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IRAN: Monthly news digest about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in November

Monthly news Digest about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in November

Christians

Converts cleared of wrongdoing in second trial on identical charges

Article 18 (29.11.2022) – Three “Church of Iran” members serving five-year prison sentences for “spreading deviant beliefs contrary to Islam” have been cleared of wrongdoing in a second trial on identical charges.

Meanwhile, in a separate development, one of the men, **Morteza Mashoodkari**, has had his prison sentence reduced by half.

The second trial took place on 2 November at a Rasht Revolutionary Court. A week later, Morteza was informed that he had also been granted a “partial pardon” and reduction of his sentence to two and a half years.

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USCIRF condemn’s religious charges in Iran protester’s death sentence

Article 18 (16.11.2022) – The US Commission on International Religious Freedom has condemned the sentencing to death of an Iranian protester on “religiously-grounded charges” and warned of the “credible” threat of “large-scale executions in the coming weeks”.

On Sunday, a Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced the unnamed protester on charges including “enmity against God” and “corruption on Earth”, which USCIRF noted were “both grounded in religious interpretations”.

The independent, bipartisan group said the ongoing protests in Iran, now two months old, were at their root a cry for Iranians to be granted “their intentionally-guaranteed human rights”, including religious freedom.

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Defenders of Christians among over 30 lawyers arrested

Article 18 (08.11.2022) – More than 30 lawyers, including at least three involved in defending Christian converts, have been arrested in recent weeks in cities across Iran.

The arrests come as thousands of protesters await trial, without recourse to legal advice, and amid calls from more than 200 Iranian MPs for them to be sentenced to death.

Hossein Ahmadi-niaz, an Iranian human-rights defender now living in the Netherlands, told Article18 that many of the arrested lawyers are well-known figures, some of whom had offered legal advice to arrested protesters and openly “demanded the establishment of a legal commission to protect the rights of detainees, including the right of access to a lawyer”.

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‘National security’ charges deliberately vague ‘to mislead public’

Article 18 (07.12.2022) – Accusations that members of religious minorities, including Christians, are engaged in unspecified “actions against national security” are deliberately vague in order “to mislead the public”, says the author of a recent report on religious propaganda in Iran.

The intention, according to Shahin Milani, executive director of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, is “to basically convince the masses, the public, that these individuals are engaging in nefarious actions against the Iranian state”.

Mr Milani was speaking on Thursday, 3 November, as part of a virtual discussion hosted by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), for whom his July

report was written.

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UK courts grapple with church leaders' expertise in assessing asylum-seekers' conversion claims

Article 18 (04.11.2022) – The question of how much weight should be given to the testimony of church members and leaders in assessing the credibility of asylum-seekers' claims to have converted to Christianity has become pivotal in UK courts.

Guidance on this issue is included in the latest policy advice to the Home Office on how to assess the claims of Iranians who say they would be at risk if they were deported because they have become Christians.

The risk genuine converts – including ordinary church members, as well as leaders – would face upon return to Iran was accepted in previous guidance to the Home Office published in March 2020.

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Baha'is

BIC statement at Human Rights Council special session on Iran

Iran Press Watch (25.11.2022) – 35th special session of the Human Rights Council on the deteriorating situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially with respect to women and children.

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Iran using protests To further persecute Baha'is

Iran Press Watch (22.11.2022) – Many members of the Baha'i religious minority have been arrested across Iran in recent weeks amid unabated nationwide protests. Some were detained at their homes while others were rounded up with other protesters in the streets. Like many of the arrested demonstrators, these Baha'is have been locked up behind bars without specific charges and haven't been allowed to meet with their families.

As of now, the Baha'i International Community, which represents the worldwide Baha'i community, has not yet officially commented on the new wave of arrests of Baha'is, but its representatives have used their personal social media accounts to comment about the unrest and the ensuring crackdown by the authorities.

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Another Baha'i arrested In Iran; Whereabouts unknown

Iran Press Watch (22.11.2022) – Iranian authorities have arrested a member of Iran's long persecuted Baha'i religious minority amid an intensified crackdown on the faith, IranWire reports.

Sanaz Tafazuli was driving in her car in the eastern city of Mashhad on November 22 when she was apprehended by intelligence officers who confiscated her electronic devices and religious books.

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Iranian government detains dozens more Baha'is during national crisis

Iran Press Watch (18.11.2022) – Twenty-nine Baha'is in Iran have been arrested since September, the latest incidents in a crackdown that began in late July, even as the Iranian government faces unprecedented scrutiny around the world over its human rights record.

The latest developments follow the most recent crackdown against the Baha'i community commencing at the end of July which saw almost 300 incidents of persecution over a period of six weeks.

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Baha'i citizen Parwa Behdad arrested

Iran Press Watch (15.11.2022) – On November 14, 2022, security forces arrested Baha'i citizen **Parwa Behdad** at her house in Isfahan and took her to an undisclosed location. The agents also searched her home and confiscated some of her personal belongings.

According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, on November 14, 2022, Parwa Behdad was arrested at her house in Isfahan.

The reason for this arrest, charges and her whereabouts are still unknown.

Pressure on Baha'i citizen Payam Vali to make forced confession

Iran Press Watch (10.11.2022) – According to a report received by "IranWire", Payam Vali, a Baha'i resident of Karaj, is under pressure and threats from the security agents to make a forced confession. He was told that he could be released only after he makes a confession. This Baha'i citizen is accused of

propaganda against the regime by promoting the Baha'i religion, and propaganda against Islamic Sharia, communicating and cooperating with foreign media through interviews and sending news of human rights violations and inciting people to create protests through cyberspace.

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Religious minority persecuted in Iran targeted with sophisticated Android spyware

Iran Press Watch (03.11.2022) – Kaspersky is warning of a previously unknown espionage campaign targeting the Persian-speaking religious minority Baha'i with Android spyware.

As part of the campaign, victims were lured to a VPN application claiming to provide access to Baha'i religious resources that are banned in Iran.

The application contains highly sophisticated spyware designed to collect all types of data from devices, including call logs and contact lists, and to track victims' activities. The malware, named SandStrike, also supports commands that allow the attackers to perform various operations on the device.

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Iran arrests Baha'i in continuing crackdown on faith

Iran Press Watch (03.11.2022) – Iranian authorities have arrested a member of the country's long-persecuted Baha'i religious minority, and transferred him to an unknown location. According to a report received by IranWire, security and intelligence forces on November 2 stormed the workplace of

Pouya Sarraf in the city of Karaj, west of Tehran. They seized his personal computer and mobile phones.

Security forces also searched Sarraf's house and confiscated some of his wife's books.

Sarraf's whereabouts remain unknown.

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