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IRAN: News Digest about Baha'is and Christians in February

Baha'is

Confiscation of assets from Baha'is in Bandar Lengeh

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (23.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3b1fP5h> – The business, homes and bank accounts of two Baha'is in the Southern port city of Bandar Lengeh have been confiscated by court order. The workshop and houses of Mohabatullah Thaabet and Erfaan Noahnezhaad were ordered to be seized following

pressure from the “security office” [ie, agent of the Ministry of Intelligence, ~ Sen] in the town’s Tax Department, and the levy of a substantial, and abnormal, fine on the Baha’is.

Their workshop, making composite beams, has been closed by the authorities since November, 2019, because of their Baha’i beliefs. They had operated the workshop for five years prior to that, and had paid their taxes and kept accounts as required. The business of another Baha’i in that town, Vahid Zaraa`at-Kaar, was also sealed at that time [presumably in relation to the celebration of the Birth of Baha’u’llah ~ Sen] and also remains sealed by the authorities.

Eight Baha’is summoned to prison in Bandar Abbas

Hrana/ Sen’s Daily (23.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3q6GbqF> – A Review Court has confirmed the sentences of eight Bahais from Bandar Abbas who were previously sentenced to jail and re-education, and on February 21 they were summoned to present themselves at prison within ten days.

Arash Raasekhi, Nasim Qanawaateyaan, Maaraal Raasti, Mahnaaz Jaan-Nethaar, Omid Afaaqi and Mehrollah Afshaar were sentenced to two years in prison, while **Adib Haqq-pazhuh and Farhaad Amri** were sentenced to one year in prison.

In addition, all eight were given a two-year ban on membership of social and political parties and groups and attending Baha’i meetings, and are required to attend five counselling sessions on “sects” under the supervision of the “Sajjadiyyeh” Institute (named after the fourth Imam, aka Zayn al-Abidin). The court also confiscated 30 million tumans in cash, two small pendants, a gold necklace, gold bracelet and gold ring, all with religious motifs, books, photo displays, statues and CDs.

The eight were sentenced on 12 December 2020 in Branch Two of the Islamic Revolutionary Tribunal of Bandar Abbas, presided over by Judge ‘Ali Balaador. They were charged with conspiracy

to undermine national security, based on evidence that they had conducted children's classes and youth classes for Bahai children, and music classes, and had attended a "Ruhi" study circle and collected donations [from Baha'is] for the Baha'i "Feasts" (community devotionals).

On 2 February, the Review Court for Hormouzgan Province, consisting of Judge Mash'allah Afshaarpour and Counsellor Ebraahim Mohammadi, confirmed the sentences. The verdict of the Review Court does not mention any activities against national security, instead referring to the fact that the Bahai Faith [like Buddhism, Hinduism and many other religions] is not recognized in the Constitution of Iran.

Three Baha'is sentenced in Tehran Revolutionary Court

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (23.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3kxPsXD> – Saeed Naasseri, his brother Hamid Naasseri, and Afsaaneh Emaami, wife of Saeed Nasserri, have been sentenced by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran. Judge Mohammad-Reza Amouzaad sentenced Mrs. Emami to three years in prison, and the two brothers to two years in prison, for membership of an illegal group intended to undermine national security. The same court had previously handed down these sentences in absentia and without a hearing, and now, after a hearing, has confirmed its own findings.

Afsaaneh Emaami was arrested at her home on the evening of February 2, 2019. Agents searched her house thoroughly and confiscated her mobile phone, computer, books, and essays. Hamid Nasserri was arrested on the street in front of his business on March 11, 2019, and Saeed was arrested on the same day after going to the Evin detention center to inquire about the condition of his brother and wife.

She was released on bail of 500 million tumans (105,000 euros; \$US 119,000) on March 16, 2019, and Saeed and Hamid were

released for the same bail amount on April 18 and 24, respectively.

Five Baha'i women begin 1-year sentences in Mashhad

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (05.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3b1jYpS> – Five Baha'i women from Mashhad have been summoned to the city's Vakilabad Prison to begin serving their sentences. They are **Noghmeh Dhabihayan, Nakisa Hajipour, Nika Paakzaadaan, Faraaneh Daaneshgari and Saanaaz Eshaaqi**. Each has been given a one-year sentence on charges of “propaganda against the regime through propagation of the Baha'i Faith.” The sentences were handed down in September 2019 in the Revolutionary Court by Judge Baghdehi, who has a track record of issuing custodial sentences to Iranian Bahais for no reason other than their faith. The sentences were confirmed by the Review Court around December 25, 2020.

Touraj Amini begins his 6-month sentence

HRANA/ Sen's Daily (01.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3q16QVZ> – 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, and he was previously detained for a short time, in March 2008. He was charged with “propaganda against the regime.”

