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News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in December

Baha'is

Sentences confirmed for five Baha'is from Mashad

Sen's Daily/ Hrana (26.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3hGWKY1> - The Review Court for Khorasan Province has confirmed the one-year prison terms that Judge Baagh-dehi, in the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad, had ordered for **Nika Paakzaadan, Faraaneh Daaneshgari, Saanaaz Eshaaqi, Nakisa Hajipour and Noghmeh Dhabihayan**. The Review Court decision was announced on December 17.

These five Baha'i women were arrested on November 13, 2015, at the same time as agents from the Ministry of Intelligence also arrested 15 other Baha'is in Tehran and Isfahan, and Baha'i-run businesses were closed down in Mazandaran Province. Nakisa Hajipour was arrested at the Mashhad railway station, and the other four at their homes. The Revolutionary court trial was held on 28 September, 2019.

Bandar Abbas: 8 Baha'is sentenced to prison and re-education

Sen's Daily/ Hrana (24.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3o1bFP3> - A Revolutionary Court in Bandar Abbas has sentenced **Arash Raasekhi, Nasim Qanawaateyaan, Maaraal Raasti, Mahnaaz Jan-Nethaar, Omid Afaaqi and Ruhollah Afshaar** 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). Failure to attend the counselling will result in a one-third increase in their prison sentence for the first omission, and for repeated absences, to imprisonment or a fine. They were charged with conspiracy to undermine national security.

Mr Haqq-pazhuh was arrested in Shiraz in April, 2017, and transferred to the Ministry of Intelligence detention facilities in Bandar Abbas on April 19. He had previously been arrested, in August 2014, and sentenced to six months in prison for propaganda against the regime and in favour of its enemies, but benefited from an amnesty granted in February 2019. The other seven were arrested in Bandar Abbas on April 18, and held by the Ministry of Intelligence.

Wahda Silaani begins her sentence in Kerman



Sen's Daily/ Iran Press Watch (20.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2WYL216> - Wahda Silaani, a Baha'i living in Kerman, was arrested on Sunday, December 13, 2020, after being summoned to the Revolutionary Court "for some explanations." She was transferred to Kerman Prison to serve her sentence. She had previously been sentenced by the Kerman Revolutionary Court to seven months in prison.

Wahda Silaani was arrested by Ministry of Intelligence agents on December 29, 2019 and transferred to Kerman Prison. During the arrest, officers searched Ms. Silaani's home and confiscated some of her personal belongings. She was temporarily released on January 15, 2020, on 100 million toman [approx. \$23,750] bail. She was later tried by the Kerman Revolutionary Court and sentenced to seven months in prison on charges of propaganda against the regime by means of Bahai propaganda.

Ruhollah Zibaa'i released

Sen's Daily/ Hrana (03.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2X3OxmR> - Ruhollah Zibaa'i, who began a 4-month sentence in Karaj central prison on December 1, was released on December 2 for health reason. He was accused of propaganda against the regime and in favour of the Bahai Faith. Due to extensive injuries sustained in multiple actions during the Iran-Iraq war (he was wounded three times in Dehlawieh, Susangard, and Ahvaz), he requires constant medical care.

Ruhollah Zibaa'i was arrested at his home in Baghastan (Karaj) on December 1 and taken to Karaj central prison to begin his 4-month sentence. He was given a one-year sentence by Judge Assef Al-Husseini, on a charge of propaganda against the regime and in favour of the Baha'i Faith. This was reduced to four months by the Provincial Court of Review.

Christians

Judge to Christians: 'Who set this low bail so you were free to roam the streets?'



Mohammad Moghiseh has earned the nickname the 'Judge of Death' for his harsh treatment of prisoners of conscience. (Photo: Fars/Ali Khara)

Article 18 (17.12.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7653/> - More details have emerged of the harsh treatment of four Christian converts sentenced in October to a combined 35 years in prison.

Mehdi Akbari, Fatemeh Sharifi and Simin Soheilinia were sentenced to 10 years in prison and Mehdi Roohparvar five – all on the same charge of “acting against national security by forming a house-church”.

But little was previously known about their case, other than that Mehdi A and Mehdi R were both being held in Ward 4 of Tehran’s Evin Prison.

Now, Persian-language website humanrightsinir.org, which first reported on their case, has provided more details, including their harsh treatment by interrogators, weeks in solitary confinement, and harsh insults by notorious judge Mohammad Moghiseh.

What has been reported?

According to the new report, the four converts were first arrested during coordinated raids on their homes by intelligence agents on 28 January 2019 in the Ariashahr area of Tehran.

They were then all transferred to Ward 2A of Evin Prison, where they were placed in solitary confinement and interrogated “severely” for 30 days, before being released on bail of 800

million tomans each (\$62,500 at the time) on 18 March 2019, pending the outcome of their trial.

They were tried on 16 June 2020 at Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran on charges of "acting against national security" and "forming an illegal evangelical Christian group" – under Article 498 of the Islamic Penal Code, relating to organisation of groups "hostile" to the regime.

They were also reportedly accused of "widespread association with missionary groups, as well as evangelical Christian groups outside the country – in Russia, Georgia, Turkey, and Armenia".

Judge Moghiseh – who has earned the nickname the "Judge of Death" for his harsh treatment of prisoners of conscience – reportedly spoke "obscenely" to the Christians and would not listen to their defence, only citing the report of the intelligence agent.

He then increased their bail to 7 billion tomans (\$220,000), reportedly saying: "Your actions are worthy of death! Who set this low bail amount for you, so you could be free to roam about on the streets?"

The two women were later freed on bail, but the men were transferred to Evin Prison and their sentences were communicated to them there on 17 October.

European government ministers and parliamentarians condemn denial of higher education to Baha'is in Iran

BIC (18.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3oEv3l3> - In recent weeks, a number of European government ministers and parliamentarians have spoken out against Iran's systematic refusal to allow Baha'is access to higher education.

Among those who have shared their concerns was The Rt. Hon. James Cleverly MP, UK Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. On 15 December 2020, he responded to a question by Rachel Hopkins MP, [sharing](#) the UK government's deep concern regarding the denial of educational access to Iran's Baha'is. Jim Shannon MP also [spoke](#) in the UK Parliament about this issue, highlighting the government's responsibility to support the Baha'is in Iran and their right to education.

Earlier in the month, Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ine Eriksen Søreide, echoed the concern of Member of Parliament, Mona Fagerås, regarding the barring of Baha'is from higher education. In her response, the Norwegian Foreign Minister [listed](#) the steps Norway has taken to address the general situation of the Baha'is in Iran.

Similarly, in Ireland, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney [expressed](#) his concern. Minister Coveney stated that, "...the inability of members of the Baha'i Faith to access higher education is deeply concerning," adding, "...it is unacceptable to discriminate against individuals on the basis of their religion." Minister Coveney was responding to Member of Parliament, Marian Harkin TD, who had asked that the Irish government call on the Iranian authorities to end discrimination against Baha'is in education.

In Sweden, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ann Linde, met with representatives of the Baha'i community in October. This meeting took place on the basis of Member of Parliament, Anders Österberg [requesting](#) that the Minister "consider raising, with the EU and directly with Iran, the worrying escalation in the persecution and the denial of access to higher education for Baha'is".

Members of the European Parliament are also voicing concern about the systemic and government-led discrimination against Iran's Baha'is. Last month, MEP Antonio Lopez-Isturiz White [asked](#) High Representative of the EU, Josep Borrell to "call upon the Iranian authorities to start showing good will by letting young Baha'is have access to university and complete their degree just as their compatriots."

The 1991 [secret memorandum](#) of the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, among other actions, states that Baha'is, "must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is". Referring to this memorandum, a 2006 [letter](#) issued by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology outlines the formal process to be undertaken regarding Baha'i students. In this letter, the Ministry instructs 81 Iranian universities to expel any student found to be a Baha'i at the time of enrolment, or during his or her studies, adding that universities should take measures to prevent further enrolment by Baha'is.

Baha'is [have been systematically persecuted in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution](#). Over 200 Iranian Baha'is have been executed or murdered, thousands have been arrested, detained and interrogated, and tens of thousands more have been deprived of jobs, pensions, and educational opportunities. The Baha'i community's holy places, cemeteries, and properties have been confiscated, vandalized, or destroyed, and many Baha'is have had their homes and other property seized or damaged. [Recent home raids](#) across Iran and confiscation of properties belonging to the Baha'is in the village of Ivel are the latest episodes in the ongoing waves of persecution faced by Iran's Baha'is.

Background

The Baha'is are Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority and have been systematically persecuted by the government since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

More than 200 Baha'is were executed in the years after the Revolution.

A 1991 policy document signed by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called for the progress and development of Iran's Baha'i community to be "blocked" and for Baha'is to be denied education and livelihoods. Thousands of articles of propaganda against the Baha'is are published in Iran's state media each year.

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News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in November

Baha'is

Home raids across Iran indicate alarming increase in human rights violations against Baha'is, says Baha'i International Community

BIC (30.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2KSALRr> - Over a hundred government agents raided the shops and homes of tens of Baha'is across Iran, on 22 November 2020, and demanded that they hand over their property deeds. The simultaneous raids were staged in at least seven cities around the country and came just hours into a 15-day national lockdown imposed to slow coronavirus infections in the country. [More...](#)

Baha'i university applicants summoned to sign pledge

Sen's Daily (19.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3q9mNuJ> - On Wednesday 11 November, a number of Baha'is who passed Iran's national university entrance exams were summoned by telephone to the Karaj branch of 'Sanjesh,' the body responsible for organizing and overseeing the annual tests in Iran. Several said that on arrival, they were taken into a private room and their mobile phones were confiscated. They were then questioned about their belief in the Bahai Faith, and made to fill out questionnaires on their family members, personal relations and social media activities. [More...](#)

UN passes resolution condemning human rights violations in Iran

BIC (18.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3qgvMKi> - In spite of the ongoing pandemic, a committee of the United Nations General Assembly considered and approved a resolution today calling on Iran to observe human rights for all its citizens, including members of the Baha'i Faith.

The Third Committee of the General Assembly approved the [resolution\(link is external\)](#) by a vote of 79 to 32. Sixty-four Member States voted by abstention. [More...](#)

Security forces confiscate Baha'i agricultural land at Roshankuh

Sen's Daily (09.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33plH4b> - Recently, the Natural Resources Department of Mazandaran Province confiscated land owned by the mostly Bahai residents of Roshankoo village, near the city of Sari, under the pretense of protecting natural resources. These lands, which have been owned by the villagers for nearly a hundred years and have title deeds, have been occupied by a Special Security Forces Unit. [More...](#)

Baha'i students again barred from Iran's universities

Sen's Daily (02.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2KI5zUL> - On Friday, October 30, Ebrahim Khodaei, head of the Iran's National Organization of Educational Testing, announced that this year's results of 2020 had been posted on the organization's website.

As in previous years, when Bahai students logged on this year, they found that their records were flagged with the words "incomplete dossier": a catch-all term the testing organization has been using for more than a decade now to stop students known to belong to the Baha'i community from progressing to the next stage in their education.

At the time of writing, IranWire had received the names of 14 Bahai participants who have been locked out of the grading system because of an "incomplete dossier". The "Iran" news site [reports](#) 17 Bahai students have been excluded, without naming them.

Christians

House-church leaders acquitted of 'acting against national security'

Article 18 (26.11.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7483/> - Two Iranian Christian converts have overturned on appeal a combined 10-year prison sentence for their leadership of a house-church. Aziz Majidzadeh, known as Andreas, and another convert who cannot be named, were sentenced to four and six years in prison respectively in July – a ruling that was not made public at the time.

But on 9 November, an appeals court judge overturned the verdict, ruling there was insufficient evidence their leadership of a house-church amounted to "actions against national security". [More...](#)

Four Christians given combined 35 years in prison

Article 18 (17.11.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7335/> - Mehdi Akbari, Fatemeh Sharifi and Simin Soheilinia were given 10 years, and Mehdi Roohparvar five, all under the same charge of "acting against national security by forming a house-church".

Very little is known about their case, but Article18 has been able to independently verify that Mehdi A and Mehdi R are both now serving their sentences in Ward 4 of Tehran's Evin Prison. [More...](#)

Second Christian convert flogged for drinking Communion wine

Article 18 (16.11.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7326/> - Despite international condemnation of the recent flogging of an Iranian Christian convert for drinking Communion wine, a second convert has now received the same punishment.

Zaman Fadaie, who prefers to be called Saheb, received 80 lashes yesterday, one month and one day after his friend Mohammad Reza (Youhan) **Omidi** [endured the same punishment](#). [More...](#)

Christian convert's third plea for retrial rejected

Article 18 (13.11.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7297/> - Imprisoned Christian convert Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh has been informed that his third request for a retrial has been rejected.

Nasser, who is 59 years old, is serving a 10-year prison sentence in Tehran's Evin Prison because of his membership of a house-church, for which he was [convicted in July 2017](#) of "acting against national security".

He has been in prison since [January 2018](#). [More...](#)

Christian homes targeted in coordinated Fardis raids

Article 18 (11.11.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7270/> - Twelve Christian homes were raided by intelligence agents today in a coordinated operation in Fardis, west of Tehran, at around 9am.

None of the Christians were arrested, but many of their personal belongings were confiscated – including phones, laptops, Bibles, Christian literature and anything else to do with Christianity – and they can expect to be summoned for interrogation in the coming days. [More...](#)

Tehran church with giant cross demolished

Article 18 (03.11.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7152/> - A 70-year-old Adventist church in central Tehran has been demolished, along with the giant concrete cross on its facade.

The 8m cross was the largest of its kind in the Iranian capital, and a rare prominent symbol of Christianity in the city. [More...](#)

News about Baha'is in Iran in October

Five Baha'is of Mashhad given one-year sentences

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (22.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2HWrMx4> - A Revolutionary Court in Mashhad has sentenced five Baha'i women to one year in prison. They are Nika Paakzaadan, Faraaneh Daaneshgari, Saanaaz Eshaaqi, Nakisa Hajipour and Noghmeh Dhabihayan. They were arrested on November 13, 2015, at the same time as agents from the Ministry of Intelligence also arrested 15 other Baha'is in Tehran and Isfahan, and Baha'i-run businesses were closed down in Mazandaran Province. Nakisa Hajipour was arrested at the Mashhad railway station, and the other four at their homes. They were charged with propaganda against the regime through teaching the Baha'i Faith. The trial was held on 28 September, 2019, but the sentences have only now been announced.

Noghmeh Dhabihayan-Esami was previously arrested in connection with a handcrafts exhibition in Mashhad. This HRANA report states that she was sentenced to 6 months in prison, but my own [records from the time](#) show she was acquitted.

Mehrdaad Mousavi Khoulenjaani granted early release

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (15.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/387W9vn> - Mehrdaad Mousavi Khoulenjaani, a Baha'i from Shahin Shahr, was granted early release from Dastgerd Prison, near Isfahan, as of October 12. In September he was granted a one-month furlough, beginning on September 9. He reported back on October 10. Two days later, he was released with an apology and told there had been a mistake in handling his file. On July 9 this year, he began a six-month sentence on what are apparently ideological charges : "propaganda against the regime in the form of teaching the Baha'i Faith." His case has been an extraordinary tale of confusion as competing security forces, Ministeries and courts have alternately imprisoned and released him, and charged him alternately with ideological and criminal charges. Although on this occasion he has served just over two months of a 6-month sentence, he has not recovered the belongings that were seized from him, despite one court ordering that they should be returned, and it appears that his business is still sealed by other authorities.

Farhaad Fahandezh recovers, released from solitary

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (13.10.2020) – <https://bit.ly/32adnVs> - Farhaad Fahandezh, a 61-year old Baha'i serving a 10-year sentence in Rajai Shahr prison, was returned to the 'general' or 'common' section of the prison on October 13. He had previously tested positive for the Covid-19 virus and was moved to a solitary confinement cell in the high-security block, where he remained for 13 days. Rajai Shahr prison holds many prisoners of conscience. A recent report said that 119 of them had the Corona virus.

Arzu Mohammadi and Banafsheh Mokhtaari begin their sentences

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (13.10.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3l8wbff> - On October 12, Arzu Mohammadi and Banafsheh Mokhtaari reported to Birjand prison to begin serving their sentences. Both were sentenced to two years in prison by a revolutionary court. This was reduced to 18 and 15 months, respectively, by the Review Court for Khorasan Province, headed by Judge Ibrahim Ramezani, with Counsellor Hamid Arabzaadeh. See the previous report [here](#).

Farid Ziragi-Moqadam summoned to begin sentence

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (13.10.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2JA3TMD> - Farid Ziragi-Moqadam, a Baha'i from Birjand, has been summoned to begin serving his 5-year prison sentence. He must report within ten days. The Provincial Review Court **confirmed his sentence** on September 20.

Update: He began his sentence on October 19.

Farhaad Fahandezh tests positive, moved to isolation cell

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (01.10.2020) – <https://bit.ly/35YtS7W> - Farhaad Fahandezh, a 61-year old Baha'i serving a 10-year sentence in Rajai Shahr prison, has been moved to a solitary confinement cell in the high-security block after testing positive for the Covid-19 virus. He is now in the eighth year of his sentence. He suffers from a gastro-intestinal disorder and heart disease. Mr. Fahandezh was born in Torbat-e Heydarieh, and was arrested in his home Gorgan on October 17, 2012. He was held incommunicado for seven months, before being tried in the Revolutionary Court of Tehran by the notorious judge Moqayeseh, also responsible for the sentencing of the seven 'Yaran' (national facilitators for the Baha'is in Iran). He was charged with teaching the Baha'i Faith and administering the Baha'i organisation. This is the second time he has been imprisoned for his religious beliefs. In 1983, when he was 24 years old, he was sentenced to six years in prison. The conditions he endured during this sentence left him with a gastro-intestinal disorder.

Iranian Christian convert lashed 80 times for drinking Communion wine

Article18 (14.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37FuXUT> - Iranian Christian convert Mohammad Reza (Youhan) Omid was today lashed 80 times for drinking wine as part of Holy Communion.

It is illegal for Muslim Iranians to drink alcohol, but exceptions are made for recognised religious minorities, including Christians. However, Iran does not recognise converts as Christians.

This lack of recognition is also the reason Youhan spent the last two years in prison and is now living in internal exile – because of his membership of a house-church, which is the only available Christian fellowship for converts in Iran.

Youhan began his two-year term in exile in the southwestern city of Borazjan one month ago today.

Then, on Saturday 10 October, he received a summons from the authorities in his home city of Rasht, more than 1,000km north of Borazjan, to travel back home at his own expense to receive his lashes.

Youhan and two of his fellow house-church members, Mohammad Ali (Yasser) Mossayebzadeh and Zaman (Saheb) Fadaee, were sentenced to the 80 lashes in September 2016 – by a Rasht civil and revolutionary court which at the same time refused to convict them of “acting against national security” by conducting house-churches.

That conviction – and accompanying 10-year sentences – was instead imposed on them, and their pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, a year later by a revolutionary court in Tehran.

This was not Youhan’s first experience of lashes. Youhan was also given 80lashes in 2013, alongside one other house-church member, forthe same reason: they had used wine with Communion.

However, on both occasions friends of Youhan say he was grateful for the relative leniency shown him by those carrying out the sentence, after he explained to them that he had not acted with impropriety but had only shared in one cup of wine as an act of worship to God.

Christian convert among women prisoners of conscience to describe ‘white torture’

By Fred Petrossian

Article18 (08.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/31vFa25> - Christian convert Mary Mohammadi is among 12 female current and former prisoners of conscience interviewed as part of a new book on “white torture” inside Iran’s prisons.

The book, written by Narges Mohammadi, who was yesterday released after over five years in prison, also includes the testimonies of two Baha’is and two Sufi dervishes – other

oppressed religious minorities in Iran – and British-Iranian national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

The 12 interviewees highlight the numerous ways in which “white torture” was used against them, including solitary confinement, prolonged interrogations, threats to family members, and lack of access to medical care.

The author warns that the effects of these tortures will be lifelong.

Christian convert Mary Mohammadi, who served six months in prison for her membership of a house-church and was given another suspended sentence earlier this year for her part in Tehran protests, explained the “terrible” insults she was subjected to, particularly targeting her parents and her Christian faith.

“For example, they would call the church a gambling house, or say, ‘Why do you read the Bible? Go read the Qur’an!’” Mary explained.

“They would go into the most private corners of my life, which had nothing to do with them at all, and make derogatory remarks. And I couldn’t understand why, when I was interrogated about Christianity, I was blindfolded and made to face the wall – and they would only take it off when I was writing – but then when they wanted to talk to me about personal issues as a woman, I was not blindfolded and made to look at them.”

Mary said that some questions they asked her were “very personal, and no-one has the right to question you about them”, and that “after long, heavy interrogations, I cried, I called on Christ, I spoke to Him, and I prayed”.

‘I’d rather be interrogated than left alone in my cell’

One of the most striking elements of the book is the interviewees’ depictions of the immense loneliness they experienced in solitary confinement.

Nigara Afsharzadeh, a Turkmen national given a five-year sentence in 2014 for alleged spying, explains how she was reduced to talking to ants.

“The cell was silent and there was no sound,” she said. “I scoured the cell just to find something like an ant, and whenever I did, I would talk to it for hours.

“When they brought me lunch, I would crush up some rice and throw it on the floor to attract an ant. I just wanted another living thing in my cell! I was overjoyed when a fly came in one time!”

Sedigheh Moradi, who has spent several periods in prison for her alleged links to dissident groups, explained how on one occasion she was so happy to be joined in her cell by another prisoner, a Christian woman, that “when she came into the cell and took off her blindfold, I hugged and kissed her”.

Baha’i former prisoner of conscience Sima Kiani summed up the sentiment of so many others when she said: “I would rather be interrogated than left alone in a cell.”

Rights activist Atena Daemi, who is currently serving a new two-year sentence after already spending five years in prison, explained solitary confinement as “like a closed box” or “a tin which you feel is being pounded outside by a hammer, to crush it”.

"All the time, suddenly and without warning, they will open the door with a loud crash," she said. "They have the power to do whatever they want with you, and you have no power at all."

Threats and deprivations

Another pattern in the book is the huge range of different tactics employed by interrogators in an effort to bend the prisoner to their will.

The former prisoners explain that during interrogations it became clear that the interrogators weren't looking so much for information – they said it seemed they already knew everything – but that instead they sought only to demoralise the prisoner so much that they would confess to their alleged crimes and do anything else they wanted.

Among the tactics employed are frequent threats to family members.

Mahvash Shahriari, another Baha'i citizen who spent 10 years in prison, said the threats made against her husband and son were "the most difficult" aspects of her interrogations.

"The interrogator told me that your son comes here twice a week, and this is 'dangerous' because there he may have an 'accident', or that your husband shouldn't come because, if he does, he will be arrested and executed immediately for apostasy," she said.

Zahra Zahtabchi, who is serving a 10-year sentence for alleged links with the MKO opposition group, said that when she told her interrogators that her daughters may attend her trial, she was told: "Your sentence is death, so it would be better if they didn't come."

Meanwhile, Hengameh Shahidi, a journalist and rights activist sentenced in 2018 to 12 years and nine months in prison, explained how one interrogator told her that he loved her, and even waited for her after her release from prison so that he could propose to her.

"He promised that if I married him, he would close my case forever," she said. "My answer was that I was willing to accept any sentence imposed on me provided I never had to see him again."

Some of the tactics were more subtle. Reyhaneh Tabatabaei, another journalist and activist tried three times on charges of "propaganda against the state", explained that she had been given a war novel to read in prison, which she read seven times, and "later realised how reading this book and imagining scenes of war and killing and death, while in a cell, put more pressure on me".

But others were very obvious. Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who is on temporary released from prison but still faces the threat of fresh charges, explained how she was denied medical care in prison, including even tablets prescribed for her, and that when prison guards came to bring her food, they would constantly sniff their noses, which put her off her food.

Sufi dervish Nazila Nouri, who spent a year in prison, said the toilet in her cell had no door, nor wall to provide you with any semblance of privacy.

"The sewage was leaking out, and the cell stunk so much that it made us nauseous," she said.

Resistance and hope

Yet despite all they have endured, there is a real message of hope in the book, evidence that any attempts to crush their spirits have failed.

