

Iran: Three Shiraz Baha'is headed to prison to serve sentences

HRA News (11.05.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2LKcm0u> – Yesterday, three Baha'is living in Shiraz, Mahboub Habibi, Pejman Shahriari and Kourosh Rouhani, headed to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz to serve their sentences. Last month, in their appeal process, these Baha'is were sentenced to six months, six months, and three months and one day of imprisonment respectively.

According to the HRANA, the news arm of Human Rights Activists in Iran, on Tuesday, May 7, 2019, three Baha'i citizens living in Shiraz, Mahboub Habibi, Pejman Shahriari and Kourosh Rouhani, were headed to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz to serve their sentences.

These individuals were each previously sentenced to a one-year prison term in the lower court by the First Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz, headed by Judge Mahmoud Sadati, under Article 500 of the Islamic Penal Code, under charges of "propaganda against the regime". On April 17, 2019, in their appeal, Mahboub Habibi and Pejman Shahriari were sentenced to six months each, and Kourosh Rouhani was sentenced to three months and one day in prison.

On August 17, 2018, HRANA reported on the arrest of these Baha'is, along with three other Baha'is, , Dorna Esmaili, Hooman Esmaili and Negar Misaghian, by Shiraz security forces. After 37 days, Pejman Shahriari and Mahboub Habibi were released on bail on September 30, and another Baha'i, Kourosh Rouhani, was released on bail on September 24, until the end of their trial period.

Baha'is in Iran are systematically deprived of freedoms

related to religious beliefs. This systematic deprivation is in direct contradiction of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to both of which Iran is a signatory: "All persons have the right to religious freedom, the right to change their religion or belief, and the freedom to express their belief individually or collectively, in public or in private."

According to unofficial sources in Iran there are more than 300,000 Baha'is living in the country, but the Iranian Constitution recognizes only the religions of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrian, and does not recognize the Baha'i Faith. This is why for many years Baha'is' rights have been systematically violated in Iran.

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RUSSIA: Statement by the Spokesperson on the sentencing of Dennis Christensen

EEAS (06.02.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2SvzL86> – Today, a Russian court in the city of Oryol sentenced Mr Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen, to 6 years of imprisonment.

Mr Christensen was arrested in 2017 when Federal Security Service agents raided a peaceful religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Oryol. He has been convicted on grounds of 'organising extremist activity', which amounts to exercising his right to freedom of religion as a Jehovah's Witness. A number of other criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses are also currently pending. No one should be imprisoned for peaceful acts of worship in the expression of their religious beliefs.

The European Union expects Mr Christensen to be released immediately and unconditionally. Jehovah's Witnesses, as with all other religious groups, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, as well as by Russia's international commitments and international human rights standards.

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RUSSIA: Dennis Christensen found guilty – verdict to be appealed



Dennis Christensen. Photo: Simon Kruse / Berlingske

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia (06.02.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2Bm4VoG> – On February 6, 2019, Judge Aleksei Rudnev of the Zheleznodorozhniy District Court of Oryol, announced the verdict in the case of Dennis Christensen. Dennis Christensen was found guilty under Article 282.2 (1) of the criminal code for “organising the activity of an extremist organization.” He has been sentenced to 6 years in prison.

The decision has not entered into force. His lawyers believe the verdict is unreasonable and will be appealing the decision. Meanwhile, Dennis Christensen will remain in Detention Facility No. 1 in the Oryol Region, where he has already spent 622 days. He is able to receive letters of support.

“We deeply regret the conviction of Dennis Christensen,” said Yaroslav Sivulsky, a representative of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. “An innocent man who did not commit any real crime was convicted. It is sad that reading the Bible, preaching, and living a moral way of life is again a criminal offense in Russia.”

Additional comment: Paul Gillies, International Spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses

“Everyone acquainted with Dennis Christensen knows that he has committed no crime. He received a six-year prison sentence merely for practicing his Christian faith. This verdict reveals just how fragile religious freedom has become in Russia. Jehovah's Witnesses will continue to appeal for

justice while supporting their fellow worshippers.”

