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## **A machinery of hate: increasing propaganda raises concern for Baha'is**

Bahá'í International Community (08.07.2021) - <https://bit.ly/36rYLSO> - The Baha'í International Community is calling for the Iranian government to be held accountable for its campaign of hate speech against the Baha'is in Iran. In recent months, the four-decades long state-sponsored campaign of hate speech and propaganda has reached new levels, increasing in both sophistication and scale. This has provoked fresh concerns for the rights of the Baha'is in Iran, as history shows that flagrant violations of human rights often take place in a climate of hate and disinformation.

The Baha'í International Community has been [tracking anti-Baha'í propaganda](#) in Iran over the decades and has, in recent months, witnessed an expansion in the machinery of hateful propaganda targeting the Baha'is. The unfolding strategy to demonize the Baha'í community is reflected in a growing and coordinated network of hundreds of websites, Instagram accounts, Telegram channels and Clubhouse rooms, with content such as ["Baha'is are unclean and enemies of your religion"](#), ["Associating with Baha'is is banned"](#), ["Purchasing any goods from a Baha'i store is forbidden"](#), as well as ["The modern 'Human Rights' is a big lie,"](#) and many others. These platforms have been producing hundreds of thousands of pieces of disinformation reaching millions of Iranians. A BIC publication, ["Inciting Hatred,"](#) offers a more detailed analysis of this 40-year media campaign against the Baha'is.

The websites and social media channels are compounded by [videos](#), [print newspaper articles](#) and other [written media](#), [books](#), [seminars](#), [exhibitions](#), [graffiti](#) and [fatwas](#) from both official outlets and others sponsored by the government but purporting to be independent.

“History is replete with the victims of grievous crimes incited by hate speech,” says Diane Ala’i, Representative of the Baha’i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. “We are concerned that the increasing spread of disinformation targeting the Baha’is may signal a severe increase in the persecution meted out against them.”

Spreading falsehoods has been a central weapon in the Iranian government’s assault against the Baha’is since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The goal is to demonize the Baha’is and to try to provoke public hatred for the community, thus justifying crimes against them, a very common tactic used by oppressive governments throughout history.

The Iranian government does not recognize Baha’is as a religious minority and, as such, Baha’is have neither the right to legally appeal against these statements nor are they permitted to respond and present their own case to their fellow Iranians.

António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General, in his 2019 [Plan of Action to Combat Hate Speech](#)([link is external](#)), says that “[h]ate speech is a menace to democratic values, social stability and peace. As a matter of principle, the United Nations must confront hate speech at every turn. Silence can signal indifference to bigotry and intolerance, even as a situation escalates and the vulnerable become victims.”

Incitement to hatred is prohibited under international treaties that Iran itself has ratified, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

“Iran has consistently ignored its international obligations, and it is time that it is held to account for inciting hatred and committing countless human rights violations against the Baha’is with impunity.” says Bani Dugal, the Baha’i International Community’s Principal Representative to the United Nations. “Hate crimes always begin with words. Let us not allow history to repeat itself.”

## **Background**

- The Baha’is, Iran’s largest non-Muslim religious minority, have been [systematically persecuted](#) by the Iranian government since the Islamic Revolution. More than 200 Baha’is were executed in the 1980s; today, they are denied public sector jobs, higher education, their livelihoods are often disrupted, their cemeteries desecrated, and they are vilified in state and semi-official media as well as from the pulpit and in schools and other educational institutions.
- The [situation has deteriorated](#) in recent months: dozens of Baha’i properties have been [confiscated](#) even as secret government documents have been [exposed](#) that target the Baha’i community. The situation has been extensively reported on [by the United Nations](#) and other agencies.
- The persecution of the Baha’is in Iran is widely documented in the website, [Archives of Persecution of the Baha’is in Iran](#).

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## News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in June

### HRWF Digest

#### Baha'is

##### Shahrzaad Nazifi retried: 8-year sentence upheld

Hrana / Sens Daily (29.06.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/MmaJn4q>

On June 8 this year, HRANA reported that **Shahrzaad Nazifi**, a well-known sportswoman and trainer in women's motorcross, had been sentenced to eight years in prison, banned from leaving Iran for two years, and sentenced to three month's community service, four hours per day, providing services to the intellectually handicapped. She was tried in absentia in a Revolutionary Court by Judge Eymaan Afshaari, and the sentence was communicated to her "defence" lawyer after the fact. That highly irregular trial has now been rerun by the same Judge with the same outcome. The ruling cited her "bad motives and desire to destroy the religious system." It is not clear whether she was this time allowed to know the evidence and present a defence.

