

IRAN: Iranian Christian converts arrested in family party

Iranian security forces arrested a group of Christian converts who had gathered in a family party. Their families are concerned over staged accusations against their loved ones.

Mohabat News (30.08.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2cbbv3x> – Iranian police raided a family party on Thursday August 26, 2016, held in a garden in Firouz-Kouh county, north of Tehran, and arrested a group of Christian converts who had gathered there.

Recently, Iranian police started a campaign to crack down on parties and weddings where Islamic principals are not tightly followed. As part of this campaign, Iranian police identified and raided a gathering in Firouz-Kouh county, arresting 15 of the guests. Later they discovered that there were a few Christian converts among those arrested who had been previously arrested for their faith.

Among the Christians arrested were Afshar Naderi, Hadi Asgari, Amir Saman Dashti, Ramil Bet-Tamraz, and Mohammad Dehnavi.

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

The police then transferred those arrested to an unknown

location and so far only Amir Saman Dashti has been able to contact his family in a very short phone conversation. Mr. Dashti stated in the short phone call that they were immediately transferred to Evin prison.

Most of the Christians arrested had a history of previous arrests for their faith.

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 and Kavian Falah Mohammadi were arrested as well but were later released on bail after weeks of interrogation and solitary confinement.

They had all been charged with evangelism through their house church, which is defined as a crime in Iran. They are yet to appear before a court for this charge.

Pastor Bet-Tamraz was held longer and released upon posting a heavy bail on March 1, 2015, after 65 days in detention. Despite his physical problems and advanced age, Mr. Bet-Tamraz was held in solitary confinement for the majority of his imprisonment.

In that incident, Amin Afshar Naderi was released on bail on February 10, 2015 after 36 days in jail, during which he was

frequently interrogated. He spent one month of his arrest in solitary confinement.

The other Christian arrested, Kavian Falah Mohammadi, was temporarily released just a week after Mr. Naderi to await his trial.

Families of these arrested Christians are concerned that their loved ones' previous cases will be re-opened and the new charges will be added to them. They are also worried that they will be forced to make confessions against other believers who are currently free on bail, making the situation worse for them as well.

Personal privacy is a serious concern in Iran

According to Article 25 of the Iranian constitution, "searching, intercepting delivery of mails, wiretapping and recording of telephone conversations, publicizing, censorship and interruption of private telegraph and fax communication is illegal, unless permitted through a court order".

Despite this article, Iranian police, security forces and the Revolutionary Guard, do not respect this law and violate Iranian citizens' privacy and personal space.

With this group of Christian believers arrested in their family party, not only will they be charged with having a non-Islamic party, they will be charged with possession of Bibles and Christian material, which is a crime in the country. Even

though they were not having a worship session in their gathering, the mere possession of Christian material among them is considered an offence.