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 Bahai Faiths; a five-volume collection of source documents relating to the Bahais in Iran, and a volume

of “Documents of Contemporary Zoroastrians of Iran.”

Christians

Ebrahim Firouzi released on bail, but charges not dropped

Article 18 (28.02.2021) –
<https://articleeighteen.com/news/7933/> – Iranian Christian convert Ebrahim Firouzi has been released on bail after nearly three weeks in detention.

The 34-year-old, who has already spent years in prison and is now living in exile, was detained on 8 February on new charges of “insulting the sacred” (blasphemy) and “propaganda against the Islamic Republic in favour of hostile groups”.

Read the full article here

Yasser Mossayebzadeh granted conditional release from prison

Article 18 (24.02.2021) –
<https://articleeighteen.com/news/7906/> – Mohammad Ali (Yasser) Mossayebzadeh, who was serving a 10-year sentence as a result of his membership of a house-church, has been granted conditional release from prison.

It is understood that his release is dependent on him having no further interaction with other Christians, nor engaging in any Christian activities.

Article 18 understands that Yasser's 10-year sentence – on charges of “forming a house church” and “promoting Zionist Christianity” – was reduced to three years during a court hearing last month, and that he was subsequently released from prison on Monday, 22 February.

Read the full article here

Iran found guilty of 'arbitrary detention' of Christian pastor

Article 18 (23.02.2021) – <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7890/> – The UN's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has ruled that the Iranian government is guilty of arbitrarily detaining Christian pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, and called for his immediate release.

In a damning verdict, the working group found Iran guilty on four counts – lack of legal basis for detention, detention resulting from “legitimate exercise” of freedoms, lack of fair trial and due process, and “discrimination based on religious beliefs” – and called not only for Yousef's immediate release, but for compensation and “other reparations” to be given to him, and for Iran to conduct an independent investigation into his arbitrary detention and hold accountable those responsible.

Read the full article here

Iran passes bill that threatens further repression of Christian converts

Article 18 (19.02.2021) – <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7872/> – Iranian president Hassan Rouhani has signed into law two controversial

amendments to the Penal Code, which it is feared will be used to further clamp down on unrecognised religious minorities, including Christian converts.

The amendments affect two articles of the Penal Code that are routinely used in the prosecution of converts: Articles 499 and 500.

Indeed, every one of the more than 20 Christians currently in prison on charges related to their peaceful religious activity were prosecuted under either or both Article 499 or 500, which relate respectively to membership or organisation of “anti-security groups”, and “propaganda” against the state or in support of opposition groups.

Read the full article here

UN rapporteur tells Iran to ‘release all imprisoned for exercising right to religious freedom’

Article 18 (10.02.2021) – <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7824/> – The UN’s special rapporteur on human rights in Iran has reiterated his “deep concerns” over “persisting” discrimination against religious minorities in the country.

In his latest report, published ahead of the 46th session of the Human Rights Council later this month, Javid Rehman says “the imprisonment of individuals from ethnic and religious minorities for practising their culture, language or faith is an ongoing concern” and calls on Iran to “release all those imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief” and “eliminate all forms of discrimination against them”.

Read the full article here

Annual Report: Rights Violations Against Christians in 2020

Article 18 (02.02.2021) – <https://articleeighteen.com/reports/7736/> – In a year dominated by Covid-19, Iran still found time to persecute Christians in 2020, Article18's annual report reveals.

The report, published today in collaboration with Middle East Concern, Open Doors, and CSW, shows that 15 Christians were being held in Tehran's Evin Prison on account of their faith by the end of the year, while two others were living in internal exile and another was imprisoned on a disputed criminal charge.

A further 115 Iranian Christians were arrested in 2020, though only 52 of those arrests were publicly reported.

Meanwhile, two Iranian Christians were flogged for drinking wine as part of Communion, others were denied education or employment, and one couple were told they could no longer retain custody of their adopted daughter on account of their faith.

The vast majority of the Christians affected were converts from Muslim backgrounds, whom the state does not recognise as Christians, but Christians from the recognised Armenian and Assyrian Christian communities were also affected.

Read the full news here

Converts face prison for 'promoting Christianity'

Article 18 (01.02.2021) – <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7727/> – An appeals court in

the southwestern Iranian city of Bushehr has upheld the one-year prison sentences given to three Christian converts for “propagating against the Islamic Republic through promoting Christianity”.

Habib Heydari and brothers Sam and Sasan Khosravi were sentenced last June alongside a fourth convert, Pooriya Peyma, who was given a 91-day sentence, and Sam, Sasan and Pooriya’s wives, who received fines. However, only Habib, Sam and Sasan appealed.

Read the full news here

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