##### Dorsa Dehqani arrested in Shiraz

Hrana/ Sens Daily (14.06.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/DmaKd7f> - Late in the day of June 14, security forces arrested **Dorsa Dehqani** at Shiraz railway station. They took her to her home in Shiraz, which they searched. They seized some personal effects mobile phones and Baha'i books, pictures and artifacts, and took her away. It is not known where she is being detained. I assume that this is the same Dorsa Dehqani who, in 2014, was barred from entering university because of her Bahai Faith ~ can someone confirm that? From the photographs then and now, it seems she is getting younger!

##### Home raid and arrest in Shiraz

Hrana/ Sens Daily (13.06.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/ZmaKkG> - On June 15, security forces arrested **Sina Kamali Sarvestaniin** front of his home in Shiraz. They searched his home and seized personal effects such as books, as well as all the electronic- devices belonging to his family. It is not known where he is being detained.

##### Shahrzaad Nazifi sentenced: 8 years

Hrana / Sens Daily (08.06.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/4maLkIX> - A Revolutionary Court in Tehran has sentenced **Shahrzaad Nazif**, a well-known sportswoman and trainer in women's motorcross, to eight years in prison. She was also banned from leaving Iran for

two years, and sentenced to three month's community service, four hours per day, providing services to the intellectually handicapped. The trial was held recently and the sentence was communicated to her "defence" lawyer after the fact. The charge is said to be "managing illegal groups and gangs with the aim of disrupting national security." The ruling cited her "bad motives and desire to destroy the religious system."

Her home was first raided on November 10, 2018. She was arrested at a motocross track on November 18, 2018. Security forces then raided her home again and seized all the family's awards, titles and prizes, as well as documents related to motorcycle races. They also seized mobile telephones, laptops and books. She was released on bail 15 days later. Bail was set at 700 million tumans (147,000 euros ; \$US 164,000). She and the other members of her family — who also participate in motocross — have been banned from being present at motocross tracks, participating in competitions, and practicing or teaching motocross sport.

### **Sa'id `Aabadi and Vahid Daana bailed in Shiraz**

Hrana / Sens Daily (01.06.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/OmaZy4T> - The Review Court for Tehran Province had confirmed the 3-year sentences of Mrs. **Mona Mehraabi, Elhaam Karam-Pisheh, Afsaaneh Yaadgaar-Ardestaani** and **Mr. Ehsaan-Allah Yaadgaar-Ardestaani**. They were charged with membership in an illegal organization with the aim of disrupting national security. The Judge of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran who handed down the 3-year sentences, Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, said that the accused identified impoverished people and children who were abused or deprived of schooling, and gave them education, and that they made brochures for the Red Crescent (Red Cross) and International Children's Day. Before the trial by Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, in September or October 2018, they had been sentenced by a revolutionary court in Tehran in a secret trial without a hearing or defence, to five years in prison. Two other Baha'is were sentenced to five years in the secret trial of 2018: **Safa Forqani-Araani and Mehrdad Forqani-Araani**. I have no information about what happened to them.

Mrs. Elhaam Karam-Pisheh and Mona Mehraabi were arrested on February 16, 2015, in a raid on a meeting in Tehran where six Bahais were present. Mr. Ehsaan Yaadgaar was arrested in a neighbouring home at the same time, and again religious materials were seized, along with some gold coins. He was told to present himself to the public prosecutor's office in Varamin (the capital of Varamin County in Tehran Province). He did so, and was released after several hours. He was again arrested in early March, 2015, and taken to Evin Prison for questioning before being released.

### **Christians**

#### **Hamed :10 months in prison for 'propaganda against the regime' upheld on appeal**

MEC (28.06.2021) - On 26 June, the court of appeal upheld the 10-month prison sentence of **Hamed** for 'propaganda against the regime'.

Hamed, a Christian convert, was arrested in Karaj on 23 February 2019. Security agents raided his home, confiscating Bibles, Christian literature and a computer. Hamed was detained for 12 days – 10 of which in solitary confinement. During interrogation, he was offered money to become an informant and was physically assaulted when refused.