"I know that the future of my country will be bright, and that prejudice, hatred and enmity will soon disappear," Sima Kiani says.

Hengameh Shahidi, who has undergone several hunger strikes during her incarceration, said such strikes have provided her and prisoners like her with a way of "showing resistance and protesting against oppression".

So while 'White Torture' is a book about pain, it is also a portrayal of hope and resistance.

News about Baha'is in Iran in September

Eight Baha'is begin prison sentence

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (28.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3jMEpZG> - Eight Bahais from Birjand have been given ten days to report to prison to begin serving their sentences. They are **Atieh Saaleh, Nasrin Qadiri, Banafsheh Mokhtaari, Farzaaneh Dimi, Arzu Mohammadi, `Ataa'ollah Maaleki, Sa'id Maaleki and Ru'ya Maaleki.**

On September 7, 2020, the Review Court for Khorasan Province, headed by Judge Ibrahim Ramezani, with Counsellor Hamid Arabzaadehi, sentenced Mrs. Nasrin Qadiri, Farzaaneh Dimi and Banafsheh Mokhtaari to 15 months in prison for "membership in the illegal and subversive organization of the deviant Bahai sect." Mrs. Arzu Mohammadi, Ru`ya Maaleki and Atieh Saalehi, and Mr. Ataa'ollah Maaleki and Sa'id Maaleki were given 18-month sentences on the same charge. The same court acquitted Rahmat'ollah Dimi of this charge. The Review Court also handed down one-year concurrent sentences for "propaganda in favor of the Baha'i organization, that being a group and organization opposed to the holy order of the Islamic Republic."

These Baha'is are among those whose homes were raided in October 2017 in connection with the birth of Baha'u'llah 200 years previously. From the large number of homes in Birjand that were raided at that time, it appears that the Bahais had not gathered to celebrate the day, but were remembering the occasion separately in their homes. They were summoned for interrogation twice in 2019-2020, and tried on April 20 this year.

Mrs. Nasrin Qadiri is not formally a resident of Birjand. She is 60 years old and lives in Mashhad. However from 2014 to early 2018 she often stayed in Birjand to care for her father, who was ill. When the Bahai homes in Birjand were searched in October 2017, she was in Mashhad, but the security agents seized some of her belongings when they searched her father's house. She was previously imprisoned in 1983 and 2010. In the latter case, she was sentenced to two years in prison, on charges of propaganda against the regime, endangering national security, membership and activity in the Bahai Faith, advocating contact with foreigners after traveling outside the country, participating in illegal organisations, and producing and distributing Bahai CDs and books.

Judge Mahmud Saadaati of Shiraz sanctioned for human rights abuses

AlArabiyya/ Sen's Daily (24.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2GG6Mu4> - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has announced that the United States has imposed sanctions on Judge Seyyed Mahmoud Sadati, Judge Mohammad Soltani, Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz, and on Adel Abad, Orumiyeh, and Vakilabad Prisons.

The notorious human rights abuser Judge Sayyid Mahmud Saadaati, who heads a bench of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz, has specialized in sentencing Baha'is to prison and internal exile for their Bahai beliefs, usually under the guise of "propaganda against the regime," "membership of an illegal organisation," "collusion" or "undermining state security." The evidence in every case is the possession of Baha'i religious materials such as books, images, and computer files. Sittings under Judge Saadaati are often closed. In September 2018 he sentenced five Bahais to prison in closed court, without informing the defendants or their lawyers of the trial.

A sampling of this Judge's persecution of the Baha'i community in Shiraz over recent years can be found with [a search of Sen's Daily](#).

Judge Soltaani heads a Revolutionary Court in Mashhad.

Kimia Mostafavi and Kiaana Rezvaani released

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (20.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3nBrImz> - **Kimia Mostafavi and Kiaana Rezvaani**, Baha'is from Kerman, were released from prison in the past week. In September 2019, the Revolutionary Court in Kerman sentenced them to five years in jail for membership in the Bahai organisation, with a one year concurrent sentence for "propaganda against the regime and in favour of opposition groups." The Review Court reduced this to six months supervised probation with electronic monitoring, on a charge of "propaganda against the regime." They served just over two months of this electronic supervision.

They were arrested in Kerman on January 19, 2019, and released on bail five days later. Kiaana Rezvaani is a student excluded from tertiary education because of her religious beliefs.

Farid Moqadam-Ziragi's five-year sentence confirmed

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (20.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3iLGio7> - The review court for South Khorosan Province has confirmed the 5-year sentence of **Farid Ziragi-Moqadam**, a Baha'i from Birjand. The presiding judge was Ibrahim Ramezaani, with Counsellor Hamid `Arabzadeh. A Revolutionary Court had already sentenced him to five years in prison on a charge of "membership of the illegal Bahai organisation", with a one-year concurrent sentence for "propaganda against the regime of the Islamic Republic." The review court acquitted him of the latter charge. The Court of Review based its sentence on his acting as moderator in a Telegram channel.

However a criminal court in Birjand has also sentenced him to one year in prison for "insulting the sanctities of Islam," apparently for internet postings included Baha'i interpretations of the Quran, the coming of the Mahdi, the "seal of the prophets" and other theological points. The review court has not yet spoken on that sentence.

Mr. Moqadam-Ziragi, whose name was initially reported as Farid Moqadam-Ziraki, was arrested on August 3 by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence, who searched his home and seized his personal effects. At the time of his arrest, the accusation was "aggravating the economic sanctions against Iran" and "undermining national security." These accusations were widely reported in the state-sponsored media. He was interrogated by the Ministry of Intelligence for 26 days before being transferred to Birjand's Prison. The Ministry evidently failed to find evidence to support the economic and security charges. On

September 7 he was released after posting bail of 150 million tumans (32,000 euros ; \$US 35,000).

Mehrdaad Mousavi Khoulenjaani granted prison furlough

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (11.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3jNiIse> - Mehrdaad Mousavi Khoulenjaani, a Baha'i from Shahin Shahr, has been granted a furlough from Dastgerd Prison, near Isfahan. He began a six-month prison term on July 9, 2020. He was charged with "propaganda against the regime in the form of teaching the Baha'i Faith." He was initially told that he would have to wear an electronic ankle bracelet, but when he objected he was released without the tracing device. If the supervising judge approves, he will not have to return to prison; otherwise he will have to return "next month" (about September 22). However it appears that another case on the same charges is also being prepared against him, by a different arm of the security apparatus.

Mitra Bandi-Amirabaadi-Baaghi and Heyva Yazdaan-Mahdiabaadi-Bahifar bailed in Yazd

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (01.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3iLGALJ> - Mitra Bandi-Amirabaadi-Baaghi and Heyva Yazdaan-Mahdiabaadi-Bahifar were released on bail on September 1 after three months of detention. They were arrested on May 30, and detained by the Ministry of Intelligence in Yazd. Their release on bail was delayed by opposition from the investigating judge.

In late November, 2017, Heyva Yazdan-Mahdiabadi was arrested for teaching music to children. She was at first held incommunicado by the Ministry of Intelligence, and then transferred to the central prison in Yazd. She was released on bail on December 25, 2017. The report says that both were previously given suspended sentences, which have expired, but does not indicate when this occurred.

Christian converts' adopted child to be removed from their care

Article18 (24.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3n1DkiJ> - Lydia was just three months old when she was adopted by Iranian Christian converts Sam Khosravi and wife Maryam Falahi.

Now, just one month before her second birthday, a court has ruled she must be taken away from them, as Sam and Maryam – who are currently appealing against convictions related to their membership of a house-church – are "not fit" to be her parents.

The ruling, handed down by a court in their home city of Bushehr, southwestern Iran, on 19 July but not reported until now, was upheld by a court of appeal on Tuesday, 22 September, despite the judge in his initial verdict acknowledging that Lydia felt an "intense emotional attachment" to her adoptive parents and saying there was "zero chance" another adoptive family would be found for her, given Lydia's health problems.

It is now anticipated that Iran's State and Welfare Organisation will seek to remove Lydia from Sam and Maryam's care as soon as they are made aware of the failed appeal.

And it is with the state, Sam and Maryam fear, that Lydia is likely to remain. Indeed, in his initial verdict Judge Muhammad Hassan Dashti acknowledged that Lydia faced an “uncertain future” and may spend “the rest of her life” in state care.

But that didn’t prevent him from ruling against Lydia’s adoptive parents – and for one reason: they are Christian converts, and Lydia, though her parentage is not known, is considered a Muslim, and as such by law ought only to be cared for by Muslim parents.

Sam and Maryam maintain that they were always clear about their conversion to Christianity; however, the judge ruled that Lydia – a nominally “Muslim” child – should never have been placed in their care.

In seeking to overturn the verdict, the couple’s lawyer managed to obtain two fatwas from Grand Ayatollahs – the most senior Shia Islamic authority in Iran – declaring that, owing to the “critical nature” of the case, poor health of the child and undisputed emotional attachment with her parents, Lydia’s adoption by Christian converts was “permissible”.

But the appeal court judges, in their short ruling, made no reference to the fatwas and only declared that they were upholding the ruling as they had not been presented with any “specific or reasonable evidence” to overturn it.

In his initial ruling, Judge Dashti was clearly sympathetic, noting that “in 13 years of marriage, [Sam and Maryam] didn’t have a child to bring light and warmth to their home”, as well as bemoaning Lydia’s “uncertain future” and strong bond with her parents.

Article18’s advocacy director, Mansour Borji, explained that the wording the judge used indicated that his hands were tied.

“The verdict clearly demonstrates the unwillingness of the judge to hand down this sentence,” he said, “and that he was coerced by the representative of the Ministry of Intelligence. It is another clear example of the lack of independence of the judiciary in cases involving Christians.”

What now?

The decision is a crushing blow to Sam and Maryam, for whom Lydia fulfilled a long-held dream, having been unable to have a child of their own.

And the initial ruling came less than a month after Sam was sentenced to a year in prison, followed by two year’s internal exile, for “propaganda against the state” – related to the couple’s membership of a house-church – while both Sam and Maryam were also banned from employment within their specialist professions.

Maryam has been a nurse for 20 years, while Sam works in the hospitality sector, but if their appeals fail, Maryam will no longer be permitted to work for any national institution – including the hospital she has served for 20 years – while Sam will not be permitted to work within the hospitality sector during his time in exile.

Maryam was also fined 8 million tomans (around \$400) – equivalent to four months’ salary for the average Iranian.

Sam’s brother Sasan and his wife Marjan, who is Maryam’s sister, received similar sentences, as did three other converts.

In his ruling, the judge named some of the Christian literature that had been confiscated from the converts' homes, including copies of "Who is Jesus" and "Getting to know the Bible".

Article18's Mansour Borji commented at the time: "Condemning these people to prison because of their possession of Bibles and Christian symbols is a clear demonstration that Iran's Foreign Minister and others aren't telling the truth when they say that 'no-one is put in prison in Iran simply because of their beliefs'.

"These people have done nothing that could be construed as 'propaganda against the state' or 'acting against national security', but nevertheless they have been treated so unjustly. The international community must hold Iran to account for this miscarriage of justice, and many others like it."

Christian convert released on bail after two months in prison

Article18 (23.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2RTy7Lt> - An Iranian woman convert to Christianity detained since her arrest at the end of June has finally been released on a reduced bail.

Article18 understands that Malihe Nazari, who is 46 years old, was released from Qarchak women's prison, south of Tehran, on 5 September.

Some reports claimed her bail had been reduced to 300 million tomans (around \$15,000) – only a tenth of the initial demand of 3 billion tomans – though an Article18 source suggested the final amount was actually closer to 1 billion.

Malihe was one of at least 35 Christians arrested or interrogated following coordinated raids on the homes and house-churches of Christians in Tehran, Karaj and Malayer on 30 June and 1 July.

Most were released in the days after, either without charge or on bail after being charged with "acting against national security by promoting Zionist Christianity". Some of those arrested have been sentenced already, although details have yet to emerge.

But Malihe and Iranian-Armenian Christian Joseph Shahbazian, 56, were held for longer and initially both told they must each pay 3 billion tomans (around \$150,000) to secure their temporary release – twice the previous highest amount demanded to secure the release of a Christian prisoner of conscience.

Joseph was eventually released on a slightly reduced bail of 2 billion tomans on 22 August, but Malihe's situation has remained unclear until now.

Malihe, who is married with two sons aged 22 and 15, was arrested on the evening of 30 June at her home in the Sadeghiyeh district of Tehran.

Her house was searched and several of her personal belongings confiscated, including her computer, mobile phone and a number of books.

The agents then took Malihe away, and told her family she would be taken to Evin Prison.

When they went to visit her at the prison the next day, they found Malihe’s name on the list of detainees but weren’t able to see her, although the following day she was able to briefly call home to say that she was OK.

She was then transferred to Qarchak, where there were fears for her wellbeing after an outbreak of coronavirus.

Dozens of other women reportedly caught the virus in the prison in recent months, while there have also been outbreaks in several of Iran’s other overcrowded prisons, including Evin, where one Christian convert tested positive last month and three others displayed symptoms.

Malihe is a member of a women’s-only house-church known as “Yek Delaan” or “One Heart”, which has dozens of mostly middle-aged members.

Her eldest son has been battling with cancer for the last two years.

Iran’s secular shift: new survey reveals huge changes in religious beliefs



Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA

By Pooyan Tamimi Arab & Ammar Maleki

The Conversation (10.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/35NOV6X> - Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution was a defining event that changed how we think about the relationship between religion and

modernity. Ayatollah Khomeini's mass mobilisation of Islam showed that modernisation by no means implies a linear process of religious decline.

Reliable large-scale data on Iranians' post-revolutionary religious beliefs, however, has always been lacking. Over the years, research and waves of protests and crackdowns indicated massive disappointment among Iranians with their political system. This steadily turned into a deeply felt disillusionment with institutional religion.

In June 2020, our research institute, the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), conducted an online survey with the collaboration of Ladan Boroumand, co-founder of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran.

The results verify Iranian society's unprecedented secularisation.

Reaching Iranians online

Iran's census claims that 99.5% of the population are Muslim, a figure that hides the state's active hostility toward irreligiosity, conversion and unrecognised religious minorities.

Iranians live with an ever-present fear of retribution for speaking against the state. In Iran, one cannot simply call people or knock on doors seeking answers to politically sensitive questions. That's why the anonymity of digital surveys offers an opportunity to capture what Iranians really think about religion.

Since the revolution, literacy rates have risen sharply and the urban population has grown substantially. Levels of internet penetration in Iran are comparable to those in Italy, with around 60 million users and the number grows relentlessly: 70% of adults are members of at least one social media platform.

For our survey on religious belief in Iran, we targeted diverse digital channels after analysing which groups showed lower participation rates in our previous large-scale surveys. The link to the survey was shared by Kurdish, Arab, Sufi and other networks. And our research assistant successfully convinced Shia pro-regime channels to spread it among their followers, too. We reached mass audiences by sharing the survey on Instagram pages and Telegram channels, some of which had a few million followers.

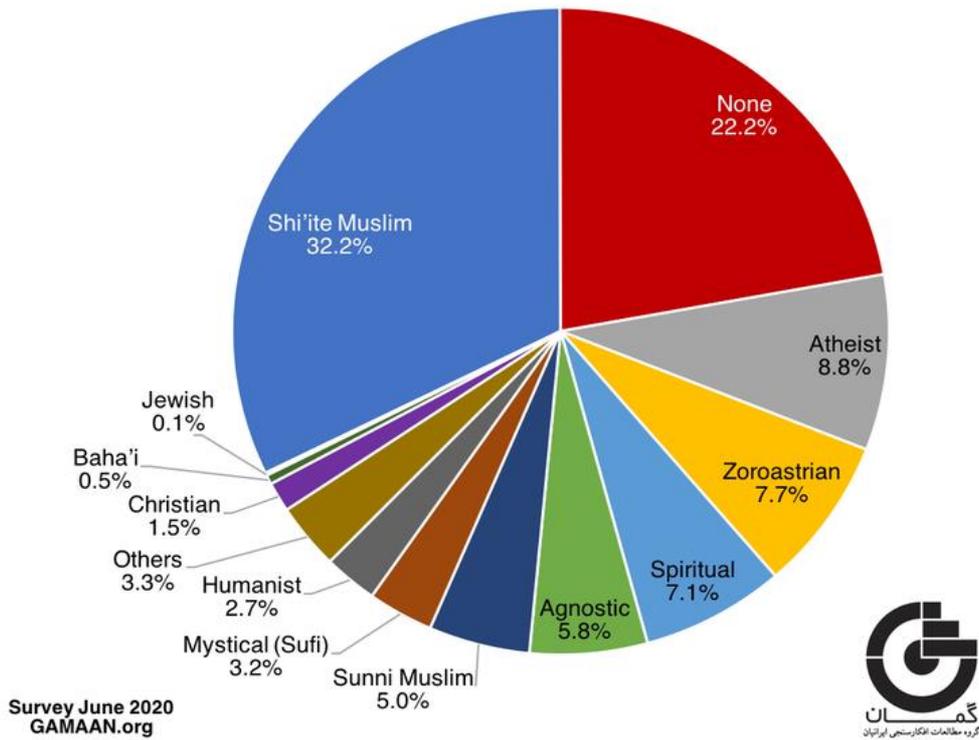
After cleaning our data, we were left with a sample of almost 40,000 Iranians living in Iran. The sample was weighted and balanced to the target population of literate Iranians aged above 19, using five demographic variables and voting behaviour in the 2017 presidential elections.

A secular and diverse Iran

Our results reveal dramatic changes in Iranian religiosity, with an increase in secularisation and a diversity of faiths and beliefs. Compared with Iran's 99.5% census figure, we found that only 40% identified as Muslim.

In contrast with state propaganda that portrays Iran as a Shia nation, only 32% explicitly identified as such, while 5% said they were Sunni Muslim and 3% Sufi Muslim. Another 9% said they were atheists, along with 7% who prefer the label of spirituality. Among the other selected religions, 8% said they were Zoroastrians – which we interpret as a reflection of Persian nationalism and a desire for an alternative to Islam, rather than strict adherence to the Zoroastrian faith – while 1.5% said they were Christian.

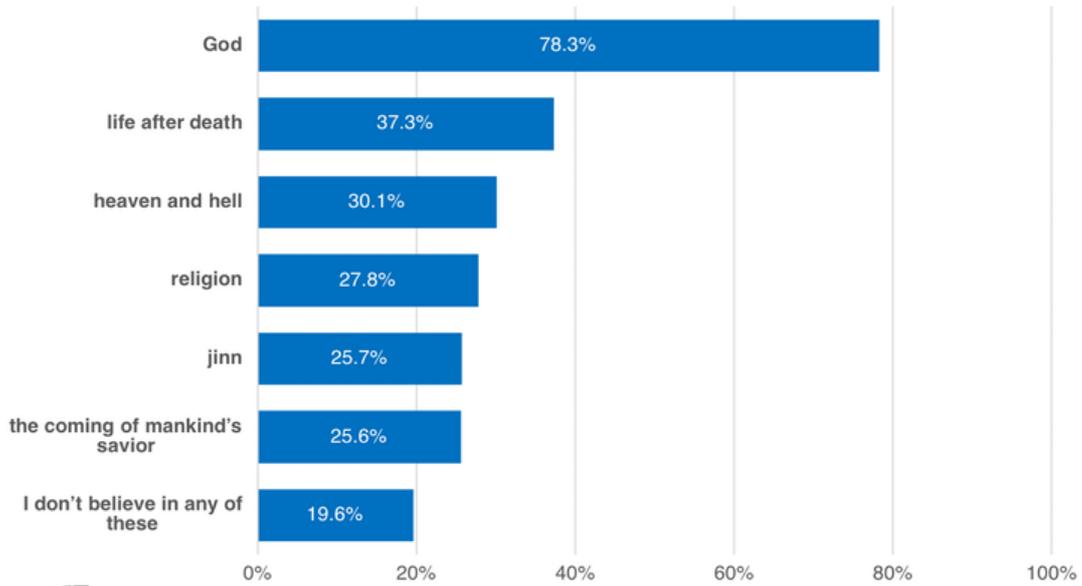
Which of the following is closer to your beliefs and faith?



GAMAAN Religion in Iran 2020 - identifications.

Most Iranians, 78%, believe in God, but only 37% believe in life after death and only 30% believe in heaven and hell. In line with other anthropological research, a quarter of our respondents said they believed in jinns or genies. Around 20% said they did not believe in any of the options, including God.

Which of the following do you believe in? (multiple options could be chosen)



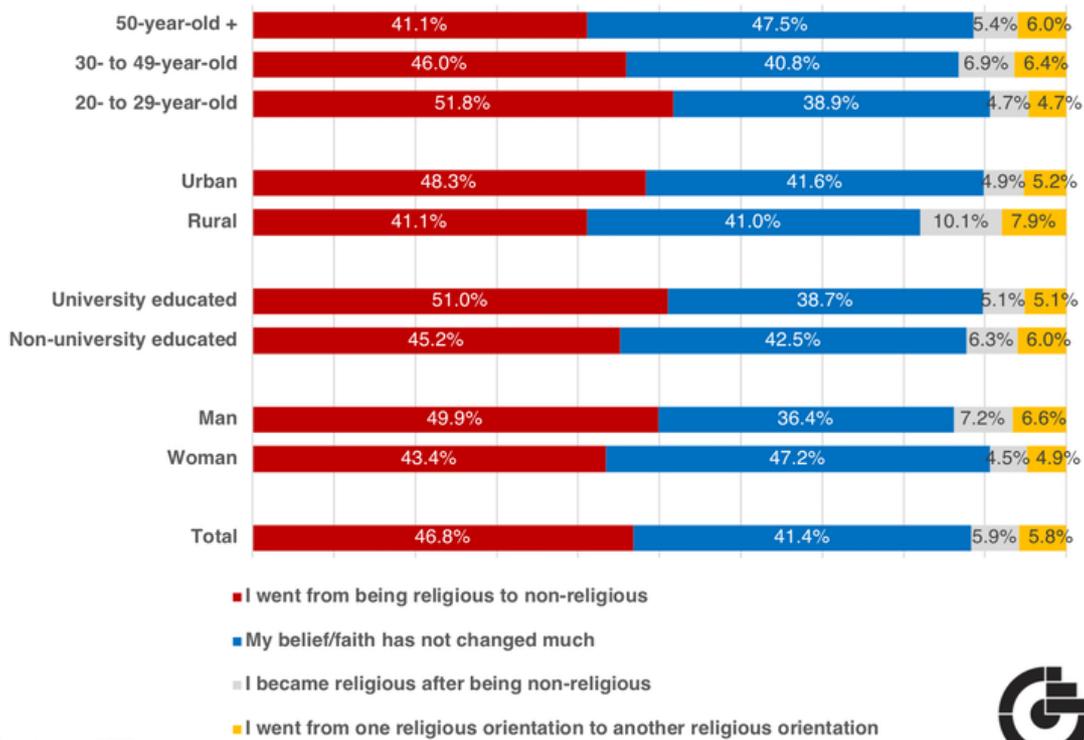
Survey June 2020
GAMAAN.org

GAMAAN Religion in Iran 2020 - beliefs.

These numbers demonstrate that a general process of secularisation, known to encourage religious diversity, is taking place in Iran. An overwhelming majority, 90%, described themselves as hailing from believing or practising religious families. Yet 47% reported losing their religion in their lifetime, and 6% said they changed from one religious orientation to another. Younger people reported higher levels of irreligiosity and conversion to Christianity than older respondents.



How have your religious (or non-religious) beliefs changed during your lifetime?



