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## **Iran shuts down church and removes cross**

The Jerusalem Post (28.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Mga6hu> - The church was located in the city of Tabriz in northwestern Iran and belonged to the Assyrian Presbyterian community.

Iranian intelligence shut down a Presbyterian church and removed its cross from the bell tower, the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA) announced Sunday, reported Iran's Radio Farda.

The church was located in the city of Tabriz in northwestern Iran and it belonged to the Assyrian community.

According to the report, the building was confiscated by the Revolutionary Court in 2011, but its members had been able to continue to use it until earlier this month.

"Intelligence agents stormed the 100-year-old church, officially recognized as a national heritage site in Iran, on Thursday, May 9, changed all the locks, tore down the cross from the church tower, and ordered the churchwarden to leave," Article 18, a non-profit organization based in London announced. The group's stated goal is the protection and promotion of religious freedom in Iran.

Eiko, the state agency responsible for the raid together with the Ministry of Intelligence, is under the direct control of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

According to the report, the congregants were left in shock and have not been allowed to hold services in the building since the raid.

Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Assyrian community in Iran totaled approximately 200,000 people, Radio Farda noted.

However, since then many have fled and in 2015 only 32,000 Assyrians were left in the country, mostly in Tehran.

"Many churches owned by Protestants have been confiscated," explained Article 18's advocacy director, Mansour Borji.

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## 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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## Activist who protested against compulsory veil gets one year in prison

***Vida Movahedi was arrested last October for showing her head uncovered in Tehran's Enghelab Square. She was convicted of "fomenting corruption and debauchery" on 2 March, but her sentence was made public only recently. She describes her fight as "civic revolt".***

AsiaNews.it (15.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2V2vnOX> - An Iranian court sentenced a woman to a year's imprisonment after she was convicted of objecting to covering her hair, a controversial issue that has sparked street protests in recent months repressed by force and arrests.

Vida Movahedi was taken into custody last October for showing her head uncovered (pictured) in Enghelab (Revolution) Square, waving her veil and some red balloons, her lawyer Payam Dérafchane told media.

The activist was sentenced for "fomenting corruption and debauchery", he explained in a trial that saw her convicted on 2 March. State news agency IRNA announced the decision only a few days ago.

Movahedi, the mother of a two-year-old girl, had already participated in public protests in late December 2017 in central Tehran, becoming the face and symbol of the struggle against the compulsory veil. Like scores of other women, she was arrested.

At her trial she told the judge that she was "against the compulsory Islamic veil" and that she wanted to express her opinion through a "civic revolt".

According to some sources, she could be released on bail but, so far, the authorities have refused to do so.

For women, covering their heads became compulsory in Iran following the rise to power of the ayatollahs following the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The fight against the obligation is nothing new. However, since the beginning of last year the movement has expanded and acquired greater vigour and visibility.

Through videos and messages posted online, activists encourage women to remove their head coverings and post their pictures on social media.

Reacting to the protests, the deputy speaker of the Iranian Parliament suggested in January that a referendum might be held on the issue, but so far, nothing has officially happened.

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## **Baha'i Moin Mohammadi sentenced to 6 years in prison**

Iran Press Watch (04.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2UmzLbt> - Moin Mohammadi, a Baha'i citizen living in Yazd, has been sentenced to 6 years in prison. He was arrested on his way to work by security forces on January 9, 2019. His family, after realizing that he had not reached his workplace, inquired; after a few hours they realized he had been arrested.

Before security forces arrested Mr. Mohammadi, they search his house as well as his father's house, even though the search warrant was only for the house of Mr. Moin Mohammadi himself and not his father. After completing a full inspection of the houses, mobile phones, laptops and a number of books and personal belongings were confiscated. Mr. Mohammadi is said to have been involved with environmental issues; however, at the time of this report, there is no information on the reasons for his arrest or the accusations against him.

Baha'is in Iran are deprived of freedoms related to religious beliefs, a systematic exclusion, although in accordance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, everyone should have the right to adopt a religion or belief and freedom to manifest this religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, in public or in private.

According to unofficial sources in Iran, there are more than three hundred thousand Baha'is, but the Iranian constitution recognizes only Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism; it does not recognize the Baha'i Faith. For this reason, Baha'is' rights in Iran have been systematically violated in recent years.

## 22 Baha'is began New Year in prison

By Kian Sabeti

Iran Press Watch (28.03.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Z5VLXm> - The last month of the Persian year 1397 (corresponding to 2018-2019 in the Gregorian calendar) was an eventful month for Baha'i prisoners. On one hand, some of them were released; on the other hand, trials, indictments, arrests and searches of their homes continued for these citizens in various cities in Iran.

On February 11<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, 17 prisoners who had less than a year remaining of their sentences were pardoned and released in Shiraz, Mashhad, Ghaemshahr, Isfahan, Sanandaj and Yazd.

Pouya Tebyanian, one of the prisoners, was released from prison in Semnan, upon the completion of his seven-year sentence. Shayda Ghodousi, a Baha'i prisoner in Gorgan, who had been sentenced to five years in prison, after serving one-third of her sentence was released on probation in the last days of the Persian year (which ended March 20). Maryam Ghaffar Manesh and Atosa Ahmadaee were also released from Evin prison, after serving respectively 6 months and 45 days of temporary detention.

