prison sentences, national security charges are continuously used to target religious minorities. The courts in Germany must take this into account when processing asylum applications,” said Lidia Rieder, Legal Officer at ADF International.

A dangerous journey to Christianity

Hassan – whose name has been changed to protect his identity and is recorded only as “H.H” in public documents – applied for asylum in 2018.

He testified before the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees that he had learned about Christianity in Iran through his wife’s brother. His brother-in-law had been imprisoned for his activities with a house-church, and was ultimately killed for practicing his faith in jail.

“My wife’s brother had become a different person by becoming a Christian. We wanted to see if we would get this feeling when we became Christians,” H.H. told the authorities.

“I had had many problems in Iran...I had many questions, but I was not allowed to ask them. When I asked questions, I was beaten at school. This led me to want to know which God I was facing. One day my brother-in-law said to me and my wife that

he had good news. There is a treasure, there is a living God, Jesus Christ, we are His children and not His slaves...He said there is a free salvation available," he continued, reflecting on his conversion experience.

Subsequently, Hassan's wife adopted the Christian faith and eventually the whole family converted. Once discovered, security forces then stormed their house and confiscated books, the computer, their passports and their Bible. The family fled to Turkey, and from there to Germany.

"In Germany I share the gospel, I organize prayer circles here in the accommodation. I want to be a good example, to win the others to faith in Jesus Christ. My greatest goal would be for my children to be able to find Christ in freedom, and to do good," said Hassan.

Credibility under Question

When H.H.'s asylum application was rejected by German authorities, he appealed to the Greifswald Administrative Court. The court dismissed H.H.'s case, declaring that it was "not particularly likely" that a Muslim would decide to become a Christian after his brother-in-law had been tortured and killed and his wife abused. It was more likely that the events described, if they had actually taken place, would have a deterrent effect on third parties," said the Administrative Court.

"There are national and international guidelines for asylum applications based on religious grounds. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), decision-makers need to be objective and not arrive at conclusions based solely upon their own experiences. General assumptions about a certain religion or country should be avoided. Unfortunately, this guidance is being used very selectively by the German decision-makers. They do not understand that maintaining a religious belief when persecuted

can be appealing to others and not just a deterrent as seen from the history of Christianity,” Rieder continued.

This week, the European Court of Human Rights quickly declined to hear arguments in Hassan’s defense, leaving him vulnerable to deportation to a country where religious conversion can carry a prison penalty.

Inconsistent allocation of asylum decisions nationwide

According to OpenDoors, Iranian asylum seekers in Germany are often confronted with suspicions of feigned conversion. The situation varies greatly across the country: a comparison of the federal states shows an inconsistent picture of very low to very high rejection rates with regard to the recognition or rejection of converts by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and the administrative courts, which suggests subjective examination procedures.

“There appears to be a tragic disregard for the application of a uniform and objective standard of examination for these kinds of dire asylum cases, in violation of international law. When decision-makers and judges decide on asylum applications according to their own criteria and without regard for the on-the-ground situation in the countries of origin, it results in severe personal suffering. H.H.’s case is a very worrying example of this,” said Lidia Rieder.

Situation of Christians in Iran worsens

Iran is ranked 9th on the World Watch List, a ranking of countries with the worst persecution of Christians worldwide. The extent of persecution is “extreme”.

In 2021, Iran passed amendments providing for prison sentences for “insulting Islam” and “deviant activities”. Last year, several Christians were arrested on this basis, charged and sentenced to five years in prison each. According to a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, the

persecution of converts to Christianity is particularly bad.

“Every person must be able to freely choose their faith. Iran systematically fails to protect its citizens’ right to religious freedom. Iranian law must be amended to be brought into accordance with international human rights law, which protects the right of every individual to choose and freely practice their faith. Until this happens, countries like Germany have a responsibility to help to protect vulnerable religious minorities when they have an opportunity to do so. Ignoring that responsibility can have fatal consequences.” said Kelsey Zorzi, Director of Global Religious Freedom at ADF International.

Photo: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

[Further reading about FORB in Iran on HRWF website](#)

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