Survey June 2020
GAMAAN.org



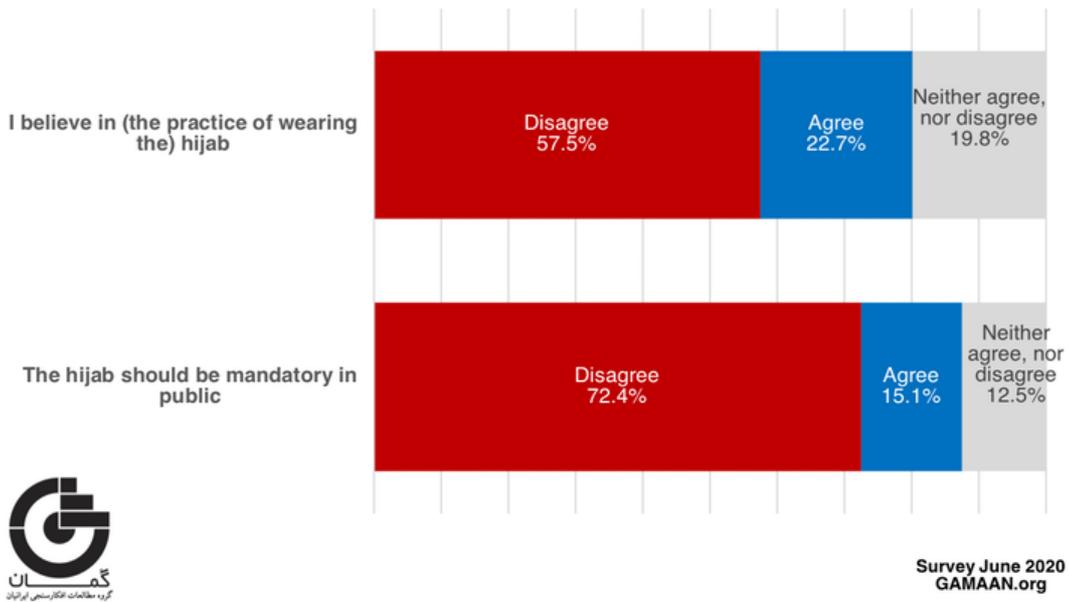
GAMAAN religion in Iran 2020 - changing orientations.

A third said they occasionally drank alcohol in a country that legally enforces temperance. Over 60% said they did not perform the obligatory Muslim daily prayers, synchronous with a 2020 state-backed poll in which 60% reported not observing the fast during Ramadan (the majority due to being “sick”). In comparison, in a comprehensive survey conducted in 1975 before the Islamic Revolution, over 80% said they always prayed and observed the fast.

Religion and legislation

We found that societal secularisation was also linked to a critical view of the religious governance system: 68% agreed that religious prescriptions should be excluded from legislation, even if believers hold a parliamentary majority, and 72% opposed the law mandating all women wear the hijab, the Islamic veil.





GAMAAN Religion in Iran 2020 - hijab.

Iranians also harbour illiberal secularist opinions regarding religious diversity: 43% said that no religions should have the right to proselytise in public. However, 41% believed that every religion should be able to manifest in public.



Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA

Four decades ago, the Islamic Revolution taught sociologists that European-style secularisation is not followed universally around the world. The subsequent secularisation of Iran confirmed by our survey demonstrates that Europe is not exceptional either, but rather part of complex, global interactions between religious and secular forces.

Other research on population growth, whose decline has been linked to higher levels of secularisation, also suggests a decline in religiosity in Iran. In 2020, Iran recorded its lowest population growth, below 1%.

Greater access to the world via the internet, but also through interactions with the global Iranian diaspora in the past 50 years, has generated new communities and forms of religious experience inside the country. A future disentangling of state power and religious authority would likely exacerbate these societal transformations. Iran as we think we know it is changing, in fundamental ways.

Christian converts leave Iran, facing combined 35 years in prison

Article18 (10.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3ivUSk7> - Three Iranian Christian converts whose appeals against a combined 35 years in prison were recently rejected want to let their supporters know they are safe and well outside the country.

The cases against Kavian Fallah-Mohammadi, Hadi Asgari and Amin Afshar-Naderi were tied up with those against the Iranian-Assyrian pastor Victor-Bet Tamraz and his wife Shamiram Issavi, whose appeals were also rejected.

Like Victor and Shamiram, the three converts are now safely outside Iran and told Article18 they wished to let everyone know they are OK, albeit still suffering with the scars of a years-long battle in the courts only because of their membership of a house-church.

Amin, who was given the stiffest sentence – of 15 years – told Article18 he had lived “six years of uncertainty” since his arrest in December 2014 at Victor and Shamiram’s home, as they celebrated Christmas together.

He said the pressure he had been placed under in the years since had left him with a nervous tic, for which he has been prescribed medication.

“I miss my country, Iran, very much,” he said. “Before prison, I had travelled to foreign countries many times, but I never decided to emigrate. Today, I am very sad that I have been forced to seek refuge in another country, no matter how much better the conditions may be there.”

Kavian said he decided to flee after the ramifications of his 10-year sentence started to become apparent.

“I had no idea that when you have a criminal record that it means you don’t have a work permit, you can’t get an official job, and you have no idea how long you’ll have to remain in this state of uncertainty,” he said.

“It took two years [after my arrest] in all before they summoned me for my last defence, when they made other serious accusations against me, which made my case even more severe.

“Then, finally, the following year, they sentenced me to the 10 years in prison, and the delay to the process puts huge psychological pressure on you. Of course we appealed the verdict, but, finally, after another three years, when no official trials took place, the appeal

court approved the verdict – very strangely without a face-to-face hearing that my lawyer could have attended.”

Kavian was recently summoned to begin his sentence, but has no intention to do so now that he is safely outside the country.

Neither Amin, nor Hadi have yet received any official summons.

Amin told Article18: “I say with tears that, according to the teachings of the Bible, we tried to be good citizens in Iran and not to act against the law, but the government inflicted serious injuries upon us with an iron fist and such cruelty.

“But we pray for the rulers, for those who harassed us, insulted and slandered us, humiliated and ridiculed us, tortured and destroyed us, harmed us and our families, confiscated our property. We pray for them and forgive them.”

Article18 will soon publish video interviews with all three of the converts, as well as Victor and Shamiram.

Iranian church leaders condemn UK bishops’ endorsement of opposition group

Article18 (07.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/32ApHyH> - Senior Iranian church leaders have strongly refuted the claims of a group of UK Anglican bishops that Christians in Iran are supporters of a controversial opposition group.

In an article last month for the ‘Church Times’, the former Archbishop of Wales, Barry Morgan, said he had “no doubt” that Christians in Iran had joined UK bishops in participating in a live-streamed event put on by the NCRI, because Iran’s Christians and the NCRI had been “fighting for the same cause throughout the history of the Islamic Republic”.

However, speaking to Article18, a host of senior figures within the Iranian Christian diaspora were unanimous in their unequivocal rejection of the claims.

Rev Edward Hovsepian, former superintendent of the Assemblies of God denomination in Iran and now superintendent of the Council of United Iranian Churches (Hamgaam) in Europe, called the claims “incorrect and irresponsible”.

“House-churches in Iran have always protested against the persecution they have been subjected to, but in our purposes and our spiritual activities, we have always remained independent of any government, political party or group,” he said, “and we oppose this hijacking of the Iranian Church’s voice and status.”

These sentiments were echoed by Rev Dr Mehrdad Fatehi, executive director of the London-based Pars Theological Centre, which provides resources for the training of Christian leaders in Iran.

“We as a Church are simply called to affirm and advocate biblical truth wherever it is found, and to protest against injustice wherever it is practised,” he said, “whether within the Iranian government or in any other political or non-political group.

"The Church should remain a prophetic voice, critical of everything that is ungodly and affirming anything in which it sees the image of God. As such, we cannot align ourselves or identify fully with any specific party or political vision."

Author Mark Bradley, whose books include 'Iran and Christianity: Historical Identity and Present Relevance' and 'Too Many to Jail: The Story of Iran's New Christians', told Article18: "Bishop Morgan asserted that the Iranian Christians supported the same cause as the PMOI. The cause of the NCRI and the cause of Christians in Iran are a million miles apart. The NCRI want to engage in a war for a political purpose; the Christians in Iran live for Jesus Christ, which means bearing witness to Christ's love and serving their fellow man in peace."

The director of missionary organisation Elam Ministries, David Yeghnazar, told Article18 it was "vitally important to underscore that the Iranian Church is not aligned in any way with any political movement in Iran".

He added: "The idea that the Iranian Church is supporting or partnering with any political group is false."

Rev Omid Moludy, an Anglican priest in charge of cultural diversity for the diocese of Manchester, in northwest England, told Article18 he had been "very disappointed to see senior UK bishops choosing to speak out on behalf of Iranian Christians in this manner."

"Whether we're talking about the NCRI, which has a long history of radical ideology, or any other political party – be they good or bad – it is not for the Church, or Christians in general, to endorse any political party, be they a Christian democratic party, or any other group with different ideologies."

And Rev Lazarus Yeghnazar, president and founder of missionary organisation 222 Ministries International, told Article18 he found it "extremely alarming" to see a group of UK bishops "aligning the 'Iranian Resistance Movement' [NCRI] with the Christ-centred house-church movement, which does not have any political ambition but prays to see a spiritual transformation in Iran, where people of all faiths can live in peace and harmony, free to practise their faith".

Meanwhile, Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani, daughter of the first ethnic Iranian Anglican bishop, shared a response to the 'Church Times' article on Twitter, which she called an "important corrective".

Article18's advocacy director, Mansour Borji, warned that the bishops' endorsement played into the rhetoric of the Iranian regime.

"Iran on the one hand has been trying to use some church officials inside the country to lend their support to the Islamic Republic's political agenda, while at the same time politicising the peaceful Christian activities of the underground house-church movement by associating their activities with 'Western powers' or their intelligence services," he said.

"The Iranian regime continues to see Christian activities as ultimately undermining their authority, but none of the many cases that we have documented of Christians being persecuted because of their Christian activities have had anything to do with any political motivations."

'First movie ever to address underground Christian movement in Iran'

Article18 (03.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Fqv5vJ> - A new film is the "first ever to address the underground Christian movement inside of Iran", its director says.

Cyrus Nowrasteh told Article18 that 'Infidel', which will be released first in the US on 18 September, is "inspired by true events in its truest sense, because in many ways it is right out of today's headlines".

Mr Nowrasteh said that, being himself a Christian convert of Iranian descent, he was inspired by the house-church movement in Iran, which he called "a response to the oppression of the Islamic Republic".

He described 'Infidel' as a "Middle East thriller, born of the idea that there are a number of Americans still being held as hostages in Iran, and the Iranian government uses them as pawns in policy negotiations".

Mr Nowrasteh recalled the hostage crisis of 40 years ago, when 52 Americans were held for 444 days and the story was front-page news, compared with today when news about hostages tends to garner less attention.

"I realised that whether it's five, seven, nine – whatever number it happens to be – in recent years there's zero coverage, zero awareness," he said. "And I thought, that [coverage] is obviously very important for [the hostages]."

He said he was particularly interested to see that some hostages had been charged with crimes related to their faith.

"A number of them have been accused of various crimes. A lot of them have to do with spying, etc., usually trumped-up crimes. But some of it has to do with their faith, their Christianity: are they proselytising?" he said.

"And I'm aware that there's a kind of underground Christian movement in Iran, led by women, and I think it's a response to the oppression of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the ayatollahs, and I think there are rumblings in Iran.

"And I also found this to be an interesting phenomenon – a lot of these people who've been taken and arrested have been accused of proselytising or distributing Bibles.

"So, being a Christian convert myself – and my family were really never practising Muslims, but I was always taught a certain amount of healthy respect for any religion, although we were really pretty secular growing up. But then I've grown up in the States, I've married an Ohio girl, and so gradually over the course of my journey, I became Christian. And I just thought that this is an interesting story and situation."

Mr Nowrasteh called his own conversion a "slow, incremental journey", influenced in part by his son's experiences.

"Our youngest son had been through some troubled years, and I think it was him finding faith in Christianity that changed his life, and we were witness to that," he said. "And that affected us, my wife and I."

'Infidel' centres on the story of an American hostage, played by Jim Caviezel – best known for playing Jesus in 'The Passion of the Christ' – and his wife's attempts to secure his release.

It is during these attempts, Mr Nowrasteh explained, that the wife, played by Claudia Karvan, encounters Iran's secret Christians.

"It's a kind of dilemma that a number of families have found themselves in, with wives, sons, daughters trying to get the Iranian government to release their loved ones," he said. "And that's the heart of the journey in it, and she connects up with a group of Christians who have a kind of a house-church, who try to help her."

Mr Nowrasteh said the house-church movement is portrayed as "an honest, shall we say 'authentic' movement inside of Iran that has been spawned as a result of all kinds of repression inside the country".

"I think we try to portray it as a group of people who are trying to help an American woman, who's there seeking to plead for her husband's life, to get him out of prison in Iran," he said.

Mr Nowrasteh was born in the States to Iranian parents and spent some of his early years in Iran, but he hasn't been back since before the Revolution and laments that his Persian is "now unfortunately that of a five-year-old!"

"The ayatollahs don't like my movies," he added. "They've made that pretty clear to me. They're film critics, you know! So I haven't been back since then."

The director said he hopes his film turns the world's attention again to the challenges faced by everyday Iranians.

"A lot has been going on Iran," he said. "There's been a lot of demonstrations, there's been a lot of resistance, and I think that resistance will continue."

"Last November, something like 1,500 Iranians were killed in the streets of Iran, demonstrating. And I just feel like sometimes we forget what's going on. And for me, because of being of Iranian descent, I follow it."

"And I think this story was worth addressing at this time, and I think people will find it very compelling. I hope so."

Survey supports claims of 1 million Christian converts in Iran

Article18 (27.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3bkSPNe> - For years, international Christian organisations have claimed there may be as many as one million secret Christian believers in Iran.

Now they have some proof.

A recent survey of 50,000 Iranians by GAMAAN, a Netherlands-based research group, found that 1.5% of respondents identified as Christian.

If this figure is extrapolated across Iran's over 80 million people, then even taking into account the approximately 300,000 "recognised" Christians of Armenian and Assyrian descent, this would suggest an additional one million converts to Christianity.

Reacting to the survey, Rev Dr Sasan Tavassoli, himself a convert, told Article18:

"There's no surprise here for me. For quite some time I have felt that this is where we are in the growth of the Church in Iran."

The findings certainly suggest that claims of one million Christians in Iran cannot be dismissed as swiftly as in the past. For example, last year judges ruling on the case of an Iranian claiming asylum in the UK on the grounds he had converted to Christianity said: "We do not regard it as remotely plausible that there are as many as 1 million people secretly practising Christianity in Iran today."

The Iranian regime has itself acknowledged an increase in conversions. Last year, Iran's Minister of Intelligence admitted converts had been "summoned to ask them why they were converting", as it is "happening right before our eyes".

But given that converts to Christianity are routinely harassed and arrested, previous estimations by Christian organisations have been based only on extrapolations of the small known number of conversions – largely based on contact with Christian satellite television channels.

This is the first time a secular organisation has added its weight to the argument.

Afshin Shahi, a UK-based lecturer on Middle East politics, told Article18: "I don't think the result of the survey is surprising to any Iran observer. Over the last 40 years, the country has gone through a gigantic socio-cultural transition. The survey highlights the fact that a very large segment of the population no longer identifies with Shia Islam, which is used as the ideology of domination by the state.

"This transition is so drastic that even the state had to acknowledge it. In recent years various figures of the state have spoken about the threat of the de-Islamisation of Iranian society. They have even coined a term for it: 'Andalusiasation', which implies the gradual de-Islamisation of cultural structures which will eventually constitute an existential threat to the political domination of the Islamists.

"Given these contradictions between the Islamic Republic and the wider Iranian society it is not surprising that the Supreme Leader regards 'cultural invasion' as more dangerous than a military invasion."

'Spiritual revolution'

The other findings of the survey include:

- Only 32% identified as Shia Muslims. (The regime claims 95% of Iranians are Shiites.)
- Some 46.8% said they had changed from being religious to having no religion, while 5.8% said they had changed from one religious belief to another.

- 41% said they believed members of all faiths ought to be able to propagate their views, while 42% said they were against public propagation of any religious views. Only 5% said this right ought to be afforded solely to Muslims.
- 68% said they didn't believe religious rulings should be enforced, even if they were the belief of the majority. 15% said they believed laws should be in accordance with religious rules regardless.
- Some 7.7% identified as Zoroastrians, the ancient Persian religion, hinting at a general rise in nationalism. (The number of Zoroastrians recorded during the last census was just 25,000.)

Dr Tavassoli commented: "To say a spiritual revolution is happening in Iran is quite an understatement! This is a total failure of the regime's attempt at indoctrination of the generation since the Islamic Revolution.

"I don't think the Iran of the future will be like anything we have known in the past. Iran might soon become the France of the Middle East, as there are also signs of growing opposition to public manifestations of religion, whether it's hijab, or legislation or even evangelisation."

Is the research credible?

In Mr Shahi's words, "When it comes to surveying beliefs there is no such thing as a perfect methodology. In addition to the general difficulties, the researchers had to conduct their work in a hagiocracy where religion provides the *raison d'être* for the monopoly of power by the Islamic Republic.

"In Iran, religious belief is securitised in every sense of the term. Within that environment where changing religion legally can result in capital punishment, people cannot freely express their belief if it is against the founding principles of the state. Not surprisingly, the researchers had to do the survey online, which has certain advantages and disadvantages. But overall, despite all limitations this the best they could have done in this situation."

He added: "The bitter experience of the Islamic Republic has undermined Shia Islam to an unbelievable level. As the survey indicates a lot of people have either lost their faith in religion or have converted to other beliefs, though given the underground nature of these changes, we never can be 100% sure about the numbers."

One of the report's authors, Pooyan Tamimi Arab, told Article18 the target population of the survey had been literate Iranians over the age of 20, accounting for around 50 million people, so the findings are only certainly representative of that percentage of the population, with a margin of error of just 5%.

He said the findings showed that Iran has undergone a general "secularisation, which does not only lead to a decline in religiosity but also pluralisation", and added that there are "probably at the very least hundreds of thousands of Christians and maybe more than one million, but we don't know for sure.

"To be even more precise, according to the 2016 census, there are 47 million Iranians who are above 19 and literate. 1.5% thus equals around 700,000 people, which is a very realistic number given the difficulties of measuring identifications in Iran."

News about Baha'is in Iran in August

Ardeshir Fena'eyan returns to prison, three days after his wedding

Sen's Daily (26.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3jHHct9> - Ardeshir Fena'eyan, a 32-year-old Bahai from Semnan who is serving a six year sentence for his beliefs, was granted a short prison furlough recently. During the furlough, he married Golrokh Firuzeyan, also from Semnan, who has also served two prison terms for her beliefs. He requested an extension to his furlough, but this was denied by the Ministry of 'Intelligence.'

Ardeshir Fena'eyan was born in Semnan Prison. His parents were both imprisoned in 1983, for adhering to the Bahai Faith, and Ardeshir was born in the prison in 1988. He was arrested early in 2013 and sentenced to 8 months in prison. Golrokh Firuzeyan was among the young Bahais arrested and sentenced at that time, and was sentenced to 6 months in prison. They were charged with various offenses, but eventually sentenced for "propaganda against the regime." Both began their sentences on January 10, 2014. When Ardeshir had completed his sentence, he was sent to do military service. Golrokh's sisters, Yalda Firuzeyan and Shidrokh Firuzeyan have also served six-month prison sentences. Yalda currently faces another sentence, of two years and six months. Their father, Hadjbar Firuzeyan, served a 40-day sentence in 2014, charged with libel against an agent of the Ministry of Intelligence. He had complained to the judicial authorities that one of his daughters was beaten in prison. When they took no action, he wrote to the President of the Islamic Republic, describing the beating. He was charged with libel and fined, but refused to pay the fine and was sent to prison instead.

Two arrests in Vilashahr, Isfahan Province

Sen's Daily (25.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2QKDTHz> - On August 23, Mazhdeh Eqteraafi and her husband Houshmand Taalebi were summoned and arrested in Vilashahr. After their arrest, officers went to the Bahai couple's home and searched it, confiscating laptops, cell phones, books, and an acoustic "Dastgah" keyboard. Two cars and a truck belonging to the family have been confiscated.

Liza Tebyanian arrested again in Karaj

Sen's Daily (20.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/31Phixi> - HRANA reports that Liza Tebyanian, a Bahai living in Karaj, was arrested by security forces on the evening of Saturday, August 16, and taken to an unknown location. The grounds for her arrest and the charges against her remain unknown.

She was previously detained on March 16, 2017, and was released on bail from Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj on April 26. In August 2017, she was sentenced to 7 months in prison by Branch 4 of the Karaj Revolutionary Court on charges of "propaganda activities against the regime."

Branch 12 of the Alborz Court of Appeals acquitted Ms. Tebyanian of the charges against her, arguing that teaching the Bahai faith was not propaganda against the regime.

Farid Moqadam-Ziraki gets additional one-year sentence

Sen's Daily (20.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Z0TrT4> - A criminal court in Birjand has sentenced Farid Moqadam-Ziraki, whose name is reported in this case as Farid Ziragi-Moqadam, to one year in prison. He was charged with "insulting the sanctities of Islam."

The judge was Mehdi Shiri Abbaasabaad. His judgement referenced internet postings, apparently referring to Telegram repostings that included Bahai interpretations of the Quran, the coming of the Mahdi, the "seal of the prophets" and other theological points.

Mr. Ziragi was notified of the new sentence on August 19. A Revolutionary Court has already sentenced him to five years in prison on a charge of "membership of the illegal Bahai organisation", with a one-year concurrent sentence for "propaganda against the regime of the Islamic Republic."

Nine Bahais from Karaj receive one-year sentences

Sen's Daily (08.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3gRrRxT> - The Revolutionary Court in Shahriar, which lies between Karaj and Eslamshahr on the Western fringe of Tehran, has sentenced nine Bahais to one year in prison for 'propaganda against the regime.' They are Mr. Keyaanush Salmaanzaadeh, Mrs. Jamileh Paakrou, Mr. Paymaan Ma'navi, Mr. Payaam Sha'baani, Mr. Parvan Ma'navi, Mrs. Ilham Salmanzadeh, Mr. Houman Khoushnam, Mrs. Neda Shabaani and Mr. Soroush Agaahi. They were arrested in September and November, 2018, and are at present free on bail. The trial was held on July 27, and sentences were announced on August 6. The trial judge was Judge Panahi.

At the time of their arrest, agents searched the homes of some of these detainees and seized personal belongings, including books, computers, laptops and mobile phones. The business premises of some of them were also sealed after their arrest.

Volunteer firefighter barred in Shiraz, for Bahai beliefs

Sen's Daily (01.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/34WjS01> - Kiarash Mo`ini, a 19-year-old Bahai from Shiraz, has been expelled from the volunteer firefighters because of his Bahai beliefs. The head of his team in the fire department informed him of this in a meeting on July 25, and told him to return his firefighting uniform. The team leader said he was acting under pressure from the Security Department [This is not a department of the fire service, but rather the Ministry of Intelligence presence within the fire service, analogous to the Political Commissars in the Soviet Union.] Mr. Mo`ini has been a volunteer for about two years, and has gained proficiency certificates in training courses. The voluntary firefighters are an auxiliary, used in emergencies or to fight exceptionally large fires.

Joseph Shahbazian released on bail after 54 days



Iranian-Armenian Christian Joseph Shahbazian has been released on bail after nearly two months in detention.

Article18 (25.08.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/6696/> - The 56-year-old was one of dozens of Christians arrested by Revolutionary Guards in a coordinated operation targeting homes and house-churches in Tehran, Karaj and Malayer on 30 June and 1 July.

Last week Joseph's family were finally able to see him for the first time since his arrest, but they remained unable to secure his bail due to the exorbitant amount demanded.

However, on Saturday their pleas for a reduction were finally answered, and Joseph was released after his family submitted property deeds worth 2 billion tomans (around \$100,000).

This amount, though still the highest ever submitted for a Christian prisoner of conscience, was 1 billion tomans less than the 3 billion previously demanded, which the family had been unable to raise.

In the days after Joseph's arrest, his family were initially told the figure was the comparatively small sum of 300 million tomans (around \$10,000), but when they arrived at the court with the amount in cash, they were told they must return with ten times as much.

Joseph was one of only two Christians still detained following the 30 June and 1 July raids, during which at least 35 Christians were either interrogated or arrested.

It remains unclear whether the other long-term detainee, a Christian woman convert named Malihe Nazari, 46, remains in prison, or whether her bail was also reduced.

There have been concerns for Malihe's health following a coronavirus outbreak at the Qarchak Women's Prison where she is believed to have been detained.

