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IRAN: religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest April

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Christians

Christian convert whose son has leukaemia released from prison

Article 18 (28.04.2023) – A 50-year-old Christian convert whose son has been battling leukaemia for five years was released from prison on Monday, two days before his 25th

birthday.

Malihe Nazari, who was serving a six-year prison sentence in Tehran's Evin Prison for "acting against national security by promoting 'Zionist' Christianity", had been in prison since August 2022.

Her son, Mohammad-Hosseini, turns 25 today.

Article18 has not yet been able to independently verify the details of Malihe's release, but Mohabat News reported that the Supreme Court ruled in her favour due to her son's condition.

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Malihe Nazari, Joseph Shahbazian and Mina Khajavi

Article 18 (24.04.2023) – Iranian-Armenian Christian Joseph Shahbazian and Christian converts Mina Khajavi and Malihe Nazari were sentenced to a combined total of 22 years in prison solely for practising their Christian faith, including through attending and organising house-churches.

Joseph, Mina and Malihe were among at least 35 Christians arrested or interrogated by intelligence agents belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard in a coordinated operation over two days and across three cities in the summer of 2020.

The arrests took place on the evening of 30 June and the morning of 1 July in Tehran, its sister city Karaj, and Malayer, 400km southwest of Tehran.

Dozens more Christians were ordered to provide their contact details and told they would soon be summoned for questioning.

The first arrests took place at around 8pm on the evening of 30 June, in western Tehran's Yaftabad district.

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Supreme Court orders retrial of Christian couple serving combined 10-year sentence

Article 18 (11.04.2023) – An Iranian Christian couple serving a combined 10 years in prison for belonging to a house-church have had their third application for a retrial accepted.

Sara Ahmadi, who will turn 45 on Friday, and Homayoun Zhavveh, who is 64 and has advanced Parkinson's disease, were informed of the decision on Easter Day.

The ruling was made by Branch 9 of the Supreme Court, the same branch that agreed last month to a retrial in the case of an Iranian-Armenian pastor, Joseph Shahbazian, serving a 10-year sentence for holding church services in his home.

Sara and Homayoun's case will be reviewed by Branch 34 of Tehran's appeal court on 9 May.

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Iranian Christian rights activist wins German prize

Ucanews (24.04.2023) – A German foundation that supports persecuted Christians honored an Iranian Christian civil rights activist with a prestigious prize for her brave and relentless campaign for human rights despite state oppression.

The Stephanus Foundation for Persecuted Christians conferred the Stephanus Prize 2023 on Mary Fatima Mohammadi for her "outstanding courage" and "extraordinary selflessness" at a ceremony in Bonn on April 21, said a press release from the group.

"The 24-year-old has not only claimed the right to change one's faith for herself in Iran, where turning away from Islam is considered a crime. She has also compiled and published information on the totalitarian dictatorship's persecution of

dissidents, including the inhumane treatment of inmates in Qarchak and Fashafoye prisons,” the release said.

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Defending the freedom to worship–Iranian Christian pastor released from prison

Afinternational (13.04.2023) – Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, an Iranian Christian-convert and leader of a 400-member house church, has been released from prison in Iran. Pastor Nadarkhani was arrested on charges of acting against national security and promoting “Zionist Christianity” in 2018. Prior to his arrest in 2018, he was sentenced to death in 2010 on charges of apostasy and evangelism, although the sentence and charges were later dropped.

“No person should be punished, much less imprisoned, for sharing their beliefs,” said Kelsey Zorzi, Director of Advocacy for Global Religious Freedom for ADF International. ADF International has been advocating for Pastor Nadarkhani’s release since 2019.

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Baha’is

B.C. man worries for cousin, a Bahá’í woman Jailed in Iran’s Evin Prison

Iran Press watch (25.04.2023) – Coquitlam resident Vesal Amini is making a plea for the release of his cousin, Samin Ehsani, who is behind bars in Iran’s notorious Evin prison.

She has been sentenced to five years in connection with her religious beliefs as a Bahai – Iran’s largest minority religion, and for her role as a children’s rights activist.

“It’s not fair,” Amini told Global News, “to be imprisoned for her belief, doing good things and being a good person.”

Amini said she was active in running courses for Afghan children who are denied the right to an education in Iran. He says his cousin is a mother to a five-year-old girl named Nila and the two of them miss each other terribly.

