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IRAN: News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in January

HRWF (04.02.2021) – Human Rights Activists (HRA) in Iran have published their “Annual Statistical Report of Human Rights Conditions in Iran”. A section is devoted to the persecution of members of religious minorities and illustrated by maps, tables and pie charts. Here is an excerpt of their report:

“In this category, 136 reports have been registered by the Department of Statistics in 2020. According to these reports, 77 arrests, 49 cases of prevention from economical activities, 126 cases of summon by the judicial and security institutions, and 22 cases of depriving and preventing from education, and 69 cases of police home raids, has taken place.

98 individuals of the religious minorities were sentenced by

the judicial institutions to a total of 4351 months of imprisonment. Additionally, the ministry of cultural heritage of Tehran and the Municipality of Tehran demolished the Adventist church of Tehran in the past year.

In the field of religious minorities, the Baha'is constitute the highest of the Human Rights reports on religious minority violations with 45%, Sunnis 26%, Christians 15%, Dervishes 4%, Jews and Yarsans 1%, and others 9%, of the total reports. Note that the reports labeled as "Others" are those that did not belong to a specific group of religious minorities.

The number of citizens arrested in the category of religious minorities has decreased by 42 % in 2020 compared to 2019, and the imprisonment sentences issued by the judiciary has increased by 28.9 %."

What follows is not part of this report but is a compilation of facts gathered from various sources by *Human Rights Without Frontiers*.

Baha'is

Touraj Amini begins his six-month sentence

HRANA (30.01.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3cEbG8s> – On January 29, Baha'i researcher and author Touraj Amini was summoned to the Prosecutor's office and taken to Karaj Central Prison, near Tehran, to begin his six-month sentence. He was originally sentenced by the Revolutionary Court in Karaj to one year in prison and two years of exile from the city, but this was reduced by the Alborz Provincial Review Court. On August 4, 2019, security forces searched his home, seizing books and notes and a laptop.

His books include one on the role of religious minorities in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911; "The Hidden Awakening", on the relationship between Iranians intellectuals and the Babi and Baha'i Faiths; a five-volume collection of

source documents relating to the Baha'is in Iran, and a volume of "Documents of Contemporary Zoroastrians of Iran."

For more information: <https://bit.ly/3roUuIt>

Three Baha'is sentenced in Tehran

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (29.01.2021) – <https://bit.ly/2YGk3Z5> – Mrs. Marvash `Adaalati `Ali-Abaadi, who in previous reports was named as Mahvash `Adaalati-Za'iri, Mrs. Sepideh Keshaavarz and Mr. Farid Ismaa`ili have been sentenced to three years and seven months in prison by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran. They were tried around January 1 this year.

The Judge, Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, issued his verdict on January 10, but the accused were only informed in the past few days. This sentence refers to the charge of "collusion intended to undermine national security by conducting Bahai activities." They were also found guilty of "propaganda against the regime in the form of teaching and spreading the Baha'i Faith," and sentenced to eight months. However, if the sentences are confirmed by the Review Court, they will serve only the longer sentence.

The home of Mrs Mahvash `Adaalati-Za'iri in Tehran was searched by security forces for three hours on November 20, 2018, with the seizure of Baha'i books and other personal effects, and she was summoned to Evin Prison for interrogation on November 26, and arrested after two hours of interrogation. Interrogations continued in the following days, and she was released on bail on November 29.

The home of Farid Ismaa`ili was raided on the same day. Agents seized his mobile telephone, laptops and books and images relating to the Bahai Faith. They left a summons requiring him to report to Evin Courthouse in Tehran. According to the latest HRANA report he was released on bail the following day: I have no previous record of that.

Mazhdeh Eqteraafi and Houshmand Taalebi bailed at last

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (24.01.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3pM6Slk> – Mazhdeh Eqteraafi and her husband Houshmand Taalebi, Bahais from Vilashahr, were released from prison in Isfahan on January 24. They have been detained since August 23, 2020. After their arrest, officers went to the Baha'i couple's home and searched it, confiscating laptops, cell phones, books, and an acoustic "Dastgah" keyboard. Two cars and a truck belonging to the family were also confiscated. During their interrogation, they were charged with propaganda against the regime and links to foreign governments.

Sufeya Mobini's sentence reduced to five years

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (21.01.2021) – <https://bit.ly/36CsusE> – In an unusual step, a Revolutionary Court in Tehran has reduced the sentence of Sufeya Mobini, from ten years to five years. This is not a Review, but the correction of an administrative error within the Revolutionary Court system.

Her sentence, and Negin Tadrissi's five-year sentence in the same case, will still be considered by the Provincial Review Court, which reviews all the findings of the Revolutionary Courts, and often reduces the sentences. The accused are usually free on bail until the Review Court has spoken. The correction in this case was made by Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad. The initial 10-year sentence, handed down by the notorious Judge Moqayeseh, was based on Article 498 of the Islamic Penal Code, which provides for a maximum of 'only' five years' imprisonment for "acting against national

security" [i.e., commemorating a birth that took place 200 years ago !