Meanwhile, the Kurdish news agency Hengaw has reported the arrest of another Christian convert in the north-western city of Sardasht.

Article18 has not yet been able to independently verify the news.

According to Hengaw, Shirko Siavashi, 37, was beaten during his arrest at his home on Friday, 21 August, and several of his personal belongings were confiscated, including his laptop and hard drives.

There has since been no news of his whereabouts.

Iran's religious minority representatives: surrender to survive

"Religious minorities in the Islamic Republic have no restrictions; they enjoy full freedom and all economic and social rights, and those who say otherwise are false claimants of 'human rights' who distort the facts."

Article18 (21.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3ILlcsK> - These recent remarks by Ara Shahverdian, one of two Armenian Christian representatives in the Iranian parliament, are just the latest in a long line of similar claims by religious-minority representatives, echoing those of the Iranian regime by denying human-rights violations and even the existence of prisoners of conscience.

Armenians and Assyrian Christians, alongside Jews and Zoroastrians, are the only "recognised" minorities in Iran's Constitution, and together share five MPs in the Iranian parliament, or Majlis.

Other religious minorities, such as Baha'is, Yarsanis and Christian converts, are not recognised by the Islamic Republic and are deprived of basic rights.

But, as Article18 has highlighted previously, even the "recognised" minorities are victims of an apartheid along religious lines.

Why, then, have they also become propagandists of the Islamic Republic, denying cold, hard facts, such as the presence of Christian converts in Iran and persecution of the religious minorities they represent?

Institutionalised harassment

Persecution of religious minorities began from the very first days of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, from the assassination of Rev. Arastoo Sayyah in Shiraz, to the execution of Habibollah Elghanian – then president of the Tehran Jewish Society – and widespread repression of Baha'is.

Harassment of minorities has not only failed to diminish in the past four decades, despite the promises of the founding father of the revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini; it has become institutionalised in the very fabric of the Islamic Republic, with laws that violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and that are even in conflict with the Iranian Constitution itself.

The persecution of unrecognised minorities such as Baha'is and Christian converts is so severe that there is less talk about violations of the rights of the minorities "recognised" in the Constitution.

But in the Islamic Republic, even Muslims, such as Sunnis and Dervishes, are the victims of discriminatory laws.

Iranian-Canadian philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo told Article18: "Of course, from the point of view of a man of common sense, discrimination of the 'other' is something that is never justified, whatever the reason. But in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, scapegoating minorities is a way not to confront the 'otherness' of the 'other', whether they are Armenian, Jew or Baha'i, since the *raison d'être* of such a political system, which is walking on an ideological tightrope, is to have enemies, both inside and outside the country.

"I believe, as in the case of Stalin's Russia or Hitler's Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot survive without an ideology that discriminates against the 'other'."

In this religious apartheid, "recognised" non-Muslim Iranians, who were called "brothers" when fighting and dying together with Muslim Iranians in the war with Iraq, can be declared "infidels" and deprived of their rights during the division of inheritance.

A Christian family can even be rendered homeless in a very short space of time if one member of the family becomes a Muslim as, according to the law of the Islamic Republic, that individual is therefore entitled to inherit everything, at the expense of all the others.

Or consider employment: according to Article 28 of the Constitution, "Everyone has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, provided it does not infringe on the rights of others and is not contrary to Islam and public interests. It is the government's duty to provide all citizens with employment opportunity, and to create equal conditions for obtaining employment, with consideration of society's need for different professions."

But the reality is that many government agencies do not employ persons belonging to religious minorities.

Meanwhile, the testimony in court even of the Armenian representative who speaks of minorities' "equal rights" cannot be accepted against that of a Muslim.

Then, after finishing his term in the Majlis, this representative will not be able to find a job in, say, the army or many other-state run institutions – for one simple reason: he is not Muslim.

The institutions and activities of religious minorities are tightly controlled and must operate within the framework of government laws and demands. The same is true of representatives of religious minorities in parliament.

Surrender to survive

Members of parliament in Iran, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, were not elected in free elections – the extremely conservative Guardian Council filters candidates and checks if they are "loyal to the Islamic Republic, its leader, and the Revolution" – while all precautions are taken to protect the Islamic Republic and its interests above anything else.

Representatives of religious minorities therefore find themselves almost forced to defend the interests and discourse of a government that has deprived them of many of their rights, in an attempt perhaps to regain those lost rights or to prevent their further deterioration.

Probably the main achievement of these MPs was the approval in 2003 of a bill on equal “blood-money”, or diyeh, for Muslim and non-Muslim Iranians. But still the value of the blood of minorities in Iran’s religious apartheid seems to be lower, with the Islamic Penal Code differentiating between the punishments (qisas) for murderers, depending on whether or not the victim is a Muslim.

For the government of the Islamic Republic, which has been repeatedly condemned by international organisations, including the United Nations, for human rights abuses, including against the rights of minorities, representatives of religious minorities have both internal and external propaganda use.

In their interviews, they are the mouthpiece of the Islamic Republic’s narrative about minorities, denying any discriminatory policy against themselves, and even going so far as to claim Christian converts do not exist.

In the religious apartheid created by the Islamic government, the survival of one group, in the judgment of these MPs, seems tied to the negation of another.

The Islamic Republic has taken religious minority representatives on numerous official engagements around the world to accomplish a simple mission – in the words of one minority representative: “To reveal the conspiracies of the arrogant and ‘Zionist’ media against the honourable nation of Iran and the holy system of the Islamic Republic.”

Roobik Ghahramanian, a fellow Iranian-Armenian journalist who now lives in Yerevan, told Article18: “The Iranian government uses the news about repairing and restoring few churches, in international conferences or fora, as examples that the Islamic Republic provides for minorities to enjoy their rights, but the rights of minorities in any society are not limited to repairing a few monuments.

“Restrictions and discrimination have made religious-minority numbers decrease and forced them to flee Iran to such an extent that the number of Armenians in Iran today doesn’t even reach 20,000. Cities such as Shahinshahr, Anzali, Rasht, Abadan and Gorgan no longer have any active Armenian churches, schools or associations. The same is now also true of Urmia and Tabriz.”

Parliament is the only place in the government structure where representatives of religious minorities can communicate and negotiate with government officials to preserve what is left for them.

Decades of repression have institutionalised fear in religious minorities, and it seems that individuals in these communities, including members of parliament, see no choice but to surrender to the Islamic Republic, at the expense of denying facts and even the identities of their co-religionists.

The Islamic Republic’s minority-phobic policies have reduced the population of Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians, according to some estimates, by a third over the past four decades, while at the same time the country’s population has doubled.

These citizens have decided to emigrate and flee from the land where their ancestors lived for hundreds or even thousands of years, and died to defend its land alongside other citizens, because they have lived under the realities of the Islamic Republic and not the slogans of government officials, including their representatives.

Iranian-Armenian Christian prisoner's family see him for first time in seven weeks

Article18 (20.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/354wxOy> - The wife and son of an Iranian-Armenian Christian who remains in detention seven weeks after his arrest were able to visit him for the first time on Tuesday.

Joseph Shahbazian was said to be in good health, though unshaven and therefore scruffier than usual in appearance.

It remains unclear where the 56-year-old is being held, as he was driven, blindfolded, to the courthouse where they met and has been blindfolded every time he has been let out of his cell, which he shares with one other prisoner.

Joseph remains in prison as his family have not yet been able to raise the 3 billion tomans (around \$150,000) stipulated for his bail – the highest bail amount ever set for an Iranian Christian prisoner of conscience.

They have raised 2.5 billion tomans, which they have asked the prison authorities to accept. However, they are yet to receive a judge's decision.

Joseph was arrested on the evening of 30 June, as part of a coordinated operation targeting the homes and house-churches of dozens of Christians in Tehran, Karaj and Malayer on 30 June and 1 July.

Of the at least 35 Christians who were either interrogated or arrested, only Joseph and Malihe Nazari, a 46-year-old woman convert, remain detained.

Malihe is believed to have been transferred to the notorious Qarchak women's prison, where there are fears for her health given an outbreak of the coronavirus there and in other overcrowded prisons within Iran.

Last week Article18 reported an outbreak at Evin Prison, where Christian convert Mohammad Ali (Yasser) Mossayebzadeh was among 12 prisoners to test positive for Covid-19.

A further three converts – Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh, Yousef Nadarkhani and Zaman (Saheb) Fadaee – were not tested but showed symptoms of the virus, including a prolonged fever.

Saheb and Yousef's health has reportedly since improved, though Nasser remains unwell and there is no news on Yasser.

Earlier this week, another Christian convert incarcerated in the same prison ward, Mohammadreza (Youhan) Omid, was released after two years.

However, he was informed he must report back to the prison authorities within 15 days to begin his exile in the southwestern city of Borazjan.

Youhan has a wife and two teenage daughters and it is as yet unclear whether they would be permitted to join him in exile.

Iranian-Assyrian Christians flee but vow to continue legal battle

Article18 (19.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3IONBhm> - Article18 can now confirm that Iranian-Assyrian Christians Victor Bet-Tamraz and Shamiram Issavi fled Iran on Saturday, hours before Shamiram was due to begin her five-year prison sentence.

The couple's daughter, Dabrina, told Article18 that while she does not wish to disclose where they are, her parents are "safe and well" and determined to continue their legal battle against their combined 15-year prison sentence.

"We continue to pray and hope for their sentences to be dropped," she said. "We pray for justice both for my parents and for all the believers suffering in prisons."

As Article18 reported on Sunday, Shamiram received an official summons last Tuesday, 11 August, to present herself at Tehran's Shahid Moghadas Court, inside Evin Prison, within five days to begin her sentence, or face arrest.

Three weeks earlier, on 19 July, Victor had received a telephone call from his lawyer, telling him that his three-year-long appeal against his 10-year prison sentence had failed.

Therefore, facing prison, the couple, who are both in their mid-sixties, decided with heavy hearts to leave their homeland and continue their legal battle abroad.

Dabrina added that they are determined to return to Iran if they can overturn the unjust prison sentences against them.

Background

It was during a Christmas celebration, way back in 2014, that the couple's ordeal began.

Victor was arrested, alongside two Christian converts, Amin Afshar-Naderi and Kavian Fallah-Mohammadi, and held in solitary confinement for 65 days.

The converts were eventually sentenced alongside their pastor and a third convert, Hadi Asgari, in July 2017.

Kavian and Hadi were also given 10 years in prison; Amin was sentenced to 15.

Article18 can now confirm that the three converts have also been notified by their lawyers that their appeals have been rejected.

Shamiram received her prison sentence six months after her husband and the three converts, in January 2018.

But it took another two and half years of numerous scheduled and postponed hearings until the appeals court finally ruled to reject the five Christians' appeals.

Concerns for Christians after coronavirus outbreak at Evin Prison

Article18 (11.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/32UkpNy> - There are concerns over the health of four Christian prisoners of conscience after one of them tested positive for Covid-19 while the three others are all displaying symptoms.

Mohammad Ali (Yasser) Mossayebzadeh was one of 12 prisoners in Ward 8 of Tehran's Evin Prison to test positive during a random test of 17 of the ward's approximately 60 prisoners yesterday.

Fellow Christian prisoners of conscience Yousef Nadarkhani, Zaman (Saheb) Fadaee and Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh were not among those tested, but they are all displaying symptoms.

Nasser's friends and family are particularly concerned about him, as he recently turned 59 years old and remains in his crowded cell despite being laid low with fever for nearly a week. The only medical assistance he has received is a few painkillers.

The fifth Christian prisoner in Ward 8, Mohammad Reza (Youhan) Omid, has so far shown no symptoms, though he remains in the ward despite already serving the entirety of his recently reduced sentence.

A further 10 Christian prisoners of conscience are being held in other wards of the notorious prison, though as yet there are no reports that any of them are unwell, although there are unconfirmed reports of infections and even a death in another Evin ward.

The approximately 60 prisoners in Ward 8 sleep on bunk beds in rooms containing around 12-15 prisoners each, but all the prisoners mingle together; there are no social distancing rules. Indeed, when the ward is overcrowded, some prisoners are forced to sleep on the floor.

Yesterday, over two dozen Ward 8 prisoners staged a sit-in to draw attention to the growing crisis there, inadequate medical care and insufficient protection measures.

At the height of the pandemic in March, Iran released some 100,000 prisoners – among them six Christians – amidst fears that its overcrowded prisons could provide a hotbed for the virus to spread.

But just five months on, the prisons are overcrowded again, and there are now more Christian prisoners of conscience than before the pandemic.

Prison sentences for Rasht converts

Article 18 (05.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33z09D0> - Four Iranian Christian converts have received prison sentences of between two and five years for "acting against national security" by belonging to a house-church and "spreading Zionist Christianity".

Ramin Hassanpour was given a five-year sentence, Hadi (Moslem) Rahimi four years, while there were two-year sentences for Sakine (Mehri) Behjati and Ramin's wife Saeede (Kathrin) Sajadpour.

The sentences were pronounced on Saturday, 1 August.

The four Christians were first arrested in February, though initially Mehri's identity was not made public.

In May, they spent a week in Lakan Prison in Rasht, having been unable to afford the 500 million toman bail (\$30,000) set for them after the charges against them were read out at Branch 10 of the Revolutionary Court in Rasht.

They were eventually released on a reduced bail of 200 million tomans (\$11,500).

Ramin and Kathrin have two sons – one of whom is 16 years old and was forced to stay at home by himself while they were in prison, and the other just seven and therefore went to stay with his grandfather.

They are part of the Rasht branch of the "Church of Iran", a non-Trinitarian group, which has been especially targeted by the Iranian authorities.

Reacting to the news, CSW's chief executive Mervyn Thomas called it "the latest development in a relentless crackdown on specific religious groups in Iran".

Foreign Minister of Luxembourg writes to Iranian counterpart in wave of support for Iran's persecuted Baha'is

Baha'is International Community (30.07.2020) – <http://www.bic.org/brussels> - The Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn, [has written](#) to Iran's Foreign Minister, Muhammad Javad Zarif, condemning the recent escalation of the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in the country. The letter is part of a new wave of support for Iran's Baha'is by Members of the European Parliament (EP) as well as numerous parliamentarians and prominent figures in Germany, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Finland and Ireland.

In the letter sent to Mr. Zarif, Mr. Jean Asselborn has expressed his concern regarding the situation of the Baha'is in Iran. He has followed this with a public [statement](#) asserting that the reopening of proceedings against "members of the Baha'i community in recent weeks" and the "incarceration of members of the community" during the COVID-19 pandemic were "particularly worrying".

Since the beginning of 2020 and despite the ongoing health crisis, the Iranian authorities have increased their religiously-motivated prosecution of the Baha'is, targeting over 100 individuals in Bushehr, Fars, Isfahan, Kerman, South Khorasan, Tehran, and Yazd provinces. Moreover, despite international calls to release prisoners of conscience due to the global pandemic, some Baha'is still remain in prison.

At the European Union level, the Chair of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iran, Cornelia Ernst, has issued a [statement](#) of support, stating that the "intimidation and repression levelled against religious minorities, in particular the Baha'i community, must...end."

The European Parliament's Vice President, Heidi Hautala, together with other EP members, has signed a [joint statement](#) calling on the Iranian authorities to "cease the baseless accusations against Baha'is, to acquit them of all charges and to let them freely practice their faith."

On the national level, a group of over 30 German parliamentarians, human rights defenders, health experts and non-governmental organizations have appealed to the Iranian government in a [letter](#) addressed to President Hassan Rouhani to drop the charges against Iran's Baha'is in the proceedings and to release all remaining prisoners.

The Dutch government has also put the situation of the Baha'i community in Iran on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Committee for September.

In Ireland, more than 70 politicians and health experts have signed a similar [statement](#), writing that "[a]s we in Ireland begin to be released from lockdown, the Iranian authorities are locking up dozens of Baha'is." The letter has further asked the Iranian government to "end the state-sponsored dehumanisation and persecution of their Baha'i citizens" and to "allow Baha'is their basic human rights".

Parliamentarians in the [UK](#) and [Norway](#) have also called for an end to the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran.

"These strong expressions of support by European officials at the highest levels demonstrate that although the Iranian government has tried, time and time again and city after city, to destroy the Baha'i community as a viable entity," said Rachel Bayani, Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the European Union in Brussels. "These discriminatory policies and actions do not go unnoticed and are condemned the world over".

Outside of Europe, just last month, [a group of 21 senior members of parliament and senators in Canada has made an "urgent demand"](#) to the Iranian government to halt the recent escalation of the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran. In the United States, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom has [expressed concern](#) about the persecution of the Baha'is and various members of congress called for the release of the Baha'is from prison. A [joint letter](#) signed by 19 civil society organizations and addressed to the US Secretary of State has expressed concern regarding the rise in persecution against the Baha'is. This week, too, more than 250 Australian health practitioners have [signed an open letter](#) expressing their concern about the human rights pressures faced by the Baha'i community in Iran.

The Baha'is in Iran have been systematically persecuted since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. They are barred from numerous businesses and professions and employment in the public sector. They are denied the right to study in universities, are routinely arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned, their properties are confiscated, their cemeteries desecrated, and their private livelihoods are often disrupted or blocked—all because of their beliefs. This persecution has been widely documented and condemned by [UN bodies and the international community](#) for four decades.

The detention of Christian convert "Maliheh Nazari" continues with her transfer to Qarchak prison

The bail for this Christian convert who has been in prison since her arrest, has been set for three Billion Tomans (\$137,000) by the judicial authorities. Knowing that her family most likely will not be able to provide such a high bail, this way they can keep her in custody.

Mohabat News (23.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/31Un7mQ> - According to Mohabat News, Mrs. Maliheh Nazari, a Christian convert and a member of the Tehran Women's House Church, was arrested three weeks ago and because of a very high bail was transferred from Evin Prison to the Women's Prison in Qarchak, Varamin.

While security agents and the investigator of Maliheh Nazari's case promised her children that they can visit her in Evin Prison, prison officials on the morning of Wednesday, July 22, 2020, without any prior notice transferred Maliheh from Evin Prison to Qarchak Prison, one of the most notorious prisons in Iran.

The arrest and transfer of this novice Christian woman took place in a situation where so far her family's attempts to introduce a lawyer to the "Shahid Moghaddes" court located in Evin Prison have been fruitless, and no lawyer has been able to investigate her case and be aware of the charges against Mrs. Nazari.

According to sources familiar with Mohabat News, the "Shahid Moghaddes" court has set a "three Billion Toman" (\$137,000) bail for her temporary release, which is unbelievable! Maliheh's family were not able to provide this amount. It seems that the issuance of such a heavy bail by the judicial authorities is to create obstacles for Maliheh's family, and since the judge knew that this amount was not easy to obtain, the detention of this Christian convert will continue.

Qarchak Varamin Prison is a remote and infamous prison in the deserts southeast of Tehran that is virtually inaccessible to the families of female prisoners. The prison is intended for women with criminal records such as robbery, murder and drugs. But in order to deny the existence of ideological and political prisoners, the judicial authorities transfer these prisoners to this detention center, which has non-standard living and health conditions.

Placing women with political and religious statuses among women prisoners with common and dangerous crimes is a form of leverage against them.

Maliheh Nazari, a 46-year-old Christian prisoner, is a member of the "one-Hearted" House Church in Tehran. She has a husband and two sons, aged 22 and 15. Mrs. Nazari's eldest son has been suffering from cancer for two years.

"Maliheh Nazari" was attacked and arrested by plainclothes agents on Tuesday, June 30, 2020, in the presence of her husband and sick child at her home. Security forces of the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Agency also searched her house in a panic and raid, and confiscated some of her personal belongings, including computers, cell phones, a number of books and personal items.

Mrs. Maliheh Nazari's husband and children, under pressure from security and intelligence agents, have so far refused to provide any information about her, and Mohabat News' attempts to contact the husband and children of this novice Christian woman has so far been unsuccessful.

It should be noted that the “One-Hearted” church is a house church for Christian women believers in Tehran. This group of women, which includes dozens of middle-aged women converts, have no activity other than praying and worshiping God. Security officials so far have not given a specific reason for detaining several attendees of this church who have been detained in recent weeks, including Somayeh Sadegh, Masoumeh Qasemi, Maliheh Nazari and Mahkameh (Hengameh).

It is worth mentioning that Christian converts Somayeh (Sonia) Sadegh and her mother Masoumeh Qasemi have already been released from Evin Prison on bail until their trial.

Six Baha'is sentenced to total of over 19 years in prison in Shiraz

Translation by Iran Press Watch



HRANA (21.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2D8Tzbd> - The Court of Appeals of Fars Province sentenced seven Baha'i citizens living in Shiraz to a total of 19 years and six months in prison, plus a fine of one million tomans (about \$237). According to this sentence, Niloufar Hakimi was sentenced to five years and nine months imprisonment, Navid Bazmandegan, Bahareh Ghaderi, Noora Pourmoradian, Soodabeh Haghigat, and Elahe Samizadeh to two years and nine months imprisonment each, and Ehsanollah Mahboub Rah-Vafa was sentenced to a fine of one million tomans.

According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists in Iran, the Court of Appeals of Fars Province sentenced seven Baha'is living in Shiraz to a total of 19 years and six months in prison and a fine of one million tomans.

According to this sentence, Niloufar Hakimi was sentenced to five years and nine months of imprisonment, Navid Bazmandegan, Bahareh Ghaderi, Noora Pourmoradian, Soodabeh Haghighat, Elahe Samizadeh to two years and nine months of imprisonment each, and Ehsanollah Mahboub Rah-Vafa to a fine of one million tomans.

Earlier in the primary stage, the First Branch of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Seyed Mahmoud Sadati, sentenced Niloufar Hakimi to eight years in prison, Navid Bazmandegan, Bahareh Ghaderi, Noora Pourmoradian, Soodabeh Haghighat and Elahe Samizadeh each on charges of "propaganda activities against the regime and membership in opposition groups," to six years in prison and Ehsanollah Mahboub Rah-Vafa to one year in prison.

Among these people, in the second stage of her court case, Elahe Samizadeh was sentenced by Branch 105 of the Shiraz Criminal Court to an additional one year of in prison and two years of banning from government and public services. In addition, Niloufar Hakimi was also sentenced to five years in prison by the criminal court.

Soheila Haghighat, Shahnaz Sabet, Farzan Masoumi, Farham Sabet and Shahriar Atrian, five other Baha'i citizens living in Shiraz, were previously sentenced by the First Branch of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court to six years in prison each on charges of "propaganda activities against the regime and membership in opposition groups." Among these people, Soheila Haghighat was also waiting for the trial of her other case in the criminal court. The status of this part of Ms. Haghighat's case was unknown up to the time of the preparation of this report.

Previously, the Court of Appeals of Fars Province upheld the conviction of Shahriar Atrian with no change, without holding a court hearing.

Information regarding the sentencing, and the verdicts issued by the Court of Appeals regarding Soheila Haghighat, Shahnaz Sabet, Farzan Masoumi and Farham Sabet were also not known up to the time of the preparation of this report.

These citizens were detained by security forces in Shiraz during the years 2016 to 2019 and were later released on bail pending trial.

Baha'is in Iran are deprived of freedom to practice their religious beliefs. This systematic deprivation of liberty occurs even though Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights entitle any individual to freedom of religion and belief as well as freedom to express it individually or collectively, in public or in private.

According to unofficial sources, there are more than 300,000 Baha'is in Iran, but Iran's constitution only recognizes Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism and does not recognize the Baha'i Faith. For this reason, the rights of Baha'is in Iran have been systematically violated over the years.

Iran appeals court upholds 31-year total sentence for Baha'is

Iran HRM (21.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33sU4In> - An Appeals court in Fars Province, southwestern Iran, sentenced 12 followers of the Baha'i faith to a total of 33 years in prison.

A court Shiraz, the capital of Fars Province, sentenced four Bahai's on July 21 to a total of eight years in prison.

The men and women have been identified as Farham and Shahnaz Sabet, Farzan Masoumi, and Soheila Haghighat.

Farham Sabet, Farzan Masoumi, Shahnaz Sabet, and Soheila Haghighat were each sentenced to two years in prison.