According to rights group Article Eighteen, Hamed was forced to undergo Islamic 're-education' classes but afterwards he refused to attend more. Court proceedings were initiated against him.

On 7 March 2021 Hamed was summoned to Karaj Revolutionary Court to answer charges of 'propaganda against the regime.' His prison sentence was announced on 12 April. Hamed has been given 10 days to present himself to Karaj Central Prison to begin his sentence.

### **Three converts put on trial for anti-state propaganda**

MEC (23.06.2021) - Friends of Amin Khaki, Milad Goudarzi and Alireza Nourmohammadi are charged with "propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam" under a recently amended version of Article 500 of the penal code.

The Article states that those found guilty "will be severely punished." It allows prison sentences of between two and five years; deprivation of civil rights, such as voting, for up to 15 years, and heavy monetary fines. Rights organisations have warned that the amendments, which came into effect in March, could be used to further restrict the freedoms of religious minorities and criminalise their activities, including those online.

On 11 November 2020 Iranian intelligence agents raided the homes of several converts in Fardis (near Karaj), including those of Amin, Milad and Alireza, confiscating Bibles, cell phones and computers. No-one was arrested at that time, but the converts continued to face harassment and were ordered to abstain from Christian activities (they all refused to comply).

On 5 May Amin, Milad and Alireza were summoned to court, but were later released on bail of 250 million tomans each and told that for the next six months they must report weekly to the intelligence branch of Iran's police force. Another seventeen converts from the same church denomination were taken in for questioning and threatened.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide reports that the presiding judge, Mehdi Zeinali, of the 4th Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Karaj, prevented the defendants' lawyer from attending the trial, claiming he had not been registered as their lawyer. The defendants had to represent themselves in a hearing that lasted less than an hour.

### **Christian convert Reza Zaeemi (40) from Karaj turned himself in at Karaj Central Prison**

MEC (07.06.2021) - On 2 June, Reza Zaeemi started serving a nine-month sentence at Karaj Central Prison.

In November 2020, Reza was arrested by plainclothes security agents. He was blindfolded, handcuffed, and interrogated for four hours, then held in a detention centre belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps and in Ghezel Hesar Prison for a total of 17 days before being released on bail of 60 million tomans.

On 25 January Reza was sentenced to 18 months' prison for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic by promoting evangelical Christianity." He was also given a two-year travel ban.

On 25 April, the conviction was upheld, but the prison sentence reduced to nine months.

According to human rights organization Article Eighteen, Reza initially reported to prison at the end of May but there was no judge present to process his admission.

An Iranian pastor, who was himself imprisoned in Karaj Central Prison for several years, requests prayer for Reza, saying that especially during the first days of imprisonment there is significant mental pressure.

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## **Iran expels Italian nun who has spent her life for the poor of the country**

***Seventy-five-year-old Sister Giuseppina Berti is denied a visa renewal.***

Vatican News (11.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3Aqj17Q> - Seventy-five-year-old Sister Giuseppina Berti, who has worked for 26 years in the leprosarium of Tabriz and now lives in Isfahan in the house of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, will have to leave Iran in the coming days. In fact, her visa has not been renewed and she has received a travel order. Her departure will make it difficult for her fellow nun, Sister Fabiola Weiss, a 77-year-old Austrian, who has dedicated 38 years to the poor and the sick in the leprosy hospital, and whose residence permit has been renewed for another year.

The two religious nuns, who have dedicated their lives to the country's sick without distinction of religious or ethnic affiliation, are forced to abandon the Congregation's house, built in 1937. In Isfahan, the Daughters of Charity had dedicated themselves for years to the education and training of young people. Their commitment to hundreds of Polish children, refugees and war orphans, who arrived in Iran in the spring of 1942, should also be remembered. In fact, the sisters ran a large school in the city, which was confiscated after the 1979 revolution. In recent years, the two sisters did not carry out any outside activities, to avoid being accused of proselytizing.

The house of the sisters is currently the only reality of the Latin Catholic Church in Isfahan and their chapel, built in 1939, serves as the parish of the "Powerful Virgin", which is occasionally made available to visitors for the celebration of Mass.