HRWF Comments

1. In 2018, Dennis Christensen was adopted as a prisoner of conscience by the US Commission on International Freedom (USCIRF)
2. HRWF Database of FORB Prisoners contains documented cases of 29 JW who were in prison last year. Some were afterwards put under house arrest but most of them are still detained. However, Russia is only ranked 41th on Open Doors 2019 World Watch List (<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/russian-federation/>)
 - See as well Aid to the Church in Need 2018 Religious Freedom Report on Russia: <https://religious-freedom-report.org/report/?report=790>
 - HRWF Database of FORB Prisoners also contains 7 cases of Said Nursi Followers (Muslim) and 4 cases of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims.
 - In all, about 40 peaceful believers were in prison in Russia in 2018.
3. Six-year prison term. His pretrial detention will be calculated 1.5x toward the sentence. Dennis Christensen will appeal the decision.

Case of Christensen in Oryol

Region: Oryol Region

Locality: Oryol

Case number: 11707540001500164

Number of the case in court: 1-37/1

Current stage: trial in court of first instance

Suspected of: according to the investigation, together with the others he conducted religious services, which is interpreted as “organising the activity of an extremist organisation” (with reference to the court’s decision on the liquidation of the local organisation of Jehovah’s Witnesses)

Article of the Russian Criminal Code: 282.2(1)

Case initiated: 23 May 2017

Investigating: Investigative Department of the Directorate of the FSB of Russia for the Oryol Region

Considering on the merits: Zheleznodorozhnyy District Court of the City of Oryol

Judge: Aleksei Nikolaevich Rudnev

Prisoner of Conscience:
Dennis Christensen
February 6, 2019

Family and background
Born in Copenhagen in 1972. Parents are Jehovah's Witnesses. Baptized in 1989 as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Current location
In custody at Detention Center No. 1, ul. Krasnoarmeyskaya, 10, g. Oryol, 302040. He is able to receive letters of support.

Education
In 1991, completed courses in carpentry. In 1993, received a diploma in construction at a trade school in the city of Haslev, Denmark. Since age 19, lived independently from his parents.

Active community life
Christensens helped improve the children's playground near their home, although they do not have children. Together with fellow believers, they participated in the neighborhood clean-up each year.

Move to Russia
In 1995, arrived in St. Petersburg. Volunteered to construct buildings for use by Jehovah's Witnesses in the town of Solnechnoye. In 1999, moved to the city of Murmansk.

Life in Oryol since 2006

Case

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FRANCE: Cult hunters and imaginary cults



A 60-year-old female trainer in 'biodynamism' from Nyons, discharged on appeal – Archives Le DL /Jean Francois SOUCHET

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (04.02.2019) – On 29 January, the appellate court of Grenoble discharged a 60-year-old female trainer in 'biodynamism' accused of "abuse of weakness of a person under psychological or physical subjection".

In July 2017, after a 16-hour hearing (!), during which the public prosecutor of the criminal court of Valence had requested a suspended two-year prison sentence, the confiscation of the Mochatte domain in Nyons and a fine 250,000 EUR, the accused had been cleared of all charges. However, the French anti-cult organization (UNADFI) and the prosecutor's office appealed the decision.

Attorneys Luc Abratkiewicz and Alain Fort who were defending their client said to Le Dauphiné newspaper: "After 8 years of investigation, that lady has finally seen the end of her judicial ordeal. Her teachings had nothing to do with a cult-like practice."

Source : Le Dauphiné
(<https://www.ledauphine.com/drome/2019/02/01/l-enseignante-de-biodynamisme-relaxee-en-appel>)

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CHINA: The Church of Almighty God: US Congress adopts Mo Xiufeng as prisoner of conscience



For the first time, a prisoner of The Church of Almighty God detained in China is “adopted” by the bipartisan Lantos Commission of the US Congress.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (30.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2DIJkIk> – On September 24, 2008 H. Res. 1451 created the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, as a bipartisan body of the House of Representatives for the international advocacy of human rights. It was named after U.S. Democrat congressman Tom Lantos (1928–2008), a well-known champion of human rights. Perhaps the most well-known activity of the Lantos Commission

is the “adoption” of prisoners of conscience, which started in 2012. When a prisoner of conscience is “adopted,” the Lantos Commission, through one or more members of the House, releases information about him or her, urges the Department of State and the White House to prioritize the prisoner’s case, urges the government of the country to release the prisoner, and ensures that U.S. delegations traveling to the country in which the prisoner is detained raise concerns about the prisoner.