In their initial court hearing in the 1st Branch of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court, Judge Seyed Mahmoud Sadati sentenced each of them to six years of prison on charges of "spreading propaganda against the state and membership in opposition groups".

Earlier, another seven Bahais were sentenced to a total of 19 years and 6 months of prison and a fine of 1 million tomans (about \$50).

According to this sentence, Nilofar Hakimi was sentenced to five years and nine months of prison. Navid Bazmandegan, Bahareh Ghaderi, Noura Pourmoradian, Soudabeh Haqiqat and Elahe Samizadeh were each sentenced to two years and nine months of prison for "propaganda against the regime and membership in anti-regime groups".

Ehsanollah Mahboub-Rahvafa was sentenced to a fine of 1 million tomans.

Elahe Samizadeh was sentenced to another year of prison by the 105th Branch of the Shiraz Criminal Court and a two-year ban from public and state services. Niloufar Hakimi was also sentenced to another five years of prison by a criminal court.

The Court of Appeals of Fars Province had previously upheld the six-year prison sentence for Bahai citizen Shahriar Atrian, without a court hearing.

These Baha'i citizens were arrested between 2016-2019 by security forces and were released on bail until their trial.

The Baha'is are Iran's largest religious minority with 300,000 followers. For decades they have been arbitrarily detained, denied education and livelihood, harassed, vilified in the media, and executed. Hundreds were killed after the 1979 revolution. Baha'is have no legal protection as a minority because their faith is not recognized under the constitution.

News about Baha'is in Iran in July

Review court cuts sentences for 11 Baha'is in Fars Province

Sen's Daily (21.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3gBoo7d> - The Review Court for Fars Province (Shiraz) has sentenced Nilufar Hakimi to five years and nine months in prison. In May,

Judge Sayyid Mahmud Saadaati, sitting in the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz, had sentenced her to eight years in prison. Navid Bazmaandegaan and his wife Bahreh Qaderi, Sudabeh Haqiqat, Elaheh Sami`zaadeh and Noraa Pourmoraadian were sentenced to six years by Judge Saadaati: this has been reduced to two years and nine months. Ehsanollah Mahbub-Rahwafa was given a one-year sentence by Judge Saadaati, which the Review Court has changed to a fine of one million tumans (200 euros ; \$US 240). All were charged with propaganda against the regime and membership of groups opposed to the regime.

Mrs. Sami`zaadeh has also been sentenced — in a criminal court — to one year in prison by Judge Fakhaarzaadeh on a charge of “misuse of scientific titles,” which refers to her studies at the Bahai Institute of Higher Education. In addition to the prison sentence, he added a 2-year suspension from holding all governmental and public jobs. This seems to be a bit of black humour on the part of the Judge: all Bahais in Iran are permanently barred from governmental and public jobs, and also from work in many economic sectors, and from tertiary education. According to this report, Nilufar Hakimi has also been sentenced to five years in prison by a criminal court, but the report does not give further details. The only additional charge against Mrs Hakimi that I know of, is one count of blasphemy.

In a separate story, HRANA reports that the Court of Review has given two-year sentences to Farhaam Saabet, Farzaan Ma`sumi, Shahnaaz Saabet and Soheila Haqiqat. Mr Saabet and Ma`sumi were previously sentenced to five years in prison (with an additional one-year concurrent sentence), while Mrs Saabet and Haqiqat were sentenced to six years in prison, by Judge Saadaati. They were charged with “propaganda against the regime and membership in anti-regime groups. The report also says that Soheila Haqiqat faces additional charges, but that no details are available.

The same Review Court recently confirmed Judge Saadaati’s 5-year sentence for Shahryaar`Ataareyaan.

Mehrdaad Mousavi Khoulenjaani begins 6-month sentence

Sen’s Daily (11.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/30C8NPr> - Mehrdaad Mousavi Khoulenjaani, a Baha’i from Shahin Shahr, was arrested in that city on July 9 after being summoned by telephone to the office responsible for the implementation of criminal (i.e., not ideological) crimes. He was taken the central prison in Dastgerd to begin a six-month sentence on what are apparently ideological charges : “propaganda against the regime in the form of teaching the Bahai Faith.” Shahin Shahr and Dastgerd are both towns just north of Isfahan City.

On June 10, the Provincial Review Court for Isfahan Province, headed by Judge Seyyed-Javaad Mansouri and Counsellor Mohammad Mohammadi Kalaal-Abaadi, confirmed his prison sentence.

Following a house raid and the seizure of personal effects in August/September 2018, he was summoned on November 27, 2018, arrested and taken to Dastgerd Prison in Isfahan. Some time later he was released on bail. He was acquitted [by the Review Court?] and the court ordered the return of confiscated items except those relating to the Bahai Faith.

However the Ministry of Intelligence then intervened to obtain a warrant sealing his place of business for “propaganda against the regime in the form of teaching the Bahai Faith.” On March 18, 2019, he was summoned, supposedly in relation to the return of confiscated items, and was again arrested — thanks to the intervention of the Ministry — on the charge. His case was then reopened.

Negin Qadamiaan granted early release

Sen's Daily (07.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/39Z9wNm> - Negin Qadamaian, a Bahai prisoner who began a furlough from Evin Prison in Tehran on June 9, has been informed by telephone that she has been granted early release and will not need to return to prison. She began serving her 5-year sentence for educational crimes in relation to the Bahai Open University (BIHE) on December 16, 2017, and was granted a medical furlough April 22 to April 27, 2019. She was arrested, along with many others associated with the Open University, in May, 2011. On March 12, 2013, she and nine other Bahais associated with the Open University were tried, in absentia in a closed court, by Judge Moqiseh, a notorious abuser of human rights, and of judicial procedures, who was responsible for the imprisonment of the seven "Yaran."

Mother of a Christian convert detained in connection with the arrest of her daughter

The Christian convert "Masoumeh Ghasemi", who had referred to the Evin Prison Court to find out about her daughter's condition, was allegedly arrested and interrogated by the officers of the said court without any reason or explanation.

Mohabat News (16.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2QSL7Al> - Two weeks after the beginning of a new wave of arrests of Christians in Tehran and several other cities in Iran, which has been followed by the Christian News Agency of Iran "Mohabat News", new reports about the arrest of more converts of "Tehran One-hearted Women's Church" can be heard from the house church for women.

The Christian convert, Mrs. Masoumeh Ghasemi, the mother of Somayeh Sadegh (Sonia), whose temporary release was recently reported by Mohabat News, was among those arrested and interrogated by Evin Prison officials for no apparent reason.

When Sonia, a member of the "One-hearted" Women's Church in Tehran, who was arrested on Tuesday, June 30, 2020, in a house church, intelligence agents took her to her father's house, where she lived. After inspecting and searching the house, plainclothes officers informed Sonia's family that the next day they could go to the Shahid Moghaddasi Court in Evin Prison to find out about the status of their daughter's case.

According to reports received by Mohabat News, 51-year-old Masoumeh Ghasemi, who converted to Christianity at the same time as her daughter Sonia, went to the Shahid Moghaddasi courthouse in Evin Prison the next day (Wednesday, July 1, 2020) to inquire about her daughter's condition. Apparently, she was arrested and interrogated without any reason or explanation and with prior planning by the officers of the mentioned court.

Mrs. "Ghasemi" along with her daughter Sonia, on Thursday, July 9, 2020, after several days of detention in Evin Prison Detention Center in Tehran, by Branch 3 of the Islamic Revolutionary Tribunal of Shahid Moghaddasi, was temporarily released on a bail of 300 million Tomans (\$14,000).

The judge of the "Shahid Moghaddasi" court has issued a real estate bail of 800 million Tomans (\$36,700) for Masoumeh Ghasemi and her daughter Sonia. Determining this amount of bail, which is a very heavy figure, is unprecedented for Christians detained in Iran.

Sonia's mother, Masoumeh Ghasemi, a Christian convert, like her daughter, is a member of the "One-Hearted" women's Church.

After her release, the Christian mother has so far refused to contact the media and provide information in this regard due to threats from intelligence agents.

Intelligence and security agents have put extra pressure on the families of detained women to refrain them from contacting the media. For this reason, "Mohabat News" has not been able to contact the detainees and their families so far.

The Special Church of the "Women Christian Believers of Tehran", which focuses on prayer, worship and Christian healing, has been pressured by the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Organization and the judiciary of the Islamic Republic for unknown reasons, so that the group of Christian mothers and sisters of this church cannot freely pray, worship and practice their religion. There are credible reports that more information about the members of the capital's women's home church who were arrested on June 29th and 30th, is available and will be released soon.

Christian convert, 65, overturns first of three jail sentences on appeal



Sixty-five-year-old Iranian Christian convert Ismaeil Maghrebinejad has had his three-year jail sentence for "insulting Islamic sacred beliefs" overturned on appeal.

Article 18 (13.07.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/6371/> - Ismaeil was informed of the verdict yesterday by his lawyer, Farshid Roofoogaran.

In the verdict, dated 5 July, the judge at the 17th Branch of the appeal court in Shiraz, Jamshid Kashkouli, accepted Mr Roofoogaran's defence that Ismaeil had not been the originator of a social media joke insulting Islamic clerics – he had only responded with a smiley face emoji – and that anyway the clerics themselves are not considered "sacred" in Islam.

Ismaeil is still awaiting the result of separate appeals against two further jail sentences – of one and two years, respectively – for "propaganda against the state" and membership of a "Zionist Evangelical Christian" group "hostile to the regime". (Ismaeil is an Anglican Church member.)

Background

Ismaeil received his three-year sentence on 11 January, following a hearing on 8 January at Branch 105 of the Civil Court in Shiraz. He was sentenced under Article 513 of the Islamic Penal Code, which provides for a punishment of between one and five years in prison.

On 27 February, Ismaeil was sentenced by a Revolutionary Court to two years in prison for "membership of a group hostile to the regime", under Article 499 of the Islamic Penal Code, which provides for three months to five years' imprisonment.

The judge at the 1st Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz, Seyed Mahmood Sadati, later ordered a retrial, which took place on 9 May 2020.

Ismaeil was informed of the verdict a week later: he had been reconvicted of membership of a "Zionist Evangelical Christian" group "hostile to the regime" and convicted of the additional charge of "propaganda against the state", for which he was given a separate one-year jail sentence.

Having overturned the first of his three prison sentences, Ismaeil and his family are now anxiously awaiting the result of his appeals against the two remaining sentences.

Baha'is in Iran: An avalanche of arrests and sentences in June

HRWF (07.07.2020) – In June, a lot of Baha'is were arrested or sentenced to prison terms. However, there are possibilities of being released on bail until there is a final court decision. As a result, it can take several years before they go to prison if they have finally been sentenced to a prison term.

Sen's Daily, 24 June 2020

[Amin Dhulfaqaari free on bail in Yazd](#)

[In Birjand, Farid Moqadam-Ziraki sentenced to five years in prison](#)

Sen's Daily, 22 June 2020

[Fariba Ashtari sentenced in Yazd to five years in prison](#)

Sen's Daily, 20 June 2020

[Review Court confirms 10-year sentence for Farouq Izadinia](#)

Sen's Daily, 19 June 2020

Five year sentence for Shahryaar `Ataareyaan confirmed in Shiraz

Sen's Daily, 18 June 2020

Bahiyyeh Yalda'i's sentence quashed in Shiraz

Sen's Daily, 17 June 2020

Four detainees released on bail: Naahid Na'imi, Didaar Ahmadi, Boshra Mostafavi and Mahbubeh Mithaqiyaan-Dehqaan

Sen's Daily, 16 June 2020

Sentence of Sahba Farnoush reduced to six years

Sen's Daily, 14 June 2020

Six month sentence for Mehrdaad Mousavi in Shahin Shahr

Sen's Daily, 11 June 2020

Six furloughed prisoners return to prison in Birjand, three granted extensions

Sen's Daily, 9 June 2020

Touraj Amini sentenced to 1 year in prison and exile

Sen's Daily, 8 June 2020

Three new arrests in Rafsanjan Naahid Na'imi, Didaar Ahmadi and Boshra Mostafavi

Sen's Daily, 3 June 2020

New arrest in Yazd: Mahbubeh Mithaqiyaan

Sen's Daily, 2 June 2020

Parvaneh Hosseini released in Yazd

Vida Haqiqi begins her sentence in Isfahan

Arrest of another Christian convert confirmed in Tehran

Article 18 (07.07.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/6333/> - A 46-year-old Christian woman has been named as another of those arrested during a series of raids on the homes of Christians last week by intelligence agents belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

Malihe Nazari, who is married with two sons aged 22 and 15, was arrested at her home in the Sadeghiyeh district of Tehran last Tuesday evening, reports [Mohabat News](#).

Article18 [reported](#) on Friday that at least 12 Christians had been arrested in a coordinated operation on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning targeting house-church members in Tehran, sister city Karaj and also Malayer, 400km southwest of Tehran.

The confirmation of Malihe's arrest means that the total number of arrests was at least 13.

As Article18 reported, the others known to have been arrested were: in western Tehran's Yaftabad district, Armenian-Iranian Christian Joseph Shahbazian and Christian converts named Reza, Salar, Sonya, and elderly sisters Mina and Maryam; in separate raids on their homes in Tehran and Karaj, two men named Farhad and another named Arash; and, finally, three more Christian converts in Malayer named Sohrab, Ebrahim and Yasser.

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

According to Mohabat News, Malihe is a member of a women's-only house-church known as "Yek Delaan" or "One Heart", which has dozens of mostly middle-aged members.

During the raid, Malihe's house was reportedly searched and several of her personal belongings were confiscated, including her computer, mobile phone and a number of books.

The agents then took Malihe away, and told her family she would be taken to Evin Prison.

When they went to visit her at the prison the next day, they found Malihe's name on the list of detainees but weren't able to see her, although the following day she was able to briefly call home to say that she was OK.

Malihe's eldest son has reportedly been battling with cancer for the past two years.

12 Christians arrested by Revolutionary Guards in three cities

Article 18 (03.07.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/6311/> - At least 12 Christians have been arrested by intelligence agents belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard in a coordinated operation across three cities.

The arrests took place on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning 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 will be soon be summoned for questioning.

What happened?

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

Ten intelligence agents – eight men and two women – raided the home of a recent Christian convert, where around 30 Christians had gathered.

The agents, who were armed and wore masks, were reportedly polite as they filmed the raid and separated men from women, but later turned the cameras off and treated the Christians harshly.

All those present were taken down to the building's car park, where a van with blacked-out windows awaited, as well as several cars. All cars belonging to local residents seemed to have been moved to make space for the agents' cars and for the garage to become a quasi interrogation room.

The agents then proceeded to read out a list of names written on an arrest warrant.

The six present whose names were read out – Armenian-Iranian Christian Joseph Shahbazian, and five Christian converts named Reza, Salar, Sonya, and elderly sisters Mina and Maryam – were handcuffed, blindfolded and taken away, and have not yet been able to contact their families to tell them where they have been taken.

The others whose names were not read out – many of them recent converts – had their mobile phones confiscated and were ordered to fill out forms providing information of another method by which they could be reached, and told not to follow-up on the confiscation of their phones for at least 72 hours.

They were also ordered to write down that none of their property had been confiscated, even after the confiscation of their mobile phones and despite their protestations.

The agents then drove the six arrested Christians, as well as some of those whose names were not on the list, to their homes in Tehran and Karaj to carry out searches of their properties, looking especially for Bibles, other Christian literature and communications devices.

According to the reports of witnesses, some of the Christians were beaten, as well as some of their non-Christian family members.

The agents later went to the homes of the three Christian converts whose names were read out but had not been present – two men called Farhad, and another named Arash – and arrested them.

Coordinated operation

Meanwhile, on the same night, three Christian converts were called in the city of Malayer and told to report to the Revolutionary Guard intelligence office the next day for questioning.

The three Christians – named Sohrab, Ebrahim and Yasser – were arrested the next morning, before they had the chance to turn themselves in.

They were then detained, but released the next day – yesterday – after posting bail of 30 million tomans (around \$1,500) each.

All that is known about the fate of the other arrested Christians is that two of them had their bail set at 50 million tomans (around \$2,500), and are currently seeking to raise the amount to secure their temporary release.

It is believed that the raids were coordinated with the help of an informant, who had infiltrated the group within the past few months and gained their trust.

This individual is reported to have accompanied the intelligence agents in their raid on the Tehran house-church, and to have even stood next to the judge as he later read out his bail demands.

Bushehr Christians face prison, exile, work restrictions and fines



L to R: Pooriya Peyma, Fatemeh Talebi, Maryam Falahi, Sam Khosravi, Habib Heydari, Sasan Khosravi, Marjan Falahi.

Article 18 (29.06.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/6263/> - Seven Christian converts in the south-western Iranian city of Bushehr have been given sentences ranging from prison and exile to work restrictions and fines.

The seven, including three married couples, received their verdicts on 21 June at the revolutionary court in Bushehr.

They were given 20 days to appeal, and intend to do so.

The four men – Habib Heydari, Pooriya Peyma, and brothers Sam and Sasan Khosravi – each received custodial sentences. Sam and Sasan also face work restrictions and exile after their release.

The three women – Fatemeh Talebi, and sisters Maryam and Marjan Falahi – were fined. Maryam, a nurse, was also given a lifetime ban on working for any national institution, including the hospital she’s worked at for 20 years.

Details of sentences

Sam and Sasan were each sentenced to one year in prison, followed by a two-year exile from Bushehr, which includes a ban on working in their specialist profession – the hospitality sector.

Habib also received a one-year prison sentence, but no exile or work restrictions. Pooriya received a 91-day sentence – the minimum jail time required to ensure the prisoner leaves with a criminal record – and again no exile or work restriction.

Sam and Sasan's wives, Maryam and Marjan, received fines of 8 million tomans (around \$400) and 6 million tomans (around \$300) respectively.

Maryam's additional lifetime ban on employment at any national institution is a severe blow after her two decades of service at the local hospital.

Finally, Pooriya's wife, Fatemeh, received a 4 million toman fine (around \$200) – equivalent to two months' salary for the average Iranian.

The seven Christians were given their verdicts to read, but not allowed to take them home or to make copies.

They were each convicted of the same charge – “propaganda against the state” – under Article 500 of the Islamic Penal Code, which provides for up to a year in prison for anyone found guilty of engaging in “any type of propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations”.

The Iranian Parliament recently passed amendments to two articles of the Penal Code, including Article 500, but they do not appear to have had any impact in this particular verdict.

The amendments enable judges to label those convicted of “insulting Islam” or “propaganda against Islam” as being members of “sects”. Those convicted of membership of such groups can face flogging or even the death penalty, in addition to imprisonment and fines.

Background

The seven Christians were first arrested on 1 July 2019, alongside Sam and Sasan's mother, Khatoon Fatolahzadeh, who is in her sixties and as a result was released later the same day.

The seven detained Christians were released over two weeks later, having each posted bail of 300 million tomans (around \$30,000).

During the arrests, officers introducing themselves as agents from the Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) stormed the Christians' homes in a coordinated operation, confiscating Bibles, Christian literature, wooden crosses and pictures carrying Christian symbols, along with laptops, phones, all forms of identity cards, bank cards and other personal belongings.

The agents also searched their work offices and confiscated computer hard drives and security-camera recordings.

They treated them harshly, even though small children were present during the arrests.

The seven Christians were then held in solitary confinement in the MOIS office in Bushehr and denied access to lawyers. They were also coerced to confess to their "crimes" on camera.

Some of their associates were later summoned for interrogation.

The seven initially faced two additional charges – "collusion", and "membership of a group hostile to the regime" – which could have led to ten-year sentences.

They were acquitted of those charges at a hearing on 30 December 2019, but told that the remaining charge against them was "applicable" because of their possession of Christian literature and other Christian items, which were claimed to be evidence they had evangelised.

The judge even named some of the Christian literature that had been found at their properties, including copies of 'Who is Jesus?' and 'Getting to Know the Bible'.

A further hearing took place on 20 April, after which the court clerk told them they could expect a verdict within a week, though their lawyer told them it could take months.

Article18's advocacy director, Mansour Borji, commented: "Condemning these people to prison because of their possession of Bibles and Christian symbols is a clear demonstration that Iran's Foreign Minister and others aren't telling the truth when they say that 'no-one is put in prison in Iran simply because of their beliefs'.

"These people have done nothing that could be construed as 'propaganda against the state' or 'acting against national security', but nevertheless they have been treated so unjustly. The international community must hold Iran to account for this miscarriage of justice, and many others like it."

In Shiraz, the trial of 26 Baha'is begins and is adjourned

Sen's Daily (16.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3e9TFfk> - On June 15, the trial of 26 Bahais in the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz began, but was adjourned after three hours after the defence lawyer pointed to problems in the files supported the charges. According to the summons, issued on June 8, these Bahais were charged with "propaganda against the regime and in favor of groups opposing the regime, running groups opposing the regime, membership in these groups, propaganda activities for, and cooperation with, hostile states; links to states hostile to the Islamic Republic and [supporting] global arrogance, and implementing their plans, [all the above taking] the form of the Bahai organization in Iran." In short, by being Bahais they are supposed to be guilty of all these things. Judge Sayyed-Mohammad Saadaati (قاضی سیدمحمد ساداتی) referred the case back to the Prosecutor's Office for further and

better investigations. The cases are already several years old. It appears that a Prosecutor who has declared his intention to “uproot” the Bahai community in Shiraz has been reviving prosecutions that had previously been dropped.

Those accused are :

Parisa Rouhi-zaadegaan (پریسا روحی زادگان), arrested September 28, 2016.

Esma`il Rusta (اسماعیل روستا), arrested July 16 or 17, in connection with environmental activism.

Bahareh Nowruzi (بهاره نوروزی), arrested September 28, 2016 or soon after.

Bhenam Azizpour (بهنام عزیزپور), previously reported as Behnam Azirpour (بهنام عزیزپور), arrested September 29, 2016.

Thamareh Ashnaa`i (ثمره آشنایی), previously reported as Tamar Ashnaa`i (ثمر آشنایی), arrested November 22, 2016.

Ramin Shirvani (رامین شیروانی), arrested on July 16, 2016.

Rezvan Yazdani (رضوان یزدانی), arrested November 22, 2016.

Soroush Eqaani (سروش ایقانی), arrested September 28, 2016. In this report he is named

Soroush Eqaani-Soghaadi (سروش ایقانی صغادی).

Sa`id Hosna (سعید حسنی), arrested July 16, 2016.

Shaadi Saadeq-Eqdam (شادی صادق اقدم), arrested September 28, 2016.

Shamim Ekhlaiqi (شمیم اخلاقی), arrested September 28, 2016.

Sahba Farahbakhsh (صهبا فرحبخش), arrested September 28, 2016.

Sahba Maslahi (صهبا مصلحی), arrested September 28, 2016.

Ahdiyyeh Enayati (عهدیه عنایتی), arrested September 28, 2016.

Farbod Shaadmaan (فرید شادمان), previously named as Farid Shaadmaan (فرید شادمان), arrested September 28, 2016.

Farzad Shaadmaan (فرزاد شادمان), arrested September 28, 2016.

Lala Salehi (لالا صالحی), arrested November 22, 2016.

Mazhgan Gholampour-Sa`adi (مزگان غلام پور سعدی), whose name has previously been reported as Mazhgan (مزگان), arrested September 28, 2016.

Marjaan Glomaampour (مرجان غلام پور), arrested September 28, 2016.

Maryam Eslaami-Mahdiaabaadi (مریم اسلامی مهدی آبادی), arrested September 28, 2016.

Mahyar Safidi Miandoab [=Miaandou-aab] (مهیار سفیدی میانداوب), arrested September 28, 2016.

Nabil Tahdhib (نبیل تهذیب), arrested July 16 or 17, in connection with environmental activism.

Nasim Kaashaani-nezhaad (نسیم کاشانی نژاد), arrested November 22, 2016.

Noushin Zanhaari (نوشین زنهاری), arrested July 16, 2016.

Varqa Kaaviaani (ورقا کاویانی), arrested September 28, 2016.