This is the current reality of the Catholic Church in Iran: two Assyrian-Chaldean archdioceses of Tehran-Ahwaz and Urmia-Salmas, which have one bishop and four priests (in the summer of 2019, the patriarchal administrator of Tehran of the Chaldeans, Ramzi Garmou, was also denied a visa renewal and could no longer return to the country); an Armenian diocese in which there is only a bishop and the Latin archdiocese which currently has no priest and is awaiting the arrival of its newly appointed pastor, Archbishop Dominique Mathieu. As for the religious presence, the Daughters of Charity operate in the country, with three sisters in Tehran and two sisters in Isfahan. There are also two consecrated laywomen. The faithful number about 3,000.

With the departure of the nuns, the presence of the Latin Catholic Church in Isfahan would be permanently lost. In 2016, the house of the Lazarist Fathers in the city of Isfahan had also been confiscated. It is to be hoped that the Iranian authorities will retrace their steps and reconsider their decision, allowing the sisters to continue in the country that they have loved so much and served with sacrifice and dedication.

Photo : Vatican News

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## News about Baha'is in Iran in May

### HRWF Digest

#### Sentences confirmed for 4 Baha'is from Varamin

Hrana / Sens Daily (30.05.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/fnxe6fw> - The Review Court for Tehran Province had confirmed the 3-year sentences of Mrs. **Mona Mehraabi, Elhaam Karam-Pisheh, Afsaaneh Yaadgaar-Ardestaani** and Mr. **Ehsaan-Allah Yaadgaar-Ardestaani**. They were charged with membership in an illegal organization with the aim of disrupting national security. The Judge of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran who handed down the **3-year sentences**, Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, said that the accused identified impoverished people and children who were abused or deprived of schooling, and gave them education.

Before the trial by Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, in September or October 2018, they had been sentenced by a revolutionary court in Tehran in a secret trial without a hearing or defence, to five years in prison. Two other Baha'is were sentenced to five years in the secret trial of 2018: **Safa Forqani-Araani and Mehrdaad Forqani-Araani**.

**Mrs. Elhaam Karam-Pisheh and Mona Mehraabi** were arrested on February 16, 2015, in a raid on a meeting in Tehran where six Baha'is were present. All were separately interrogated in the house, and the two women were arrested in accordance with a warrant and taken away in a car from the Ministry of Intelligence. During the search, which lasted five hours, all the books, pictures and religious symbols of those present, as well as computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones, were seized. Mr. **Ehsaan Yaadgaar** was arrested in a neighbouring home at the same time, and again religious materials were seized. Mrs. **Safa Forqani-Araani** was arrested in a raid on her home [apparently in Tehran] on February 17, 2015, and her father **Mehrdaad** was arrested at his home in Varamin an hour later.

#### Six Baha'is sentenced in Borazjan: 10 years in prison

Hrana/ Sens Daily (26.05.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/Knxr3Gi> - A Revolutionary Court in Borazjan, the chief city of Dashtestan county, Bushehr Province, has sentenced **Borhan Ismaa`ili, Maryam Bashir, Faraanak Shaykhi, Haayedeh Raam, Minu Bashir and Darna Ismaa`ili**.

**Mr. Borhan Ismaa`ili was sentenced to eleven years** on the charge of "propaganda against the regime by spreading the beliefs of the Baha'i sect and acting against security by disseminating Baha'i ideas." **The five women were sentenced to 12 years and six months** in prison on the charge of "Supportion propaganda against the regime by spreading the beliefs of the Baha'i sect.

The court findings cited the accused's involvement with child education and membership of the counter-revolutionary web site, Facebook. If the Review Court upholds these sentences, the accused will serve ten years in prison.



### Tehran review court confirms sentences of 3 years and 7 months

Hrana/ Sens Daily (25.05.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/2nxtWNF> - Mrs. **Marvash `Adaalati `Ali-Abaadi, Mrs. Sepideh Keshaavarz** and Mr. **Farid Ismaa `ili** have been sentenced to **three years and seven months** in prison by the Review Court for Tehran Province. They were charged with "collusion intended to undermine national security by conducting Baha'i activities." The Revolutionary Court, under Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, had also given them concurrent sentences of eight months in prison for "promoting the Baha'i Faith." The Review Court has not confirmed those sentences, but it makes no practical difference.