“She is missing her daughter and her daughter is missing her mother,” he said.

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Baha'i collapses after agents search home

Iran Press Watch (15.04.2023) – A Baha'i resident of Kerman, Pouran Zand, went into a state of shock and lost consciousness after agents from the Intelligence Department entered her home on Tuesday morning. The family had to call an ambulance.

According to IranWire sources, the agents presented a warrant and proceeded to search the house, confiscating various items including mobile phones, movies, CDs and books.

Zand's daughter protested at the officers' conduct. They responded by searching her personal belongings as well, but without a warrant, and threatening to record all her conversations.

The inappropriate behaviour of the agents' during the search has raised concerns about the treatment of citizens by law enforcement agencies.

The agents later left the Zand home before the arrival of the ambulance.

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Wave of home searches against Kerman Baha'is

IranPress Watch (15.04.2023) – Iranian intelligence forces have launched a wave of house searches against Baha'is in the southern city of Kerman in an apparent escalation of recent

crackdowns by the authorities on the Baha'i community.

Kerman Intelligence Department agents searched the homes of Nasrin Dowlat and Hedayat Hakimian on Thursday, seizing their electronic devices, including mobile phones, laptops, and tablets, without accusing the Baha'i citizens of any specific charges.

Hakimian blindfolded and handcuffed, though later released, and the homes of several other Baha'is in Kerman, including Pouran Zand, Soroush Kholosi, Haydeh Fatahi and Milad Misturi have also been searched.

IranWire reported yesterday that Pouran Zand went into a state of shock and lost consciousness during the search of her home. The agents had presented a warrant to search the house, confiscating various items including mobile phones, movies, CDs and books.

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Jailed Baha'i denied prison leave for mother's funeral

Iran Press Watch (08.04.2023) – A jailed member of Iran's persecuted Baha'i religious minority, Payam Vali, has been denied short-term leave to attend his mother's funeral.

Despite three days of entreaties to the authorities, Judge Asif Al-Husseini, head of the Karaj Revolutionary Court, refused Vali's request.

Vali's mother, Farangis Foroughi, passed away on April 2. He had tried to speak to his mother on the phone from prison, before her death, but he was unable to hear her voice due to her worsening condition.

Vali was arrested on September 24, after police raided his home and workplace in Karaj, near Tehran. He was severely beaten by the officers after resisting arrest.

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Back to Evin: Baha'i children's activist prison leave ends

Iran Press watch (04.04.2023) – Children's rights activist and Baha'i citizen Samin Ehsani, 37, is returning to Tehran's notorious Evin Prison after five days of leave during the Nowruz new year holiday period. Ehsani has been in prison since June of last year.

Ehsani will return with her a picture of Nila, her five years old daughter and, according to her husband Keyzad, "a lot of sadness, longing, infinite hope, and trust."

Ehsani works as a translator and is also a member of the Children's Book Council. She grew up in northern Gorgan and faced discrimination for her religious beliefs during her primary and secondary school years.

Despite being an excellent student, she was banned from continuing her education at Iranian universities due to her religious affiliation. Ehsani, like many Baha'is, attended the "underground" Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, where she received a degree in computer science, a bachelor's degree in chemistry, and a master's degree in public health.

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Open Letter by a Baha'i prisoner in Tehran: "officials told me that the law does not apply to Baha'is"

Iran Press watch (04.04.2023) – Hami Bahadori, a Baha'i citizen imprisoned in Tehran's Fashafouyeh prison (officially, The Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary), is still in an uncertain condition after six months of temporary detention. In an English-language audio recording from the prison, he spoke about what has happened to him during this time, including physical and mental torture, deprivation of legal rights, and forced confessions. Bahadori also spoke about the

sufferings of being a Baha'i in the Islamic Republic and asked everyone to "be his voice." He said he wanted to stop being a "victim."

Hami Bahadori was arrested by security forces at his home in September 2022 and initially transferred to Evin Prison, but after three months, he was transferred to Tehran's Fashafouyeh prison without notice.

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Oppressed in life and persecuted in death: Baha'is prevented from dignified burials in their own cemetery

bic.org (03.04.2023) – A brazen and barbaric act by the Iranian authorities has emerged in recent days in Tehran. A deceased Baha'i was buried on 30 March at Khavaran cemetery near Tehran by an agent of the Ministry of Intelligence without notifying the family of the deceased and violating Baha'i burial practices.

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