Yekta Fahandezh-Sa`adi (یکتا فهندژ سعدی), arrested 2010, again on February 3, 2012

(sentenced, but then acquitted by the Review Court), again on March 16, 2014 (sentenced

June 16, 2016 by Judge Doctor Sadati (دکتر ساداتی) to five years in prison), again on March 16,

2014 (sentenced in December 2018 to ten years in prison by Judge Mohammad Mojtaba

Rudijaani (قاضی محمد مجتبی رودیجانی)).

In March, 2020, they were informed of the pending trial and summoned to present their final defence.

Report on Human Rights in Iran submitted to UNHCR

APPG (11.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2NoFlVv> - A joint report by five organisations, including APPG stakeholders Middle East Concern, Open Doors and CSW, highlights ongoing violations of religious freedom and discrimination against religious minorities in Iran.

In the report, submitted to the UN's Human Rights Commission in preparation for its next session of meetings, the organisations call on the commission to ask Iran to clarify its commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The covenant, which Iran signed nearly 45 years ago, affirms freedom of religion and discrimination.

Iran's constitution guarantees religious freedom to Christian Iranians, but in practice this applies only to Assyrian and Armenian Christians, whom Iran's considers to be part of its historical-cultural heritage.

There are multiple ways in which the government makes life for minority religions difficult, says the joint report issued by Open Doors, Middle East Concern, Article18, CSW and the World Evangelical Alliance.

It highlights five of them:

1. Christian churches are forbidden to hold services or publish books in the native Farsi language.
2. Minority churches are prosecuted as a threat to national security.
3. Leaving Islam is legal under Iranian law, but converts have been prosecuted for such acts, and 'non-codified law' such as authoritative Islamic sources and fatwas has been used to prosecute.
4. Even some traditional and recognized churches have had their property confiscated or forcibly closed.
5. Christians and other religious minorities face discrimination in who they can marry, how they inherit, and their access to higher education and government employment.

"The persecution of Christians in Iran is one of the most obvious cases of state repression, but they are not the only ones whose freedoms are restricted by the regime. Therefore, the rights of Iran's religious minorities will not be respected until those of the majority are as well," said an OD spokesperson for the Middle East region.

See the full report at <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/Iran-report-for-UNHRC.pdf>

Article18 calls on UNHRC to question Iran over religious freedom violations

Article18 (05.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3d3GrQI> - Article18 has submitted a new [report](#) to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, highlighting the "multiple layers" of religious-freedom violations faced by Christians and other religious minorities in Iran.

The report, released in collaboration with partner organisations Open Doors, CSW, Middle East Concern and The World Evangelical Alliance, lists five ways in which Iranian Christians face violations to their right to freedom of religion or belief:

1. Through the prohibition of Persian-language church services and religious materials, and forced closure of those that fail to comply.
2. Through the use of Articles 489, 499 and 500 of the Iranian Penal Code to prosecute Christians for their peaceful religious activities.
3. Through prosecuting, and in one case [executing](#), Iranians who leave Islam on charges of “apostasy”, and justifying it through the use of Article 220 of the Iranian Penal Code and Article 167 of the Constitution, which allow judges to rely on non-codified Islamic law.
4. Through the confiscation or forced closure of church properties, including the [Assyrian Presbyterian Church in Tabriz](#) in May last year.
5. Through discrimination against non-Muslims in marriage and inheritance laws, and access to employment and education.

The report includes a table of 29 court cases filed against Christians in 2018 and 2019: 18 had been temporarily released on bail at the publication of the report; five were serving [five-year prison sentences](#); four had been released from prison after completing their sentences; and a further two were detained but not yet charged.

Since the publication of the report, on 29 May, four of those on bail have since [commenced](#) serving their own five-year prison sentences, while another, [Aziz Majidzadeh](#), appeared in court yesterday.

The table is not exhaustive and does not include confidential cases, nor cases that began prior to 2018, including that of [Yousef Nadarkhani](#) and the three Christian converts currently serving 10-year prison sentences alongside him.

However the report highlights Yousef’s case elsewhere, as well as that of [Victor Bet-Tamraz](#) and his family. Just three days after the report’s publication, Victor, his wife Shamiram and three Christian converts involved in the same court case saw yet another scheduled appeal hearing [postponed](#).

The report also highlights the case against eight Christian converts in [Bushehr](#); the three prison sentences recently given to 65-year-old Anglican Church member [Ismaeil Maghrebinejad](#) in Shiraz; and the forced closures of the [Central Church of Tehran](#), [Emmanuel Protestant Church](#), [St Peter’s Evangelical Church](#) and [Assemblies of God Church in Janat-Abad](#).

The report concludes by calling on the Human Rights Committee to question the Iranian government on how its treatment of Christian converts is in line with its commitments as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), by asking:

1. How Article 13 of the Iranian Constitution, which recognises only Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians as religious minorities is in line with the provisions of the covenant.
2. For information on minority faith adherents who wish to practise their faith in the Persian language.
3. For a response to reports that minority faith adherents are being tried on national security charges for the legitimate practice of their faith.
4. For clarification on how apostasy charges are in line with Article 18 of the ICCPR, which provides for freedom to choose and change one’s religion.

5. For reports on how many Christian converts are currently detained on charges relating to national security or apostasy.
6. For an indication of whether Iran plans to amend its Civil Code to allow non-Muslims to inherit from Muslims or Muslim women to marry non-Muslims.

Four Christians ordered to begin prison sentences

CSW (02.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2XIFQQa> - CSW's sources have confirmed that four Iranian Christians have been instructed by the authorities to present themselves at Evin prison in Tehran to begin serving five-year sentences.

Hossein Kadivar, Khalil Dehghanpour, Kamal Naamanian and Mohammed Vafadar were arrested by members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard in early 2019 during a [series of police raids](#) on house churches in Rasht. Five other Christians who were arrested at the same time have already begun serving their sentences, including [Pastor Matthias Haghnejad](#).

During a [court hearing](#) on 24 July 2019, Judge Mohammed Moghisheh, who is notorious for miscarriages of justice, called the four men "apostates" and argued that the Bible was "falsified." During [another hearing](#) on 23 September, the defendants' lawyer was allowed to speak briefly; however, Judge Moghisheh is reported not to have responded to his statement. The men were subsequently sentenced to five years in prison for "endangering state security" and "promoting Zionism."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "*CSW condemns the decision to send these innocent men prison. The charges levelled against them are without substance, and their trial lacked transparency. We urge the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release them, and all others who are currently detained on excessive charges relating to their faith. We also call upon the Iranian administration, as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to lift all restrictions imposed on freedom of religion or belief, and end its criminalisation of Christianity.*"

Four Iranian converts started serving five-year prison sentences

Middle East Concern (05.06.2020) - <https://meconcern.org/2020/06/05/iran-four-christian-converts-serve-five-year-prison-sentences/> Hossein Kadivar, Khalil Dehghanpour, Kamal Naamanian and Mohammed Vafadar obeyed a summons issued on 28 May. They had been released on bail of about \$13,000 each last July. They presented themselves at Evin Prison on 2 June to begin serving their five-year sentence.

They were among nine Christian converts belonging to the "Church of Iran" denomination who were arrested over a four-week period at the beginning of 2019, accused of endangering state security and promoting Zionism. Following a disagreement with the judge

over the choice of a defence lawyer, the other five men were immediately transferred to Evin prison, as they were unable to meet extortionate bail demands of about \$130,000 each.

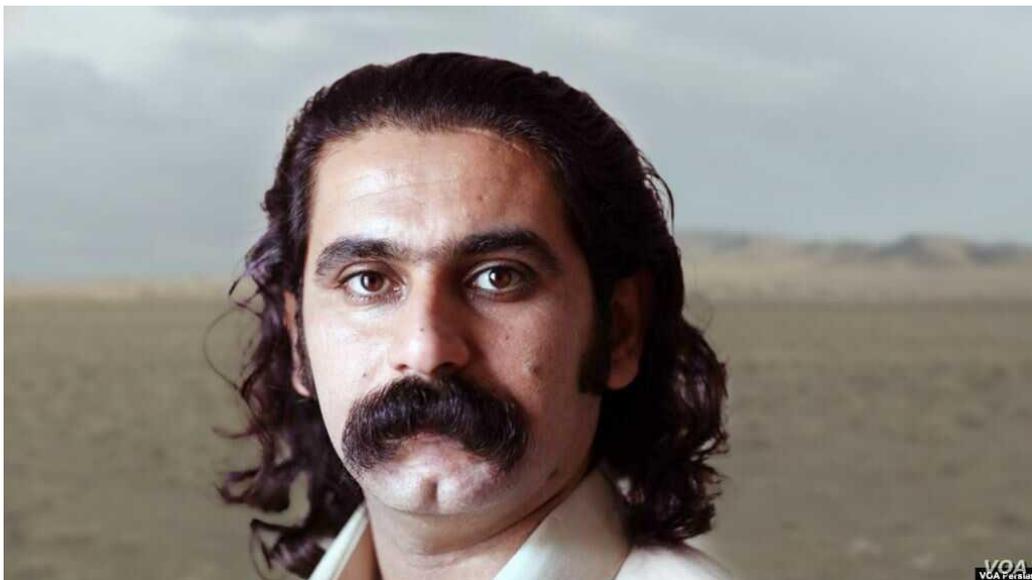
In October 2019 all nine were convicted of “acting against national security” and each sentenced to five years’ imprisonment. The sentences were upheld on appeal in February 2020.

Of the four men who presented themselves at Evin Prison earlier this week, three are married with families, while Mohammad is single.

[Read on hrwf.eu](http://www.hrwf.eu)

Iran’s Gonabadi Dervish activists face more harsh treatment by Government

By Michael Lipin, Ramin Haghjoo



Undated photo of Reza Yavari, an Iranian Gonabadi Dervish activist who was arrested in Tehran in February 2018, released from a prison in Ahvaz upon receiving a pardon in April 2020, and later forced into internal exile. (VOA Persian)

VOA (28.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3eBWqXz> - Members of Iran’s Gonabadi Dervish religious minority have faced more harsh treatment from Iranian authorities, with one recently freed dissident being sent into internal exile and another detained activist being forced to stay in a coronavirus-plagued prison system far from home.

In a Friday phone interview with VOA Persian, Iranian Dervish activist Reza Yavari said he recently was forced to relocate to the northeastern town of Taybad in Razavi Khorasan

province to start a two-year punishment of internal exile, following his April 1 pardon and release from a prison in the southwestern city of Ahvaz, capital of Khuzestan province.

Yavari, who is from Khuzestan and had been studying at a Tehran university prior to his 2018 detention, accused authorities of acting illegally by forcing him into internal exile after granting him a pardon.

Yavari was among more than 300 Dervish community members arrested for involvement in anti-government protests in Tehran on February 19-20, 2018. The protests escalated into violent street confrontations between Iranian security forces and the activists. Five officers were killed.

Iranian authorities later sentenced Yavari to five years in prison followed by two years of internal exile on charges of assembly and collusion against national security. They transferred him from the Greater Tehran Penitentiary to Ahvaz's Sheyban prison last year.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a decree pardoning Yavari and a number of other prisoners on April 1.

In a separate move, Iranian authorities have granted temporary releases or furloughs to tens of thousands of prisoners since late February, in part to protect them from the coronavirus that has spread through Iran's overcrowded and unsanitary jails in recent months. But they have refused to furlough dissidents sentenced to five or more years in prison for activities designated as security offenses.

Iranian law is unclear about whether a person whose prison term is commuted through a pardon still has to observe other aspects of a sentence, such as a period of internal exile.

Iranian judiciary regulations for granting amnesty to convicts, as published by the Iranian parliament's research service, contain the following clause: "Pardoning shall not make ... sentences ineffective, diminish the execution or enforcement of verdicts and judgments or lessen the effectiveness of decrees."

Yavari told VOA that 38 other Dervishes, who were arrested during the February 2018 protests and later released, have been forced, like him, to go into internal exile. He also expressed concern about Iran's ongoing imprisonment of another eight Dervish activists detained in the protests: Kianoush Abbaszadeh, Mostafa Abdi, Abbas Dehghan, Vahid Khamoshi, Mohammad Sharifi Moghaddam, Kasra Nouri, Amin Safari and Reza Sigarchi.

One of those detained activists, Kasra Nouri, was sentenced to 7½ years in prison followed by a period of internal exile for several alleged security offenses. After his initial detention at the Greater Tehran Penitentiary in 2018, authorities transferred him to a prison in the south-central city of Shiraz in December 2019, leaving him far from his family's home in the Iranian capital.

An Iranian Dervish community member who is close to Nouri's family and spoke to VOA Persian last Thursday said the judiciary has rejected the family's appeals for Nouri to be furloughed while the coronavirus spreads in Iranian prisons.

The Dervish source who spoke on condition of anonymity said Nouri's family members also have appealed for authorities to send Nouri back to prison in Tehran, where they live. But the source said Nouri received a judiciary letter notifying him that he is considered a resident of Shiraz and must serve the rest of his prison term there. It was not clear on what basis Iranian authorities made that assertion.

Article 513 of Iran's criminal code, as published by an Iranian law firm, states that people sentenced to prison should be jailed as near as possible to their place of residence, unless a judge decides that doing so would be a perversion of justice.

"Nouri's family believes his transfer to Shiraz prison is an unofficial exile intended to punish them, as some family members also are Dervish community activists," the source said.

The Dervishes involved in the 2018 protests had been demanding the release of arrested members of their community and the removal of security checkpoints around the house of their elderly leader, Noor Ali Tabandeh. He later died in December 2019.

Members of the Sufi Muslim religious sect long have complained of harassment by Iran's Shiite Islamist rulers, who view them as heretics.

This article originated in VOA's Persian service. Mehdi Jedinia of VOA's Extremism Watch Desk and Behrooz

News from Baha'is in May

HRWF (01.06.2020) - Baha'is in Iran have continued to be arrested, sentenced to prison terms and sometimes released on bail after a period of pretrial detention without criminal charges being dropped. The official charges are usually: forming an illegal cult, membership in the deviant Baha'i sect, membership in an anti-Islamic group, participation in illegal assemblies, propaganda against the regime, posing a threat to the holy regime of the Islamic Republic by teaching Baha'i ideas, acting against national security, espionage, and so on. Many Baha'i women are behind bars in Iran.

HRWF adds names of convicted Baha'is to its Database of FORB Prisoners (<https://hrwf.eu/hrwf-prisoners-database-other-countires/>) only when they start serving their prison term.

Two arrests in Yazd: Ms Mitra Bandi-Amirabaadi-Baaghi and Ms Heyva Yazdaan-Mahdiabaadi-Bahifar

Sen's Daily (31.05.2020) <https://bit.ly/2AnZ58t>

Isfahan: two bailed, one arrested for illegal kindergarten: Shahzaad Hosseini & Shaayaan Hosseini

Sen's Daily (31.05.2020) <https://bit.ly/3dzcJUM>

More from Shiraz: Farzaan Ma'sumi and Farhaam Sabet sentenced

Sen's Daily (28.05.2020) <https://bit.ly/36NQjN2>

Amin Dhulfaqaari arrested in Yazd

Sen's Daily (26.05.2020) <https://bit.ly/36TIPIr>

In Shiraz, two more Baha'I women sentenced to six years: Shahnaaz Saabet and Soheila Haqiqat

Sen's Daily (17.05.2020) <https://bit.ly/2Mi3XPI>

Another six young Baha'is sentenced in Shiraz: Shahryaar Ataareyaan, Navid Bazmaandegaan and his wife Bahreh Qaderi, Nilufar Hakimi, Noraa Pourmoraadian and Ehsanollah Mahbub-Rahwafa

Sen's Daily (14.05.2020) <https://bit.ly/36TJSbl>

Elaheh Sami`zaadeh and Sudabeh Haqiqat given 5-year sentences in Shiraz

Sen's Daily (13.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3dq62V9>

Ruhollah Zibaa'i summoned again

Sen's Daily (11.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2TZr9Wz>

A Baha'i citizen, Elaheh Samizadeh, sentenced to an extra year in prison

HRANA (25.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2WZXaQh> - Elaheh Samizadeh, a Baha'i citizen, has been sentenced to one extra year of imprisonment and two years suspension from holding all governmental and public jobs by Branch 105 of Shiraz Criminal Court.

Ms. Samizadeh had previously been sentenced to six years in prison by Branch One of Shiraz Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Seyed Mahmoud Sadati, on charges of "propaganda against the regime and membership in opposition groups" Based on the Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, Based on the Article 134 of Iran's Islamic Penal Code, the charge with the highest penalty will be considered; this means that Ms. Samizadeh should serve five years in prison. Ms. Samizadeh is the mother of a toddler boy, and charges brought up against her of "propaganda against the regime" and "collaborating" with "dissident "groups" are because she worked as an instructor at "mother-child innovation courses" using her valid college degree obtained from official institutions. Charge of "forging a university degree" was brought up against her in July 2019 and caused her bail to be increased by 60 million Toman. According to the verdict that was communicated to Ms. Samizadeh on May 22, 2020, by Branch 105 of Shiraz Criminal Court presided over by Judge Fakharzadeh, "usage of scientific titles" which refers to her studies at BIHI (Baha'i University) is the underlying reason for her sentence of 1-year imprisonment and 2 years

suspension from holding all governmental and public jobs. An informed source told HRANA: "She is accused of forging her diploma, while Ms. Samizadeh studied at the Baha'i Online University (BIHE) due to the Baha'is' exclusion from studying at country's accredited universities. She has also received her degree from this university, and after making bail has been repeatedly summoned and interrogated over this fact."

Earlier, Shahriar Atrian, Navid Bazmandegan, Bahareh Ghaderi, Nora Purmoradian, Soheila Haghighat, Shahnaz Sabet, and Soodabeh Haghighat, were also charged by Branch 1 of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Seyed Mahmoud Sadati in the same case. The charges against this group include "propaganda against the regime and membership in an opposition group" which caused a 6-year sentence for every member of this group, an 8-year sentence for Niloufar Hakimi, and a 1-year sentence for Ehsanullah Mahboub Rah Vafa. From this group, Ms. Haghighat is also awaiting another trial in the criminal court, and Niloufar Hakimi has previously been sentenced to five years in prison by a criminal court. Taking Ms. Samizadeh's new convictions into account, she and nine others implicated in this case have been sentenced to a total of 63 years in prison. These citizens were arrested by security forces in September 2018 and were all released on bail impending trial. HARANA reports the second part of Ms. Samizadeh's case which went into the sentencing phase on May 22, 2020, has added a 1-year conviction to her previously 6-year sentence, and this addition brings up the collective sentencing of this group to a total of 63 years.

Bahai's of Iran are deprived of all liberties and religious related activities, a systematic deprivation of liberty which goes against Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, that entitle any person to freedom of religion and belief, freedom expression individually or collectively and in a public or private setting. According to unofficial reports, there are more than 300,000 Baha'is in Iran. However, Iran's constitution only recognizes Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, and does not recognize the Baha'i faith. And this reason has given the Iranian authorities an excuse to systematically violate the rights of Baha'i citizens over the years.

Anglican Church member given third prison sentence at retrial

Article 18 (18.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2TmAuHD> - An Iranian Anglican Church member has been reconvicted of membership of a "Zionist Evangelical Christian" group "hostile to the regime" at his retrial, and convicted of the additional charge of "propaganda against the state".

Ismaeil Maghrebinejad, 65, was informed of the verdict on Saturday, 16 May, following his retrial the previous Saturday at the 1st Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz.

Judge Seyed Mahmood Sadati reached the same verdict as in his initial February ruling by giving Ismaeil a two-year sentence for "membership of a hostile group", but added an additional year in prison for "propaganda against the state".

While it is likely that Ismaeil will only have to serve the longer sentence of two years, he also faces an additional [three years in prison](#) for his January conviction at a civil court for “insulting Islam”, which he would have to serve separately.

Ismaeil, who is appealing against all three convictions, initially faced four charges after his [arrest](#) in January 2019 – also “apostasy”, for which he could have faced the death sentence. That charge was dropped during a November 2019 hearing, but the other three charges were found “applicable”, although the charge of “propaganda against the state” was not cited in his 27 February [conviction](#), so it appeared that it had been combined with the other charge of “membership of a hostile group”.

Why the retrial?

Judge Sadati called for the 9 May retrial himself, saying he had been unhappy with his initial verdict and wanted to make some “corrections”, giving hope to Ismaeil and his family that the judgment may be quashed.

However, despite the protestations of his lawyer, Farshid Rofogaran, that Ismaeil had “in no way, shape or form been a member of any hostile organisation”, he was given an even stiffer sentence.

In his ruling, Judge Sadati referred to the findings of the intelligence agents of Iranian armed forces, who were responsible for his arrest, and Ismaeil’s alleged “admission” of guilt – for acknowledging that a Bible verse from the book of Philippians had been sent to his phone by a Christian satellite TV channel.

A printout of the verse was shown to him in the court, which he acknowledged, after which he was dismissed from the room.

His lawyer, Mr Rofogaran, proceeded to argue that the court had not been presented “with one single reason, piece of evidence or document that would justify the verdict issued”.

He added that the indictment was “very vague” and “lacked any supporting statement”, and that Ismaeil’s only “crime” had been to receive a message from a Christian satellite television channel; he hadn’t even forwarded it to anyone.

“Even if those groups that have Telegram or WhatsApp channels are accepted as ‘hostile’,” Mr Rofogaran said, “receiving messages without forwarding them to anyone else does not constitute membership of that organisation.”

Mr Rofogaran went on to criticise the way the case had been handled, noting that the principle of “innocent until proven guilty” had not been observed.

Article18’s advocacy director, Mansour Borji, pointed out that “Ismaeil’s arrest took place without any prior evidence being found against him. Instead, the intelligence agents went through his personal belongings and tried to dig up evidence against him. The charge that didn’t stick they had to drop; the charges that remain have no legal basis.”

Four raids, one summons and one arrest in Isfahan

Hrana (05.05.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3ce1NeD> - On May 3, agents from the Intelligence Arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IGRC) raided three Bahai homes in Isfahan in a coordinated operation. At the same time they raided and sealed the business premises of Mr. Shahzaad Hosseini (شه زاد حسینی), one of those whose homes were raided. He was summoned to appear at IGRC office on May 6. On May 4, his son Shaayaan Hosseini (شایان حسینی) was arrested. It is not known where he is being held. The third home that was searched belonged to Mrs. Hosseini, the elderly mother of Shahzaad Hosseini.

In the raids, the agents first pretended to be Corona virus officers, but then broke doors and windows in the houses. They seized some personal effects. When Shahzaad Hosseini heard by telephone that the home of his mother had been raided, went there and found that the agents had broken a window and the security mesh on the window and entered her house in a brutal way. Mrs Hosseini was in shock and was unconscious for a time. When the agents had completed their search, they summoned Mr. Hosseini to come to their offices on May 6. Meanwhile, unidentified persons broke into Shahzaad Hosseini's carpentry workshop, breaking all the locks and doors, stealing all his carpentry tools and his stock of timber. He and his neighbour there have reported the theft to police. When his son Shaayaan went to the workshop to lock it, he was set on by agents from the Isfahan IRGC, in the workshop itself. The agents took away the remaining contents of the workshop and sealed it, and arrested him, as well as taking his mobile phone and his car.

Latest news about the persecution of Christians

Article 18 (24.04.2020) - <https://articleeighteen.com/reports/case-studies/5941/> - Abdolreza Ali Haghnejad, Shahrooz Eslamdoost, Behnam Akhlaghi, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Mehdi Khatibi, Khalil Dehghanpour, Hossein Kadivar, Kamal Naamanian and Mohammed Vafada – all members of the non-Trinitarian "Church of Iran" in the northern city of Rasht – were **arrested** during raids on their homes and house-churches within the space of a month in January and February 2019. They were **sentenced** in October 2019 to five years in prison for "actions against national security". Their **appeals were rejected** in February 2020.

Case in full

Hossein Kadivar and Khalil Dehghanpour were detained following a raid on the "house-church" meeting they were leading on 29 January 2019; Abdolreza Ali Haghnejad was arrested on 10 February 2019 during a raid on his home; Kamal Naamanian, Mohammed Vafada and Shahrooz Eslamdoost were arrested at a "house-church" gathering on 15 February; Babak Hosseinzadeh and Mehdi Khatibi were arrested at two separate "house churches" on 23 February; and Behnam Akhlaghi was summoned to the offices of Iran's Revolutionary Guards (Sepah) that same day.