### Six more detainees bailed in Baharestan

Hrana / Sens Daily (24.05.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/tnxtK0Y> - Five more of the Baha'i women recently arrested in, or in relation to, the city of Baharestan in Isfahan Province were bailed on May 22. They are **Noushin Hemmat, Shouraangiz Behaamin, Saara Shakib, Azita Rezvaani** and **Sho `lah Ashuri**. Bail was set at 200 million tumans (39,000 euros ; \$US 47,000). Previously, **Saanaaz Raasteh** and **Firouzeh Rastinejaad** were bailed on May 20; **Ruya Azaadkhush** and **Nasreen Khaademi** were bailed on May 18, and **Maryam Khursandi** on May 17. All were released from Dawlatabad prison in Isfahan city.

According to a separate [HRANA report](#), Mozhgaan Pourshafi` was bailed on May 23. The arrests and home raids across Baharestan began on April 25.

### Eight Baha'is return to prison in Bandar Abbas

Hrana / Sens Daily (18.05.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/7nxusYm> - In Bandar Abbas, eight Baha'i prisoners who were granted furlough on April 14 returned to prison on April 24. Previous reports did not indicate how long the furlough would be, but ten days is quite normal. The prisoners are **Arash Raasekhi, Omid Afaaqi, Mehrollah Afshaar, Nasim Qanawaateyaan, Adib Haqq-pazhuh, Farhaad Amri, Maaraal Raasti** and **Mahnaaz Jaan-Nethaar**. They began their **one and two-year sentences** in late February and early April, and the report does not indicate why they would be granted furlough so soon.

### Three detainees bailed in Baharestan cluster

Hrana - Sens Daily (19.05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/invrupL> - **Roya Azaadkhoush** and **Nasrin Khaadem**, Baha'is from Baharestan, were bailed from Isfahan's Dolatabad Prison on May 18. On May 17, **Maryam Khorsandi** was bailed. These three arrests were not previously reported on Sens Daily, although it was known that their homes were searched on April 25. They were arrested on the same day. HRANA has also raised the number of Baha'i homes raided in Baharestan to 29, from its previous report of 28. Sho `lah Ashuri, a Baha'i from Baharestan who was arrested in Hendijan, in Khuzestan Province, has been transferred to detention in Baharestan.

### Kiaana Sho `aari's trial begins in Shiraz

Hrana - Sens Daily (15.05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/tnve7Qe> -The trial of **Kiaana Sho `aari**, a Baha'i from Shiraz, began today, May 15. She was notified of her impending trial



yesterday. At the hearing, at a Revolutionary Court, her case was referred back to the Prosecutor's Office for revision. On May 5 she was summoned to the court to hear that she would be tried for "forming dissident groups with the intention of disrupting national security, membership of dissident groups with the intention of disrupting security, and propaganda against the regime."

She was arrested on October 21, 2019, when agents from the Ministry of Intelligence arrested her and two other Baha'is in Shiraz : **Farzaan Ma`sumi** and **Soroush Abaadi**. The agents also searched their homes, along with the homes of a number of other Baha'is in Shiraz, and seized personal effects such as computers, mobile phones and laptops. She was released on bail about two weeks later.

### **Atosa Ahmadaa'i sentenced to 4 years**

Hrana – Sens Daily (13.05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/NnvrPDP> - **Atosa Ahmadaa'i Rafsanjaani** a Baha'i from Tehran, has been sentenced to **eight years** in prison by a Revolutionary Court headed by Judge Afshaari. The trial was held on February 28. Mrs Ahmadaa'i was sentenced to four years in prison for forming a group to undermine state security, because she had applied to the Ministry of the Interior for permission to establish an NGO focussing on the empowerment of women who have no support. The Ministry declined her application because of her Baha'i beliefs. She was also sentenced to three years in prison for "assembly and collusion to undermine state security" and to one year in prison for "propaganda against the regime." Sentences in Iran are normally concurrent.

### **Three detainees bailed in Shiraz**

Hrana – Sens Daily (07.05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/RnvtNtk> - **Soroush Abaadi, Siyaamak Honavar** and **Qaasem Ma`sumi** have been freed on bail in Shiraz. They are among the Baha'is arrested in Shiraz on April 6. Mr. Ma`sumi was released from Adelabad prison on the evening of May 6. Soroush Abadi was released on bail of 800 million tumans (156,000 euros ; \$US 190,000) on May 8. He was initially detained by the Ministry of Intelligence at their 'Facility 100' interrogation unit, and then taken to the high-security block at Adelabad prison, and then moved to the prisoner of conscience block on May 5. Mr. Honavar was also bailed on May 8.