For the first time, on January 29, 2019, the Lantos Commission has adopted a prisoner of conscience of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), a Christian new religious movement banned in China and included in the list of the xie jiao.

The name of the prisoner is Mo Xiufeng. She was born on April 16, 1988 and is a native of Nanning City, Guangxi. She lived in No.8, Building 29, Qiaowang Community, Hecheng Town, Qingtian County, Lishui City, Zhejiang Province. In 2011 she became a Christian, and in 2012 she joined The Church of Almighty God.

At around 5 p.m. on July 2, 2017, six or seven plainclothes police officers from the National Security Brigade of the Public Security Bureau in Lishui City, Zhejiang Province burst into the rented apartment where Mo Xiufeng lived, and screamed at her and her husband that they were suspected of being members of a xie jiao. After ransacking the apartment, they confiscated several CAG books and other materials. The police then took Mo Xiufeng and her husband to the Wanxiang Police Station in Liandu District Branch, Lishui City, for interrogation.

At 9 o'clock in the morning on July 3, officers escorted Mo Xiufeng to the East West Rock Hotel in Shaxi Village, Laozhu Town, Lishui City, where they attempted to make her relinquish her beliefs, give up the names of co-religionists and the location where CAG funds were kept, and become an informant for the Chinese authorities so that they could arrest more CAG members and confiscate CAG assets.

When Mo Xiufeng refused to give any information, the police tortured her and prevented her from sleeping for several days. As soon as she started nodding off, they

would have her stand on a bench so that she dared not close her eyes. After 18 days of torture, the police had to conclude they had been ultimately unsuccessful. Mo Xiufeng will keep her faith and will not become an informant.

On July 21, the Liandu District Branch of the Public Security Bureau in Lishui City charged Mo Xiufeng with the crime of "organizing and using a xie jiao". She was taken into criminal custody at the Lishui City Detention Center.

On March 1, 2018, the People's Court of Liandu District in Lishui City sentenced Mo Xiufeng to nine years in prison (from July 21, 2017 to July 20, 2026) and fined her 30,000 RMB (about 4,500 US dollars), having found her guilty of the crime punished by Art. 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code. Art. 300 makes "using" a xie jiao a criminal offense punishable with a 3 to 7 years "or more" jail penalty. The formula normally used in the court decisions is "using a xie jiao to undermine the

enforcement of the law.” However the case of Mo Xiufeng, like many others, confirms that no other crime is needed to apply Art. 300 than being active in a religious group listed and banned as a xie jiao. Mo Xiufeng was sentenced to nine years having been recognized as a local leader of a xie jiao, but Art. 300 is routinely enforced also against members who are not leaders. In fact, 11 other CAG members who had been arrested on the same day as Mo Xiufeng were also sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to eight years and fined between 5,000 RMB (about 730 US dollars) and 20,000 RMB (about 3,000 US dollars).

To this day, Mo Xiufeng and six other co-religionists remain imprisoned in China. But the “adoption” of Mo Xiufeng by the Lantos Commission is a sign they have not been forgotten.

Mo Xiufeng

Detained Since: July 2, 2017

Charges: Organizing and using a “Xie Jiao” (heterodox teachings) organization to undermine law enforcement.

Sentence: Nine years in prison and a fine of \$4,500.

Biography: Mo Xiufeng joined the Church of the Almighty God, a Christian denomination with roots in China, in 2012. She and her husband lived in Lishui, Zhejiang Province, where she served as a Church leader.

On July 2, 2017, plainclothes policemen from the National Security Brigade of the Public Security Bureau in Lishui City entered Mo's apartment, confiscated several books and electronic files containing Church of the Almighty God teachings, and took Mo and her husband for interrogation. 11 other members of the Church were arrested the same day. For 18 days, the police sought to force her to relinquish her beliefs while questioning her about the identities of other Church members and the location of Church assets. She was subjected to sleep deprivation and torture during this time.

Mo and other Church leaders were charged with "organizing and using a "Xie Jiao" organization to undermine law enforcement. She was sentenced to nine years in prison and fined about 4,500 US dollars in March 2018.

Source:

<https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/defending-freedom-project/prisoners-by-country/China/Mo%20Xiufeng>

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