Mrs Mobini and Tadrisi were arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence in October 2017, during the bicentenary celebration of the Birth of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet Founder of the Baha'i Faith.].

The precise charges in this case are "acting against national security by administering the Bahai organisation and promoting its teachings." In his ruling, Judge Moqayeseh had also accused them of paying the tuition for an Afghani student to attend language classes, of giving counselling regarding behavioural, sexual and economic awareness, and of writing in a personal journal that "the people in this region need education."

Two more Baha'is barred from universities

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (18.01.2021) – In two separate items, HRANA has reported that Mahsa Foruhari, a Baha'i student from Karaj, and Sima Fattaahi-Mirshekaarlu, a Baha'i studying in Urmia (Urumiyyeh), have been barred from tertiary education because of their Bahai beliefs.

Ms. Foruhari registered for the tenth consecutive year for entrance to tertiary education with exemption from the University Entrance examination. This exemption is available to those with good academic records, and her average was just over 19 [out of 20, presumably]. Nevertheless, she was

rejected for “incomplete file” – the usual term used when students are excluded because of Baha’i beliefs. After the most recent University Entrance examination, HRANA reported 21 other cases of Baha’is excluded from university for “incomplete file.”

Ms. Fattaahi, who began a Master’s degree in International Law at Urmia Azad University about two years ago, received a message on the university website on January 17, saying that she was barred from defending her dissertation and continuing postgraduate studies because of her adherence to the Bah’ai Faith. This message refers to a letter dated December 29, 2019 regarding the exclusion of Baha’i students and the expulsion of Ms. Fattaahi. The report does not explain who wrote the letter, but the image caption says it is from the “Security Office,” the on-campus branch of the the Ministry of Intelligence. Presumably it was addressed to the University, who had no choice but to obey.

Christians

Iranian Christian group ‘dismantled’ for ‘creating moral deviations’

Article18 (25.01.2021) –
<https://articleeighteen.com/news/7717/> – An Iranian news agency linked to the Revolutionary Guard Corps has reported the arrest of a “network” of Christians in “several provinces” for “creating moral deviations” and “promoting [religious] conversion”.

According to the report, published by Fars News Agency on Saturday, the “Zionist” group was “dismantled” in a coordinated operation, though there is no indication of the number of Christians arrested, nor when or where the arrests took place.

The report accuses “Christian-affiliated networks” of “extensive” efforts against Iran’s national security over the past two years.

There are currently at least 15 Christians in prison in Iran for alleged “actions against national security” – because of their membership or leadership of house-churches.

Mary Mohammadi told she can’t have old job back, arrested again

Article18 (21.01.2021) – <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7699/> – Iranian Christian convert Fatemeh (Mary) Mohammadi has been arrested again – this time for alleged “improper” hijab – and continues to be denied employment a year after her latest release from prison.

The 22-year-old was arrested by Iran’s “morality police” on Monday, 18 January, and told her trousers were too tight, her headscarf was not correctly adjusted, and she should not be wearing an unbuttoned coat.

Mary has already spent six months in prison as a result of her membership of a house-church – recently labelled by the Iranian regime as “enemy groups” belonging to a “Zionist” cult – and was last year given another suspended prison sentence for participating in a peaceful protest.

Mary says she has been unable to return to her work as a gymnastics instructor since her release from prison in

February last year, despite good relations with her employer.

For more information: <https://bit.ly/2NZCAxn>

Iran denies persecuting Christians, calls house-churches 'enemy groups'

Article18 (20.01.2021) – <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7675/> – Iran has denied systematically persecuting Christians and called house-churches “enemy groups” of a “Zionist cult”, in response to a formal enquiry by six senior UN rights experts.

In a letter dated 11 November but only made public after Iran failed to respond within the 60-day deadline, the experts* – including the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, and special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman – expressed “serious concern” over “numerous” reports of “continued systematic persecution” of Christians, “particularly discriminatory practices and violations of their human rights”.

Iran has since written a response, denying the accusations and claiming “nobody is prosecuted on religious grounds”. Instead, Iran says it has taken legal action against members of “enemy groups” and “private churches” (house-churches), which it accuses of belonging to a “Zionist Christian cult” with “anti-security purposes”.

The rapporteurs name 24 Iranian Christians reported by organisations including Article18 to be either currently in prison or awaiting summons, and include details of each case.

Iran ranks eighth in global persecution of Christians

Article18 (14.01.2021) – <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7669/> – Iran has risen to eighth place in the latest annual listing of the 50 countries

in which the persecution of Christians is most prevalent.

The 2021 World Watch List was published yesterday by international Christian charity Open Doors. North Korea, Afghanistan and Somalia top the list, as they did last year. Iran was ranked ninth last year.

According to the new list, Eritrea and Yemen are ahead of Iran, with Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Saudi Arabia ranking 11th to 14th, respectively.

“The Iranian government sees the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as an attempt by Western countries to undermine the Islamic rule of Iran. Christians from a Muslim background are persecuted the most. Secret house-churches are often raided, and their leaders and members have been arrested and given long prison sentences for ‘crimes against national security’,” Open Doors’ report states.

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