### **Mo'in Mohammadi summoned to prison in Yazd**

Hrana – Sens Daily (07.05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/1nvtJcR> - On May 6, **Mo'in Muhammadi** was summoned to the punishments implementation office and told he must report to prison within 10 days. He was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on January 9, 2019. At the end of March he was sentenced to six years in prison by the Revolutionary Court in Yazd, and was released on bail on April 10. In July, the Review Court for the Province of Yazd reduced his sentence, for "propaganda against the regime" to one year of electronic surveillance by wearing a tracking bracelet. He was required to remain within the city of Yazd and the associated industrial park where he works.

The Prosecutor objected to the Review Court's decision and the case was re-tried in Iran's Supreme Court, which overturned the Review Court decision and returned the case to the Revolutionary Court where the Judge sentenced him to the maximum penalty for membership of groups opposed to the regime – 31 months and 16 days – but deducted

the 12 months he wore an ankle bracelet to give a sentence of **19 months and 16 days**.

### **Sa`id Ettehaad bailed in Shiraz**

Hrana – Sens Daily (07.05.21) <https://cutt.ly/pnvt3Nf> - **Sa`id Ettehaad**, one of the many Bahai's arrested in Shiraz in April, was released on bail on May 5. He was arrested during the raids on Baha'i homes in Shiraz on April 6.

### **Another Baha'i from Baharestan arrested, in Hendijan**

Hrana – Sens Daily (0-05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/TnvypQ4> - On May 5, agents from the security forces raided the home of **Sho`lah Ashuri** in the city of Hendijan, in Iran's Khuzestan Province, and arrested her. They also seized her mobile phone and a quantity of books, printed materials and images relating to the Baha'i Faith. They gained entry by climbing over the wall, at a time when Mrs. Ashuri's husband was not at home. Mrs. Ashuri is from Baharestan, in Isfahan Province, where ten Baha'is have been arrested recently and numerous Baha'i homes have been raided, including the home of her father. She moved to Hendijan two years ago.

### **Shahnaaz Saabet released**

Hrana – Sens Daily (05.05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/anvyFz6> - **Shahnaaz Saabet** was released from prison in Shiraz, where she was serving a two-year sentence. This follows the acceptance of her request for a new hearing. She began her sentence on October 6, 2020, so she has served seven months.

Mrs. Saabet was arrested in her home in Shiraz on September 1, 2019. She was initially sentenced to six years in prison, by Judge Sayyid Mahmud Saadaati, on charges of "propaganda against the regime and membership in anti-regime group." This was reduced to two years by the Review Court.

### **Farzandi Ardakaani and Sadiqeh Aqdasi bailed in Shiraz**

Hrana – Sens Daily (05.05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/9nvy79p> - **Behrouz Farzandi Ardakaani** and **Sadiqeh Aqdas** were freed on bail on May 3. They were arrested on April 5 and 6 respectively, during a wave of home raids and arrests targeting the Baha'i community in Shiraz. They were held in solitary confinement and under interrogation by the Revolutionary Guards' intelligence arm, and were then taken to the Ministry of Intelligence Detention Facility 100. Mr. Vahid Daana and Sa`id `Aabadi are also being held in Facility 100, in solitary confinement. Their arrest in late April was reported previously.

Mr. Ardakaani's name was previously reported as Farzandi Ardakaani. He is a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war and was held as a prisoner of war, and suffers from neurological and hearing problems caused by blast waves, as well as a heart disorder.

## **More homes searched, tenth Bahai woman arrested, in Baharestan cluster**

Hrana – Sens Daily (02.05.21) - <https://cutt.ly/invuYPm> - On April 30, **Shouraangiz Behaamin**, a Baha'i from Baharestan was arrested at her father's house in the village of Garuzeh in the Province of Kohgilyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. Her home in Baharestan had been searched by security agents on April 25, and her husband Mehrdaad Azhir was beaten, but Mrs Behaamin was not present.

HRANA has also confirmed the identities of 28 Baha'is whose homes in Baharestan and Isfahan have been raided in recent days. Many personal effects were seized during the raids, including money, Baha'i materials, passports and degrees and certificates. I am going to excuse myself from transliterating the 28 names: they are in Persian script

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## **News about Baha'is in Iran in April**

### ***Home searches and arrests in Baharestan, Isfahan Province***

Hrana / Sens Daily (25.04.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/ebcLIVB> - Thirteen Baha'i homes were raided, and eight Baha'is were arrested, in Baharestan, Isfahan, on the morning of April 25. Those arrested are named as **Saara Shakib, Firouzeh Rastinejad, Saanaaz Raasteh, Azita Rezvaani, Mozhaan Pourshafi, Nasreen Khaademi, Afshin Vajdaani** and his wife **Noushin Hemmat**.

