

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1215

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Notice: Undefined index: et_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1216

IRAN: Six Christians among 54,000 released from prison

Article 18 (04.03.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2TCq871> – Six Christians were among the more than 54,000 prisoners released from custody in Iran over the past week, as part of efforts to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Article18 has already reported on the early release of Assyrian-Iranian Christian Ramiel Bet-Tamraz and the release on bail of Christian convert Fatemeh (Mary) Mohammadi on Wednesday last week. Another Christian convert who cannot be named was also released that day.

Then on Monday, 2 March, three more Christian converts were given 36 days' leave from prison: Rokhsareh (Mahrokh) Ghanbari, who is serving a one-year sentence; Amin Khaki,

whose sentence is 14 months; and a third convert who also cannot be identified.

Mahrokh was forced to submit 30 million tomans for bail (around \$2,000) – the same as Mary Mohammadi – and Amin 50 million (around (\$3,000)).

Rights groups have been calling for the release of all political prisoners for weeks, noting that prisons in China, where the virus first emerged, became a hotbed for the disease.

The UN's Special Rapporteur on Iran highlighted in his most recent report that the country's overcrowded prisons are a "source of infections and ill-health" and the "spread of infectious and communicable diseases".

Succumbing to the growing pressure, on Monday Iran's judiciary spokesman, Gholamhossein Esmaili, announced that more than 54,000 prisoners who had tested negative for the coronavirus had been released on bail.

The leave did not apply to security prisoners serving sentences of more than five years, Mr Esmaili said, which could explain why more Christian prisoners of conscience were not freed.

Five Christians are currently serving ten-year sentences on security-related charges – Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh, Yousef Nadarkhani, Zaman (Saheb) Fadaie, Mohammad Ali Mossayezbازه, and Mohammad Reza Omid.

Another five – Abdolreza Haghnejad, Shahrooz Eslamdoust, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Mehdi Khatibi, and Behnam Akhlaghi – have been detained since July last year. They are appealing against five-year sentences.

It is not clear, however, why there has been no furlough for Christian convert Fatemeh (Aylar) Bakhtari, who, like Mahrokh,

is serving a one-year sentence.

The families of detainees have called for more prisoners to be released, including those serving longer sentences, with the sister of an imprisoned environmentalist noting that the virus “is unaware of [the length of] sentences when it infects people”.

Counting the cost

Iran has recorded the highest number of deaths (92) from the virus outside of China.

Several senior Iranian figures have been infected, including 23 MPs and the Vice President for women and family affairs, Masoumeh Ebtekar, while a member of the Expediency Council, Mohammad Mirmohammadi – reportedly a close confidant of the Supreme Leader – has died.

Iran rejected an offer of assistance from the United States, but a team of World Health Organization officials have been allowed into the country.

The government has not confirmed any cases of the virus in its prisons, though there have been claims of infections at several prisons.

An open letter by 100 Sunni prisoners in Rajaei Shahr Prison in Karaj claimed the authorities were not doing enough to combat the spread of the virus.

They said they had not been provided with masks, gloves and disinfectant, as requested, and were refused temporary leave.

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