The nine men were each helping to lead services in the absence of their imprisoned pastor Yousef Nadarkhani.

Two of them – Abdolreza and Kamal – had been arrested before for their Christian activities.

Seven of the men – all except Abdolreza and Shahrooz – were released on bail in March 2019, after depositing the equivalent of \$13,000 each. Abdolreza and Shahrooz were detained.

In July 2019, Abdolreza, Shahrooz, Behnam, Babak and Mehdi had their bail increased tenfold after insisting upon being defended by their own lawyer.

Judge Mohammed Moghishah, who has earned the nickname the “Judge of Death” for his harsh treatment of prisoners of conscience, rejected their choice of lawyer and demanded they were defended by a lawyer of the court’s choosing.

When they refused, the judge increased their bail amount to the equivalent of \$130,000 each, and, being unable and unprepared to pay such an amount, they were transferred to Ward 4 of Tehran’s Evin Prison, where they have remained.

The other four decided to defend themselves and were therefore released on their pre-existing bail (the equivalent of \$13,000 each) until their next hearing, when the judge accused them of promoting Zionism and said the Bible had been falsified.

On 13 October, all nine men were sentenced to five years in prison for “acting against national security”, after a hearing on 23 September.

Their appeals were rejected following a hearing on 25 February 2020.

Abdolreza, Shahrooz, Behnam, Babak and Mehdi remain in Evin Prison. The other four men are awaiting summonses.

Recommendations

Article18 petitions the international community to:

- Urge the Iranian government to uphold its obligations under its own constitution and international law, including provisions for freedom of religion or belief contained within the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party, without reservation.
- Call for the immediate acquittal and release of Abdolreza Ali Haghnejad, Shahrooz Eslamdoost, Behnam Akhlaghi, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Mehdi Khatibi, Khalil Dehghanpour, Hossein Kadivar, Kamal Naamanian and Mohammed Vafada.
- Call for the swift application of due process in the cases of all who are detained and/or awaiting charges, trials, sentences or appeal hearings on account of their Christian faith and activities.
- Support Professor Javaid Rehman, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, in monitoring Iran’s compliance with international human rights standards, including freedom of religion or belief.

Background

There has been a significant increase in human rights violations in Iran in recent years, and particularly in the persecution of religious minorities, principally of Christians from the Iranian house-church movement.

Ethnic Christian communities (Assyrian and Armenian) are permitted a degree of freedom to worship, although it is illegal for these churches to conduct services in Persian (the national language of Iran and the common language of converts).

Bibles and other Christian literature are also illegal in Persian and those found in possession of such materials, especially in sufficient quantities for distribution, can expect severe treatment and prison sentences.

Therefore, the growing community of Christian converts are not permitted to attend recognised churches and they have to gather for worship in secret house-churches and risk arrest and imprisonment.

In the past few years, a number of Christians have been handed down sentences of between 10 and 15 years, charged with offences such as "acting against national security". These political charges are used to help avoid international outcry at religiously motivated charges such as apostasy.

Those detained or charged often have to obtain and hand over exorbitant amounts for bail, which are often forfeited as some choose to flee the country in the knowledge that they are very unlikely to receive a fair trial and just verdict.

Those awaiting trial who flee the country are tried in absentia. Many will face a gruelling legal process, and until their case is heard, which could take several years, their lives are in limbo.

The majority of the Christians arrested in the last few years have been released, either after finishing their prison sentences or temporarily released on bail with severe warnings and threats against any further Christian activity. Once released, they are closely monitored, and risk re-arrest and imprisonment if they engage, or are suspected of engaging, in any Christian activity.

Iran is 9th on Open Doors' [2020 World Watch List](#) of the 50 countries where it is hardest to be a Christian. Article18's latest annual [report](#) names 25 Christians arrested in 2019 and 13 Christians who received sentences of between four months and five years in prison for alleged "actions against national security".

Criminal cases against many other Christians went unreported, either because no-one raised awareness – arresting authorities frequently issue threats to prevent publicity – or because those involved requested confidentiality. At least 17 Christians were imprisoned at the end of 2019, all serving sentences based on national security-related charges.

Baha'is in Prison

By Indigo Uriz Martinez, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (23.04.2020) - Over the past 40 years, the Baha'i community, which is considered the largest non-Muslim and unrecognised religious minority in the Islamic Republic of Iran at about 350,000 members, has suffered egregious forms of repression, persecution and victimisation (1). Since 1979, more than 200 Baha'is have been executed solely because of their religious beliefs. Fortunately, Iran no longer executes Baha'is for their religion (2).

However, Baha'is still frequently receive lengthy prison sentences because of their religious identity or their activities related to their faith and community life.

In 1991, the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran wrote a secret official document with the goal of the elimination of the Baha'is as a recognisable entity in Iran. The document, E/CN.4/1993/, was approved by the Supreme Leader and remains in force.

As of 1 April 2020, Human Rights Without Frontiers had documented 60 cases of detained Baha'is in its Prisoners' Database (See <https://hrwf.eu/prisoners-database/>).

The official charges for Baha'i prisoners are usually: forming an illegal cult, acting against national security, espionage, propaganda against the regime, posing a threat to the regime by sharing Baha'i ideas with Israel, plotting to overthrow the regime, membership in an anti-Islamic group, membership in illegal groups and assemblies, and jeopardising the security of the country, all to further the aims of the Baha'is and international organisations.

The articles of the Iranian Penal Code used to prosecute Baha'is are: Articles 498, 499 and 500. (3)

On 18 July 2019, a report by the UN Special Rapporteur, Javid Rehman, was published about the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (4). It stated that:

48. (...) Since August 2005, more than 1,168 Baha'is have been arrested and charged with vaguely worded offences. Given that the Baha'i faith is regarded as a "misguided sect" and Baha'i worship and religious practices are deemed heresy, they frequently face charges such as "breaching national security", "propaganda against the holy regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran" or "propaganda activities against the regime in the interests of the Baha'i sect". The Government, in its comments, noted that "all Baha'is can freely perform their personal rituals".

49. As of the end of June 2019, there were reportedly 49 Baha'is arbitrarily detained in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There was a total of 95 Baha'is reportedly arrested in 2018, compared with at least 84 in 2017 and 81 in 2016. This suggests that, while the number of such arbitrary arrests each year may fluctuate, the persecution is not subsiding.

The report mentions concrete cases of arrests and imprisonment, such as:

55. On 1 January 2019, the court of appeal of Isfahan reportedly condemned, in separate judgments, nine Baha'i citizens to a total of 48 years of prison. They had been charged with "membership of the illegal Baha'i community and propaganda against the regime by spreading the Baha'i faith in the society."

On 29 November 2019, Gary Bauer, the Commissioner for the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), reported on the Iranian government's relentless persecution of Baha'is and called for an immediate end of this systematic violation of freedom of religion (5).

For more information about the persecution of Baha'is in Iran, see our [website](#) (6). For more information about Baha'I prisoners, check our [Prisoner Database](#). (7)

1 <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/74/188>

2 <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais/current-situation>

3 <https://iranhrdc.org/islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five/>

4 <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/74/188>

5 <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscirf-condemns-iranian-government-measures-targeting-baha>

6 <https://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

7 <https://hrwf.eu/prisoners-database/>

Easter release for Iranian Christian convert



Iranian Christian convert Fatemeh (Aylar) Bakhteri has been told she does not need to return to prison to complete her sentence.

Articleeighteen (14.04.2020) - The 36-year-old is the third convert in the past few weeks to receive such news, after [Rokhsareh \(Mahrokh\) Ghanbari](#), 62, and [Amin Khaki](#), 36.

Aylar was initially given temporary leave from Tehran's Evin Prison on 15 March, as one of tens of thousands of prisoners given furloughs due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Earlier this month, Aylar was later told that her leave was to be [extended](#). However, when she called the prison on Easter Day, Aylar was informed that she had in fact been pardoned, as one of [10,000 prisoners freed](#) on the occasion of the Persian New Year, or Nowruz.

Aylar completed a little over half of her one-year sentence for “propaganda against the regime” – a charge related to her membership of a house-church.

Mahrokh and Amin were also serving sentences – of 12 and 14 months respectively – on the same charge and basis.

Mahrokh was [told](#) on 3 April that she would not need to return to prison. Amin was [informed](#) three days later. They are still waiting for their bail amounts of 30 million tomans (around \$2,000) and 50 million tomans (around \$3,000), respectively, to be returned to them.

Mary Mohammadi appears in court



Meanwhile, a court hearing took place today for fellow Christian convert Fatemeh (Mary) Mohammadi, 21, relating to her alleged participation in the January protests following the Iranian Revolutionary Guard’s admission of guilt in the downing of a Ukrainian passenger plane.

Mary’s hearing had previously been scheduled for 2 March, but was [postponed](#) due to coronavirus.

After her hearing was set for 14 April, Mary [tweeted](#) that it would be a “crime against humanity” to send anyone to prison under the current circumstances.

Mary has been charged with “disturbing public order by participating in an illegal rally”.

During the hearing, the judge questioned Mary about her religious views, even though the charges were unrelated to her faith.

Mary has previously spent six months in prison for her membership of a Tehran house-church, and in December she was [kicked out of university](#) without explanation.

The judge cited no evidence against her, saying that her presence in the area where the rally was taking place was evidence in itself.

Mary was told to expect the verdict soon, though no precise timescale was given.

Imprisoned Christians



Clockwise from top-left: Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh, Saheb Fadaee, Mohammad Reza Omidi, Yousef Nadarkhani.

At least ten Iranian Christians remain in prison, despite repeated calls by rights groups for all prisoners of conscience to be released.

They include four Christians whose convictions are currently [being reviewed](#): [Yousef Nadarkhani](#), 42, [Mohammad Reza \(Yohan\) Omidi](#), 46, and [Zaman \(Saheb\) Fadaei](#), 36, and [Nasser Navard Gol Tapeh](#), 58.

Both Nasser and Saheb have suffered health issues and their families are especially concerned about them.

The other Christians still detained are [Mohammad Ali Mossayezbazeh](#), who was sentenced alongside Yousef, Saheb and Yohan; and [Abdolreza Haghnejad](#), [Shahrooz Eslamdoust](#),

[Babak Hosseinzadeh, Mehdi Khatibi, and Behnam Akhlaghi](#), who recently lost their appeals against five-year sentences.

All of them, apart from Nasser, are from the northern city of Rasht and are part of the non-Trinitarian "Church of Iran".

Four more "Church of Iran" members from Rasht – [Khalil Dehghanpour, Hossein Kadivar, Kamal Naamanian and Mohammed Vafada](#) – are currently out on bail, awaiting summonses to serve their own five-year sentences, having lost their appeals alongside Abdolreza, Shahrooz, Babak, Mehdi and Behnam.

Several other Christians are currently enmeshed in ongoing court cases, including [Victor Bet-Tamraz, his wife Shamiram and three Christian converts – Amin Afshar-Naderi, Hadi Asgari and Kavian Fallah-Mohammadi](#) – whose appeal hearings have been repeatedly postponed. Their next hearing is scheduled for 1 May.

For an up-to-date list of all known court proceedings involving Iranian Christians, see our [Prisoners List](#).

Iranian news agency accuses Baha'is of genetic warfare research, links to Covid-19

Sen's Daily (29.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3cHuxfv> - State-sponsored media in Iran have been repeating a story that appears to have been invented by the Islamic Republic News Agency, [TNews](#) and popularized by the [Young Journalists Club](#), a government agency affiliated with the state broadcaster. Their [report](#) is dated March 26, 2020. It was repeated the following day by [Engelaab News](#), [Ghatreh News](#), [Khabar Farsi](#), [Mosalas Online](#), [Mashreq News](#) and others.

The story is a bit of a hodge-podge, which I will paraphrase. In the first place, Baha'is at Stanford are supposed to be preparing biological weapons. This follows a [story](#) on March 23 (in English), citing the coordinator of the fight against Covid-19, General Nasrollah Fathian: "There is even speculation that this virus has been created to specifically target the Iranian population given their genetic traits. But for now, these theories are all being examined."

Another [story](#) from the same government agency (YJC) a few days earlier, claiming that the Corona virus was probably an American weapon, linking this to an 'Iranian Genome Project' at Stanford University. The [project](#) actually exists and is studying the genomes of Iranian-Americans in the United States.

Thus far, we have a bit of absurd anti-American propaganda being repurposed by bringing in Baha'is working at Stanford, "who are likely to be of Jewish origin" which "makes it likely that the Corona (Covid-19) pandemic is a biological attack."

But what if there are no Baha'is or Jews working in the Stanford project? The YJC authors have thought ahead, and insert here a long history of the crypto-Jews of medieval Europe

and Iran, who were forced to convert to Christianity or Islam but retained their Jewish identities in secret. This is true, but how is it relevant? The implicit argument is that the lack of evidence to support the YJC story is because the Jews involved are hiding their identities. And being Jews they must be Baha'is.

The next part of this rambling story refers to large-scale Jewish conversions to the Baha'i Faith in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and claims that most Iranian Baha'is are of Jewish origin. The latter claim is not true, and not new here: it is one of the links between anti-bahaism and anti-semitism. The JYC story quotes something from Khomeini about the dangers of "falling into the hands of a few Jews who have become Baha'is."

Then there's a section on supposed Baha'is in senior levels of the Pahlavi government (the Shah deposed by the 1979 Revolution). These often-recycled claims have been debunked thoroughly by Adib Masumian in '[Debunking the Myths](#).' But even without that historical knowledge, any reader is bound to ask, if Baha'is were so prominent in the Shah's government, why were Baha'is so persecuted under the Shah's government? Why were their schools closed, why were pogroms allowed? How could Baha'is be at once so powerful and powerless in Iran?

One of these supposed Baha'is was Parviz Sabeti, head of one of SAVAK's divisions and the child of Bahai parents, who became a Muslim while in secondary school. SAVAK, the secret police, was one of the Shah's tools in monitoring and suppressing the Baha'is. Parviz Sabet left Iran at the time of the Revolution, and according to the JYC has a daughter, Pardis, who is a Professor of Genetics at Harvard. Pardis Christine Sabeti, daughter of the SAVAK official, is indeed a brilliant geneticist and one of the authors of 'Outbreak Culture: The Ebola Crisis and the Next Epidemic.'

So now it all comes together: Stanford University has a project sequencing the genes of Iranian Americans. Harvard University has a geneticist whose grandparents on her father's side were Baha'is in Iran, who is dedicated to fighting epidemics, so clearly, Iranian Baha'is are preparing biological weapons to target themselves.... I mean, to target Iranians. Or Jews. Or they are Baha'is but really Jews targeting Iranians, or something like that.

Digital church unites Christians across Iran

Mohabat News (15.04.2020) - A digital church in Iran provides fellowship, teaching, training, and counseling for Christians isolated from each other during Iran's ongoing health crisis.

Yesterday, churches around the world met digitally to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A worldwide coronavirus outbreak has closed many church buildings, forcing Christians to move their services online.

But Heart4Iran launched a virtual church back in October 2019, [Heart4Iran's Mike Ansari](#) says. "The conditions in Iran do not afford us the healthy and thriving church model that that we are used to in the West. [Most] of the Iranian believers are coming from [an] Islamic background. These are converts. They are isolated believers." Heart4Iran calls their digital fellowship Mohabat Virtual Church.

The goal? To train the next wave of Iranian Christian leaders to secure the future of Christianity across Iran – through partnership and collaboration with like-minded individuals and organizations.

How it works

Mohabat’s virtual church connects Iranian believers around the country into one family, Ansari says. “So, the very first virtual church that we launched for Iran in the region, we had roughly 1,000 people participate. And one individual . . . from Afghanistan gave his heart to Christ. This is telling us that there’s a huge demand, especially with a younger audience.”

The Mohabat Virtual Church airs every Thursday on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and www.mykelisa.com. In the next few months, Ansari says, they plan on starting a Sunday school program called Superbook produced by the Christian Broadcasting Network. “It’s a children’s program that has been dubbed and finalized into Farsi and very soon we’ll be able to reach the children of Iran, the parents, and Sunday schools across Iran and the region with a knowledge of God’s love for our children and our families.”

But the online church doesn’t just stream sermons. During the Coronavirus outbreak, they minister to Iran – the epicenter of coronavirus in the Middle East – with a message of hope. This platform is fully staffed by Iranian pastoral, technical and follow-up team members. “These are individuals that all come from a Muslim background, understanding their own people. And they’re available through our call center. Every single individual, every single phone call, every single chat is important to us. Is important to the kingdom. And we try to engage them and pray with them. And let them know that they are not alone in their journey.”

God is working in Iran

Ansari says God’s work is just beginning in Iran. Political turmoil presents enough challenges without the coronavirus outbreak, which has hit Iran especially hard.

In the recent years, Iran has seen a huge growth of indigenous Christian growth in its population.

“You have to understand,” Ansari says, “that the first millennia of Christianity, before there was Islam in Iran, there was Christianity in Iran. And it was eradicated by the Muslims. This organic reemergence of Christianity in Iran is an amazing phenomenon. It’s a miracle. It’s God’s design to bring reconciliation with the people that had Cyrus in Old Testament, that had Xerxes in the Old Testament.”

Iran faces a tumultuous time, but the Holy Spirit works in the country. Pray that the Church in Iran will triumph.

- [Read more: ‘Jesus is Building His Church’ Inside Iran, Millions Watching Christian Satellite TV](#)

Battling COVID, Iran regime makes Jews its bogeyman

Iran has used the pandemic to spin some particularly vicious antisemitic propaganda, write the Anti-Defamation League's Shaya Lerner and David Andrew Weinberg

Iranwire (03.04.2020) - <https://iranwire.com/en/blogs/26/6884> - To date, Iran has had the **highest number of reported deaths** from the COVID-19 global pandemic out of any country in Asia other than China. While battling this virus, the regime has once again become the number one state sponsor of scapegoating Jewish people, baselessly blaming world Jewry for the disease's spread.

Indeed, this crisis has led the regime to engage in fantastical, outrageous conspiracy theories about the current pandemic that are deeply infused with antisemitism, including **classic tropes**. These include claiming the disease is an attack on Iran by using genies and magic, that COVID-19 is part of an external biological attack on Iran by the United States with Jewish and Israeli assistance, and that the virus is part of a Zionist plot to gain global power.

Accusing Jews of Sorcery

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei delivered a major **annual** speech on March 22 in which he **emphasized**: "Americans are being accused of creating this virus" and even claimed "there are enemies who are genies, and there are enemies who are humans, and they help one another. The intelligence services of many countries cooperate with one another against us."

The Supreme Leader did not explicitly identify Jews or Israel in this regard, but his own office soon clarified the point. Khamenei's official website **elaborated** on his speech, posting remarks from a cleric who **explained**: "There is no doubt that the Jews and especially the Zionists previously have a long history of supernatural affairs and matters such as a relationship with the devil and genies" and "Israel's spy agencies also undoubtedly take advantage of these matters."

The **official** Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting then **promoted** this cleric's explanation of Khamenei's speech as well.

The cyberwarfare division of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) posted Khamenei's speech followed by an undated television clip from Iran's **state-run, youth-oriented** Channel Three. The clip featured another cleric **asserting** that "the Jews are experts in sorcery and in creating relationships with demons," and that "Israel wanted to use demonic force to infiltrate the intelligence systems of Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas."

Accusing Jews of Biological Warfare

The regime's propaganda has also spread the baseless allegation that COVID-19 is the result of a biological attack by outside forces to weaken Iran carried out by the US, Israel, or Zionists and Jews.

For example, Iranian MP Gholamali Jafarzadeh [tweeted](#) that the disease's progression "is not normal, and I believe it is a kind of biological attack by the US and the Zionist regime."

Similarly, London-based Iran analyst Kasra Aarabi has [documented](#) that Iranian state television recently hosted a professor from the IRGC's medical academy describing COVID-19 as a "biological ethnic weapon" created by "Americans and [the] Zionist regime."

Other communication sources [linked](#) to the IRGC have declared that COVID-19 is a "Zionist biological terrorist attack" and that Israel may have already conducted "twelve bioterrorist attacks against the people of Iran." Iran's [state-run](#) English-language PressTV explained the Iranian death toll by [claiming](#) that "Zionist elements developed [a] deadlier strain of coronavirus against Iran."

However, most of these conspiracy theories imagine the United States leading such a biological attack, either with the help of [Jewish capitalists](#) or [Israel](#), or [to benefit Israel](#) or at the [behest](#) of [Jewish](#) puppet [masters](#).

Another bizarre conspiracy theory in this regard centers on an [old medical study](#) at Stanford University that sequenced genomes from individuals of Iranian descent to help calibrate [blood thinner dosages](#).

A medical expert on Iran's [state-run](#) Ofogh TV recently cited this study to try to prove that COVID-19 is an ethnic bioweapon targeting Iranians, [asserting](#) that "25,000 of our genes are held by the Americans and Israelis" as a result of "\$200,000 donated to the university by a Baha'i foundation." Iran's semi-official Tasnim News Agency even [suggested](#) that this American research project at Stanford was likely conducted by Baha'is of secret Jewish origin.

Accusing Jews of World Domination

Another central theme of Iranian regime propaganda regarding the global health crisis has been the [antisemitic conspiracy theory](#) that Jews are all-powerful or seek world domination.

For example, Tasnim News Agency has been running a series of articles alleging that the virus is part of an American and Jewish plot to gain world domination through population control, including an article [claiming](#) this strategy was hatched by "the unique Jewish scholar and American strategist Henry Alfred Kissinger," who the piece describes as being a master controller of government and international finance to this day.

Another Tasnim article about COVID-19 [suggested](#) that the Western world is founded on the immoral principles found in Niccolo Machiavelli's book *The Prince*. The article went on to inaccurately argue that the Medici rulers for whom Machiavelli wrote the book were Jewish and even responsible for the modern institution of usurious lending.

Similarly, Iran's English-language PressTV has recently [warned](#): "Don't be surprised if the recent coronavirus phenomenon has a New World Order fingerprint," similar to what it called "the Zionist/Neocon false flag events of 9/11/2001" to help a "self-serving psychopathic elite to achieve a one-world government."

Exporting Antisemitism

Just as Iran's fanatical regime is founded on the principle of exporting its revolution abroad, its conspiratorial and antisemitic propaganda about COVID-19 is also encouraged for export.

Iran is now broadcasting the fallacy that COVID-19 is a Jewish and American plot into numerous Western languages, such as [in French](#) and [English](#) on PressTV, as well as [in Spanish](#) on Iran's HispanTV.

Iranian-backed insurgents in Yemen are now propagating the theory that COVID-19 is a Jewish conspiracy [to profit](#) from Muslim deaths and [to stop](#) Muslims from going on pilgrimage, antisemitic slanders that semi-official Iranian news outlets are all too happy to [rebroadcast](#) as [news](#).

The Iranian people have unfortunately been hit hard by COVID-19, and we can expect the regime to continue blaming Jews, Israel, and America as the current public health crisis transpires. With COVID-19 continuing its deadly spread across the globe, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) will keep exposing this kind of hateful and antisemitic scapegoating wherever it occurs.

Shaya Lerner is ADL's Associate Director of Middle Eastern Affairs. David Andrew Weinberg is ADL's Washington Director for International Affairs.

HRWF welcomes the release of Fatemeh Bakhteri

HRWF (16.04.2020) - Iranian Christian Fatemeh Bakhteri, 35, who is a member of the Church of Iran, was released from prison on 12 April. After a final appeal at the end of May 2019, she had been sentenced to 12 months in prison and barred from social activities for two years. During the trial, the judge told her that her charges would be dropped if she returned to Islam, but she rejected this proposal.

On 15 March, Ms Bakhteri was granted temporary release from Evin prison, following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Iran's prison system. On 12 April she was told by the authorities did not have to return because she had been pardoned for Persian New Year. HRWF is pleased to remove her name from its Database of FORB Prisoners.

Baha'i Mitra Badrnezhad released



Sen's Daily/ Hrana (07.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2UJnihn> - Mitra Badrnezhad-Zohdi was released from Sepidar prison in Ahvaz on 5 March, at the end of her one-year sentence. She was arrested in 2018 and charged with membership of the Baha'i organisation. Initially sentenced to five years in prison by a Revolutionary Court, her sentence was reduced to one year by the Review Court for Khuzestan Province. She began her sentence at the Sepidah Prison in Ahvaz on 21 September 2019, and was granted one 10-day furlough ending on 2 January this year.