As reported by Iranwire, on March 11 security agents in Tehran arrested two Baha'i brothers, Hamid Nasseri and Saeed Nasseri. Hamid Nasseri was arrested on the street in front of his business, and Saeed after going to the Evin detention center to inquire about the condition of his brother Hamid and of his wife Afsaneh Emami (Nasseri). At the time of Saeed's arrest, 40 days had passed since the arrest of his wife, Afsaneh Emami (Nasseri). Afsaneh Emami (Nasseri) was released on bail in the final days of the year, but Saeed and Hamid Nasseri still remain in detention.

The sentence against Ghazaleh Bagheri Tari, the Baha'i from Tehran, who was tried in December 2018, was issued in February of this year. She has been sentenced to five years in prison for the crime of "activities against national security because of membership in the Baha'i administration". Ghazaleh Bagheri was arrested by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence in September 2017, during a religious gathering at her home, and was released on bail three weeks later.

Kaviz Nouzdahi is another Baha'i whose sentence was announced in February. A source with knowledge of the case told Iranwire: "The court hearing for Kaviz Nouzdahi was held in late December 2018 in Branch 4 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Mashhad, presided over by Judge Mansouri. Of course, on the day of the hearing the judge was not present, and the hearing was conducted by the court counselor, Mr. Farhikhteh. The charges against Mr. Nouzdahi were "cooperating with hostile foreign governments" and "membership in an anti-regime organization". The judge did not permit the defendant's attorney to be present in court or review the case file. Their excuse was that the attorney named by Mr. Nouzdahi was not on the judiciary's list of approved attorneys, and that the court hearing was conducted without the attorney present. Article 48 of the New Penal Code states that in crimes against domestic or international security as well as organized crime, in the preliminary investigation phase the parties in the case must select their attorney or attorneys from among those approved by the head of the judicial branch.

According to the verdict issued, Kaviz Nouzdahi was acquitted of the charge of cooperation with foreign governments, and was convicted for the charge of membership in an anti-regime organization (i.e., membership in the Baha'i administration), and sentenced to four years in prison.

Another Baha'i citizen, Neda Mokhtari, was also sentenced to four years in prison by the verdict of Branch 5 of the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad presided over by Judge Mazloumi for the crime of "teaching the Baha'i Faith".

Twenty two Baha'i citizens began Naw-Ruz (the Persian New Year) 1398 on March 21, 2019, away from their homes and families in Iranian prisons. They were sentenced in Iranian courts to a total of 105 years of imprisonment. The verdicts against these Baha'is were issued based on articles 498, 499 and 500 of the Islamic Penal Code.

Article 498 of the code states: "Any person with any ideology who forms or leads a group, society or sub-group of more than two people, under any name or title, domestically or abroad, with the goal of disrupting national security, who is not considered a combatant, shall be sentenced to prison for two to ten years."

According to article 499 of this law: "Any person holding a membership in one of the groups, societies or sub-groups mentioned in article 498 shall be sentenced to three months to five years in prison, unless it is proven that they were unaware of its goals."

Article 500 also states: "Any person engaged in any way in propaganda activities against the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or in favor of anti-regime groups and organizations, shall be sentenced to three months to one year in prison."

The punishment for teaching the Baha'i Faith, membership and activity in this religious community is determined based on these articles of the law.

In Evin prison, four instructors of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) are currently serving sentences for the crime of teaching youth who were deprived of a university education; Hassan Momtaz, Peyman Kooshkbaghi, and Negin Ghedamian, each with five year prison sentences, and Azita Rafizadeh with a four year prison sentence, are currently in Evin prison. Peyman Kooshkbaghi and his wife Azita Rafizadeh are among the incarcerated married couples who spent the final days of the year away from each other and from their young child.

Adel Naimi with a 10 year sentence, Farhad Fahandej with a 10 year sentence, Vahed Kholousi with a 5 year sentence, and Afshin Seyyed Ahmad with a 3 year sentence, are the four prisoners in Rajai Shahr prison in Karaj. Shahnam Jazbani is the only Baha'i prisoner in Gonbad-e-Kavoos in Golestan province. He has been sentenced to 5 years in prison.

Isfahan, with 13 Baha'i prisoners, has the highest number of Baha'i prisoners in Iran. Nine of these prisoners were transferred to the Isfahan prison from the town of Baharestan. Of the nine, Sepideh Rouhani, Bahareh Zaini, Foujan Shahidi, each with a 3 year sentence, are incarcerated in Dowlatabad prison in Isfahan. Anousheh Raeineh, Afshin Bolbolan, Milad Davardan, Farhang Sahba and Ali Sani, each with a six year sentence, and Saham Armin, with a 3 year sentence, are the other six prisoners from Baharestan who have been transferred to Dastgerd prison in Isfahan to serve their sentences.

In addition, Sohrab Taghipour, with a 5 year sentence, and Manouchehr Rahmani, Mohsen Mehregani and Farzad Homayouni, each with a 20 month sentence, are four Baha'is from Isfahan who began the Persian New Year in that city's central prison.