Additional information from HRANA

Mitra Badrnejad (Zohdi), 51, reported to prison in the city of Ahvaz, southwestern Iran, on 22 September 2019, to begin serving a one-year prison sentence for being a Baha'i follower after being subjected to "psychological torture" in the custody of the Intelligence Ministry, her son, Rouzbeh Zohdi, informed the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI).

Iran's Constitution does not recognize the Baha'i faith as an official religion (such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism).

Badrnejad was convicted of "membership in the Baha'i organization" and "propaganda against the state" by Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz presided by Judge Zare (first name unknown), who sentenced her to five years in prison and two years in exile.

Upon appeal, her prison sentence was reduced to one year and the exile sentence was thrown out.

Security agents who confiscated not only her computers and phones but also her gold jewelry with Baha'i symbols on it arrested Badrnejad during a raid on her family's home on 2 March 2018.

"My mother was held in solitary confinement for 50 days in the Intelligence Ministry's detention center and Sepidar Prison in Ahvaz and then released on bail," Zohdi said. "We actually gave the deed to our house as collateral [for bail]."

"My mother said that on all the days when she was interrogated, she sat on a chair, blindfolded, in front of a wall, and her interrogator stood behind her, insulting her with very ugly words. On one occasion, they threatened to deal with her sons and she was very afraid. Fortunately it was only psychological torture, not physical."

Zohdi continued: "As far as I know, my mother's charges were based on Baha'i functions she organized at our home and for having Baha'i books. Baha'is have religious functions every 19 days and some of them were held in my mother's home."

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.

Rameel Bet Tamarz, an Assyrian citizen, was released from Evin prison

Mohabat News (29.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3a1BJk> - “The political turmoil of Iran and the spread of coronavirus in prisons were not unaffected on the decision of the judiciary and security agencies to release a group of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in recent days.”

Reports from Iran indicate that Rameel Beth Tammarz, son of Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, has been released from prison on Wednesday, February 27.

It was going to release “Ramil Beth Tammarz”, the Assyrian Christian, on March 22, but he was released about eight days earlier through receiving a leave of absence. “The political turmoil of Iran and the spread of coronavirus in prisons were not unaffected on the decision of the judiciary and security agencies to release a group of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in recent days.”

In an interview with the website of Article 5, Dabrina Bet Tamraz, daughter of Pastor Victor, also confirmed the release of her brother and said: many of the prisoners, who should be released less than the next three months, were released due to the crowding and fears of a Coronavirus outbreak.

Rameel Bet Tamarz was sentenced to four months in prison on charges of holding house churches.

The Assyrian Christian spent a month in prison and had sentenced to three months in prison in January this year.

Dabrina Bet Tamraz had previously said that her brother's morale is very good in prison and she has the opportunity to pray with Youcef Nadarkhani and Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh, two Christian converts, and each of these imprisoned Christians has a short sermon to each other. On Friday, August 26, 2016, police raided a garden in Firouzkouh, near Tehran, and arrested eighteen Christian citizens there, among whom the trial case of Rameel Bet Tamarz, Amin Afshar Naderi, Hadi Askari, Mohammad Dehnavi and Amir Saman Dashti went to court.

Rameel Bet Tamarz is the son of pastor Victor, a former leader of the Assyrian Pentecostal Church in ShahrAra in Tehran. He was also detained at a private party on December 26 and charged with acting against national security and espionage. Pastor Victor was also sentenced to four years in prison but was released on bail due to his physical condition.

Shamiram Isawi (wife of Pastor Victor) was also summoned to the Revolutionary Court in June 2017 and was temporarily released on bail of 100 million Tomans. This Christian citizen was also sentenced to 5 years imprisonment on January 6, 2018 on charges of acting against national security by holding house churches and Christian seminars abroad, and training Christian leaders in Iran on the charge of espionage. He is also awaiting an appeal.

Mari Mohammadi, a Christian convert, was released from Prison

Mohabat News (28.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/32ILbb0> - Clinics and dispensaries in prison are very poor in terms of facility and hygienic. The high number of prisoners is greater than the capacity of prisons and the risk of deadly coronavirus infection in prisons is higher.

Reports from Iran indicate that Fatemeh (Mari) Mohammadi, a Christian convert, was temporarily released from Gharchak Prison on 30 million Tomans (approximately \$ 2000 USD) bail on Wednesday, 26 Friday 2020.

The release of this Christian convert will be valid until the end of the judicial process. Mari Mohammadi was arrested on Sunday, January 12, 2020, during the protest rallies following the crash of the Ukrainian passenger plane by the Revolutionary Guards in Tehran. According to the Human Rights Activists in Iran, the court hearing the charges against Mari Mohammadi will be held on Monday, March 2 , 2020 , at Branch 1167 of the Tehran Criminal Court.

Along with releasing this prisoner of conscience, the condition of prisons was dangerous due to the spread of the coronavirus. Clinics and dispensaries in prison are very poor in terms of facility and hygienic. The high number of prisoners is greater than the capacity of prisons and the risk of deadly coronavirus infection in prisons is higher.

Regarding the current condition of Iran and the closure of government centers due to spreading coronavirus, it is unclear whether the court of political and social activists will be postponed or not.

The appeal court had previously announced that the case of *Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz*, his wife *Shamiram Isavi*, and three Christian converts was scheduled to be held on February 24, but the court was also postponed.

News from Baha'is in February: Arrests and prison sentences

HRWF (29.02.2020) – Baha'is in Iran have continued to be arrested, sentenced to prison terms and sometimes released on bail after a period of pretrial detention without criminal charges being dropped. The official charges are usually: forming an illegal cult, membership in the deviant Baha'i sect, membership in an anti-Islamic group, participation in illegal assemblies, propaganda against the regime, posing a threat to the holy regime of the Islamic Republic by teaching Baha'i ideas, acting against national security, espionage, and so on. Many Baha'i women are behind bars in Iran.

One arrest in Mazandaran Province

Sen's Daily (05.02.2020) - <https://iranwire.com/fa/features/36163> - On January 25, agents from the Ministry of Intelligence arrested Firouzeh Shafi'zaadeh, in her home in Khotbeh Sara, a village near Talesh, in Mazandaran Province. The agents searched her home and seized some personal effects, including books and photographs, a mobile phone and laptop. She has been denied access to her lawyer, and it is reported that her lawyer has been threatened by security forces. It is not known where she is being held, or why. She is a former student of the Bahai institute of higher education (BIHE), a virtual university for students excluded from tertiary education in Iran because of their religious beliefs. She went on to do a seven-year course in Pharmacy in India, and then returned to Iran.

Iran Wire reported that Dr. Shafi'zaadeh is charged with "propaganda against the regime," and has been moved to Lakan Prison, near the city of Rasht. She was working as a pharmacist in the village at the time of her arrest. She moved there from her home in Karaj.

Three Dervish women released from prison after two years in jail

After nearly two years behind bars, three Sufi women were released from Iran's notorious Evin prison on Saturday, February 8.

Radio Farda (09.02.2020) - <https://en.radiofarda.com/author/radio-farda/qvkvqy> -The three women belong to the Gonabadi dervish's sect, whose leader was persecuted, and his followers protested his house arrest in 2018.

The Islamic Republic intelligence agents and security forces detained more than seventy female dervishes on February 20, 2018, when they had gathered outside the house of dervishes' spiritual leader to prevent his house arrest.

Eleven of the detainees were jailed in the notorious Qarchak prison, near the capital city, Tehran.

Later, in 2019, three female dervishes, Sima Entesari, Sepideh Moradi, and Shokufeh Yadollahi, were transferred to Evin prison.

Security forces heavy-handedly suppressed dervishes' protests and tightened their presence around the residence of Sufis' spiritual leader, ninety-year-old, Nour Ali Tabandeh.

The Gonabadi Sufi order is the most significant dervish order in Iran. They consider themselves Muslims but the Shiite clerical regime in Iran looks at the sect with suspicion.

The spiritual leader or "Qotb" (Pivot) of the order, Tabandeh, surrounded by intelligence agents, died on December 24, 2019, in Tehran.

Hundreds of his followers are still behind bars, serving long jail terms.

Meanwhile, two sons of Ms. Shokoufeh Yadollahi, both followers of the same order, Kasra and Amir Nouri, are still in prison.

Detained dervishes are all charged with "action against national security", "disrupting order," and "challenging police orders."

Several human and civil rights activists have repeatedly raised their concern over the health and wellness of the detained Sufis.

In a tweet on December 20, 2019, Mahmoud Sadeqi a lawmaker representing Tehran insisted that the detained "dervishes' lives were in danger" and urged the Islamic Republic's head of the judiciary Ebrahim Raeesi (Raisi), to "seriously and immediately" look into the case.

Meanwhile, the wife of one of the detained dervishes told Radio Farda previously that at least four dervishes are in critical condition.

Exile and pressure on family members as violations of Christians' rights continued in 2019

Iranian Christians continued to suffer multiple violations of their right to freedom of religion of belief in 2019, Article18's latest annual report reveals.

Mohabat news (21.01.2020) - <https://mohabatnews.com/?p=37025> - The report, a collaboration with Open Doors International, CSW and Middle East Concern, names 25 Christians arrested in 2019 and 13 Christians who received sentences of between four months and five years in prison for alleged "actions against national security".

Criminal cases against many other Christians went unreported, either because no-one raised awareness – arresting authorities frequently issue threats to prevent publicity – or because those involved requested confidentiality.

At least 17 Christians were imprisoned at the end of 2019, all serving sentences based on national security-related charges.

The sentences of 16 other Christians were upheld, while many others continued to wait, indefinitely, for their court summons or result of their appeal.

Six Christians were released from prison during 2019, having completed their sentences, although one, Ebrahim Firouzi, was sent straight into "internal exile" for two more years in a remote city 1,000 miles from his home – the first time an Iranian Christian has endured such a punishment.

Unprecedented

Article18's report notes that 2019 was the year in which Iranian intelligence agents began to harass family members of Iranian Christian converts who had fled the country, even though they may not be Christians themselves.

The report highlights the case of Vahid (Nathan) Roufegarbashi and his wife Mahsa, who now live in America. The parents of both were harassed by Iranian intelligence agents in 2019, and Mahsa's father, Ismaeil Maghrebinejad, was arrested and charged with "propaganda against the state and insulting the sacred Iranian establishment". He has just been sentenced to three years in prison.

2019 was also a year in which Christians were denied education. Christian convert Yousef Nadarkhani, who is serving a 10-year prison sentence in Tehran's Evin Prison, went on a three-week hunger strike in September to protest against the denial of education to his two children, Danial, 17, and Youeil, 15.

Youeil was barred from school because he refused to take Islamic classes, while Danial was only readmitted to his school as a "guest".

And in December fellow Christian convert Fatemeh Mohammadi, 21, was kicked out of university, without explanation, on the eve of her exams.

Just a few weeks later she was arrested, and at the time of writing her family have no knowledge of her whereabouts and remain very concerned for her safety.

Hate speech against Christians was another trend that continued in 2019, as religious and political leaders in Iran continued to speak out against Christianity and assert that Christian converts, as apostates from Islam, should be put to death.

Persian-speaking churches remained closed, while Christians continued to face challenges in obtaining Bibles and Christian literature. Bibles and related literature were consistently

confiscated in searches by Iranian security agents, and it was reported that a bookseller, Mostafa Rahimi, was arrested in Bukan and sentenced to three months plus one day in prison for selling Bibles.

All the while, the battle between appearance and reality continued, as Iranian leaders repeatedly claimed that Christians, as a recognised religious minority, enjoyed full religious freedom.

Meanwhile, Christian converts, who are not recognised as Christians, were being rounded up in raids across the country, while even the “recognised” Christians of Assyrian and Armenian descent continued to be treated as second-class citizens.

This pressure on Christians – both recognised and unrecognised – continued to lead hundreds of Christians to flee the country.

The treatment of Christian prisoners also caused concern. In December, Zaman (Saheb) Fadaei, another Christian serving a 10-year sentence in Evin Prison, was suffering from a severe fever, but after initially being given medication he was denied further treatment despite the continuation of his symptoms.

2019 ended with the discovery that the grave of Rev. Hussein Soodmand, the only Christian to have been officially executed for “apostasy”, had been desecrated.

His family told Article18 the discovery “wounded our hearts yet again”.

And 2020 has begun in much the same vein, with the incarceration of Ramiel Bet-Tamraz, the son of an Assyrian-Iranian pastor, the arrest of Christian convert Fatemeh Mohammadi, and the sentencing of Ismaeil Maghrebinejad.

Recommendations

Article18’s report calls on Iran, as a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to: immediately and unconditionally release all Christians detained on spurious charges related to their faith or religious activities.

uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief for every citizen, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic background, including converts from other religions.

return confiscated churches, properties, and material belongings confiscated from Christians and other religious minorities.

cease to use provisions such as Articles 220, 498, 499 and 500 of the Penal Code and Article 167 of the Iranian Constitution to unjustly detain minority-faith adherents. guarantee the right to counsel to all individuals charged with national security-related crimes, as well as the right to be represented by a lawyer of their choice.

Article18 also calls on members of the international community to hold Iran accountable for upholding its obligation to ensure and facilitate freedom of religion or belief for all of its citizens by highlighting this issue during political and/or economic discussions with, or concerning, Iran.

Article18 thanks the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran for highlighting Iran's mistreatment of Christians, especially converts, and asks for the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to conduct his own investigation./ *Article eighteen*

[You can download the full report here:](#)

News from Baha'is in January: Arrests and prison sentences

HRWF (29.01.2020) – Baha'is in Iran have continued to be arrested, sentenced to prison terms and sometimes released on bail after a period of pretrial detention without criminal charges being dropped. The official charges are usually: forming an illegal cult, membership in the deviant Baha'i sect, membership in an anti-Islamic group, participation in illegal assemblies, propaganda against the regime, posing a threat to the holy regime of the Islamic Republic by teaching Baha'i ideas, acting against national security, espionage, and so on. Many Baha'i women are behind bars in Iran.

Four Baha'is in Karaj sentenced to one year in prison

Sen's Daily (27.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/312LUDI> - **Abu-Fadl Ansaari, Ruhollah Zibaa'i, u'in Kohansaal and Muhammad-Sadeq Reza'i** have been sentenced to one year in prison by a Revolutionary Court in Karaj. Mr. Reza'i's arrest was not previously reported on Sen's Daily. They were charged with propaganda against the regime and supporting the Baha'i Faith.

The sentence was announced to them by text message on January 26. They went to the court office to see the text of the court ruling, which they were allowed to transcribe. The trial was conducted on January 18, without the presence of a defence lawyer, and the defendants, in protest, did not speak. The Revolutionary Court's verdict refers to the claim that "Baha'i propaganda" is a religious matter [not a crime]. This arises from the finding of the Review Court for Alborz Province, in the case of Liza Tebyanian Enayati, that teaching the Bahai Faith is not equivalent to "propaganda against the regime" and is not a crime.

The Revolutionary Court in Karaj takes note of the views of these "colleagues" (more senior judges) "who were not familiar with security issues, or were ignorant of religious and doctrinal matters, or knew nothing of the Israel-based House of Justice, the English-born bastard of this old fox [England]," but finds the facts in the file sufficient to convict the four men under "article 500" of the Penal Code (i.e., propaganda against the regime).

Ruhollah Zibaa'i and Ru'in Kohansaal were arrested in Karaj, on August 3 and 4, respectively, and released on bail on September 2. At the time, government-sponsored media claimed that Mr. Zibaa'i's arrest was in relation to a scheme to tighten the economic sanctions against Iran. He requires constant medical supervision because of wounds suffered in the Iran-Iraq war, requiring the amputation of one foot and the loss of one kidney and part of his liver, and various other injuries and ailments (I cannot make out which are war injuries ~Sen).

Abu-Fadl Ansaari was arrested at his home in Karaj on August 3, 2019 and held in Raja'i Shahr prison. He was released on bail in Karaj on September 8. He has a heart condition and relies on a pacemaker.

Four Baha'is begin three-year sentences in Bushehr

Sen's Daily (26.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/315ZzJB> - On January 25, **Mrs. Minou Reyaazati, Mrs. Ehteraam Shakhi, Asadollah Jaaberi and Mrs. Farideh Jaaberi** began their sentences in Bushehr prison. They were among seven Bahais sentenced to three years in prison and a two-year ban on leaving the country by a Revolutionary Court in May 2019. Farideh Jaaberi was not named in earlier reports for that group of arrests. Earlier reports also omitted the two-year ban on leaving Iran. All seven were arrested in raids on Bahai homes in Bushehr on February 13, 2018 (or February 15, in other reports). Their homes were thoroughly searched, and personal effects such as laptops, books, flash drives, external hard drives, and family photograph albums were seized. They were released on bail six weeks later, and the Revolutionary Court confirmed their sentences in November 2019. They were charged with "membership in the Bahai group and sect with the intent of disrupting national security."

Two arrests in Qaemshahr



Sen's Daily (26.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/36wYSdC> - **Faraaneh Mansouri** and her husband **Saamaan Shirvaani**, two Bahais from Qaemshahr, were arrested on January 23 while visiting the home of an old friend in the same city. The arrest was made by agents from the **Intelligence Arm** of the Revolutionary Guards. The agents came unannounced over the wall of their friend's house and forced their way inside. They showed an arrest warrant and filmed the whole process. The agents searched the house and seized some belongings including a laptop computer, hard drive and mobile telephone, and arrested both the couple and the friend they were visiting. The friend was released a few hours later. The agents took Mr. Shirvaani with them to the couple's home, which they also searched, but it is not known whether they seized any belongings since only Mr. Shirvani was with them, and he is being held incommunicado.

It is not known why this couple were arrested, or where they are being held. Their families have not been successful in obtaining further information. [Reading between the lines of

these reports, it is possible that they were visiting a Muslim friend, and the security forces took action because they seek to minimize contacts between Bahais and Muslims. Some years ago, a Bahai named Faraaneh Mansuri was expelled from university in Tabriz because of her Baha'i beliefs. I do not know whether it is the same person. ~ Sen]

Shiraz city councilor, Mehdi Haajati, released with a surety



Sen's Daily (25.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Ry1Vha> - **Mehdi Haajati**, a member of Shiraz City Council in Iran who was imprisoned for trying to help Bahai constituents, has been released from Shiraz Prison after posting a surety. It is not clear from the report whether this ends his prison term. He began serving a one-year sentence on June 2, 2019, so he has served nine months, but a surety is not required if a prisoner is released before serving his full term.

His legal trouble started in September 2018, when, as he tweeted, "In the past ten days I have knocked on many doors to get two Baha'i friends released from detention, without success. As long as we face foreign enemies, our generation has a duty to reform the judicial and other procedures that endanger social justice". He was charged with assisting Baha'is and sentenced to one year in prison and two years in exile in Tabas, a small city 800 km North-East of Shiraz.

Review court in Kerman cuts sentences of four Baha'is

Sen's Daily (23.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2RQ27Y0> - Over two years ago, a Revolutionary Court in Kerman sentenced **Amrullah Khaalqiyaan, Ehasaanullah Amiri-niya, Nima Rajab-zaadeh and Armaan Bandi** to five years in prison. The provincial Review Court has reduced that to four months in prison, on a charge of undermining internal security by teaching the Bahai Faith. The Review Court's decision was signed by Muhammad Mohaqqueq and Majid Zaynaldini-Neya. It appears that the hearing of the Review Court was held on April 28, 2019, but the finding has only just been announced.

Nine Baha'is begin prison terms in Birjand



Sen's Daily (16.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/36yix0I> - On January 15, nine Baha'is whose arrest and sentencing was reported previously began their sentences, ranging from two to four years, in Birjand Prison.

Wahda Silaani in Kerman

Sen's Daily (15.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/38JK8cL> - **Wahda Silaani** was freed on bail from Kerman Prison on January 15. Her bail was 100 million tumans (21,000 euros; \$US 24,000). She was arrested in her home in Kerman by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on December 29. The agents also seized some of her belongings. The charges against her are not yet known.

Ali Ahmadi's 11-year sentence confirmed



Sen's Daily (15.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3aP8HXE> - The Review Court for Mazandaran Province has upheld the 11-year sentence for Mr. **Ali Ahmadi**, a Baha'i from Qaemshahr. Mr. Ahmadi was charged with propaganda against the regime and administering Bahai

activities and sentenced by the Revolutionary Court of Qaemshahr. He was informed of his sentence on December 2, 2019, The Review Court confirmed the sentence two weeks later, without holding a sitting, based on the file provided by the Revolutionary Court. Earlier reports said that the Revolutionary Court considered the possession of Bahai religious texts as sufficient to justify the sentence.

Mr. Ahmadi was arrested on November 20, 2018, by agents who insulting his religious beliefs and calling him "unclean" and "Bahai dog." They also seized some religious books mobile phone and computer. He was held in solitary confinement at the Kachou'i Detention Centre in Sari. He was freed on bail on January 2, 2019, after posting bail of 150 million tumans (31,000 euros; \$US 35,000).

This is the fifth time he has been arrested in the past ten years: On the first occasion he was sentenced to 10 months in prison, and on the second occasion he was acquitted. In 2011 he was arrested with two others and charged with participation in Bahai activities. A previous report said that he is also known as Cheragh-`Ali Ahmadi. Another states that he is 60 years old and works as a rice trader.

Sahba Farnoush sentenced to 16 years in prison

Sen's Daily (11.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2O7rROz> - A Revolutionary Court in Tehran has sentenced **Sahba Farnoush** to 16 years in prison. The verdict, from Judge Emaan Afshaari, was announced to him in recent days.

Mr. Farnoush, a Baha'i from Tehran, was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on November 15, 2015 and was freed on bail from Evin Prison in late December that year. Bail was set at two million rials (60,000 euros, \$US 66,000). Mr. Farnoush is one of 20 Bahai's who were arrested in Tehran, Isfahan and Mashhad on that day. Agents from the Ministry of Intelligence also closed down Baha'i-run businesses in the Province of Mazandaran.

The Ministry of Intelligence actions apparently related to Baha'is commemorating the birth of Baha'u'llah, but the charges are not stated, and it is not clear why the court decided to issue a judgement on the case four years after Mr. Farnoush was bailed. He is now about 45 years old. His father was arrested and executed following the 1979 Revolution in Iran, and his property was confiscated. At that time, Sahba was five years old.

Mitra Badrnezhad granted prison furlough in Ahwaz

Sen's Daily (03.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/313XNsl> - **Mrs. Mitra Badrnezhad-Zahdi**, a Baha'i serving a one-year sentence in Ahwaz, returned to prison on January 2 after a 10-day furlough. She began her sentence at the Sepidah Prison in Ahvaz on September 21, 2019. She was charged with membership of the Baha'i organisation. Initially sentenced to five years in prison by a Revolutionary Court, her sentence was reduced to one year by the Review Court for Khuzestan Province. The circumstances of her arrest and interrogation are reported [here](#).

Kaamraan Shahidi sentenced: 5 years and confiscation of assets



Sen's Daily (01.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37CRHSy> - A Revolutionary Court in Tehran has sentenced **Kaamraan Shahidi**, a Baha'i from Karaj, to five years in prison and the confiscation of his assets. The Judge was Muhammad Moqayesseh, a notorious abuser of human rights and legal procedures.

Mr. Shahidi was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on September 25, 2017. His business, as a gold trader, was also shut down, and its entire holdings of gold — about 2 kilograms — were seized, along with some currency. The arresting agents also went to the home of his sister and daughter and seized all the gold, along with books and pictures relating to the Bahai Faith. He was held in solitary confinement for 21 days and interrogated closely. was released on bail from Evin Prison in Tehran on October 18, 2017.

Bail was set at 500 million tumans (123,00 euros; \$US 145,000). A source said that prior to his initial arrest, Mr. Shahidi was making jewelry with Baha'i symbols. A woman who claimed to be a Baha'i approached him and drugged him using fruit juice so that he became unconscious. The woman then stole gold and cash. When Mr. Shahidi reported the theft to police, they arrested him.