There was some violence during the raid on Saara Shakib's house. The agents at her home also had a warrant for **Samira Shakib**. The other raids were also violent, and in one case a door was broken down because there was nobody home.

Saara Shakib's brother, **Sina Shakib**, a fourth semester student of statistics and applications at the University of Isfahan, was recently expelled because of his Baha'i beliefs. She was expelled first from the student accommodation, and then from the University, because of her Baha'i beliefs. Another sister, **Samira Shakib**, was barred from enrolling in a tertiary institution, when her file was marked "incomplete." The siblings' mother was also barred from university.

### ***Manizheh A`zamiyaan arrested and released in Babol***

Hrana/ Sens Daily (20.04.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/EbcZFy5> - On April 13, security forces in Babol, a city on the Caspian Coast, arrested **Mrs. Manizheh A`zamiyaan**. Next day, she was released on bail of 50 million tumans (10,000 euros ; \$US 12,000). Four days before her arrest, security forces raided her home and seized some personal effects including mobile phones, computer hard drives, flash drives, and pictures, books and other printed matter relating to the Baha'i Faith.

After the morning search, the agents asked her to go to the office of the Ministry of Intelligence in Babol for interrogation. She did so, and was questioned for several hours. This was repeated several times in the days before her arrest. Mrs. A`zamiyaan is 52 years old. Intelligence agents also contacted several of her contacts, stored on her mobile phone, and summoned them for questioning about their contacts with Mrs. A`zamiyaan.

### ***Mo'in Mohammadi again sentenced to prison***

Hrana/ Sens Daily (15.04.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/JbcXPHL> - A Revolutionary Court in Yazd has sentenced **Mo'in Muhammadi** to 19 months and 16 days in prison, based on a case file for which he has already been tried, sentenced, had his sentence reduced by the Review Court to electronic monitoring by wearing a tracking bracelet for one year, and has served out that penalty.

He was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on January 9, 2019. At the end of March he was sentenced to six years in prison by the Revolutionary Court in Yazd, and was released on bail on April 10. In July, the Review Court for the Province of Yazd reduced his sentence, for "propaganda against the regime" to one year of electronic surveillance by wearing a tracking bracelet. He was required to remain within the city of Yazd and the associated industrial park where he works. The Review Court acquitted him of another charge of membership of groups opposed to the regime.

The Prosecutor objected to the Review Court's decision and the case was re-tried in Iran's Supreme Court, which overturned the Review Court decision and returned the case to the Revolutionary Court where the Judge has sentenced him to the maximum penalty for membership of groups opposed to the regime — 31 months and 16 days — but has deducted the 12 months he wore an ankle bracelet to give a sentence of 19 months and 16 days. The Revolutionary Court also sentenced him to 7 months and 16 days for propaganda against the regime, but this time is not added to his sentence because the two sentences are concurrent, as usual under Iranian law. Mr. Mohammadi was not aware of the Prosecutor's objection or the Supreme Court trial, and was therefore not represented or defended. The Supreme Court's decision has not been formally notified, let alone explained.

### ***Eight Baha'is free on furlough in Bandar Abbas***

Hrana / Sens Daily (15.04.2021) – **Arash Raasekhi, Omid Afaaqi, Mehrollah Afshaar Nasim Qanawaateyaan, Adib Haqq-pazhuh , Farhaad Amri, Maaraal Raasti** and **Mahnaaz Jaan-Nethaar** were released from prison on April 14. They began their one and two-year sentences in late February and early April, and the report does not indicate why they would be granted furlough so soon. A [previous report](#) on Sen's Daily has details of their trials and sentences.

### ***Seven arrests in Shiraz***

Hrana / Sens Daily (09.04.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/ubvJf5E> - **Sa`id Ettehaad, Qaasem Ma`sumi, Siyaamak Honavar, Soroush Abaadi, Sadiqeh Aqdasi** and **`Aliyyeh Farutan** were arrested in home raids in Shiraz on April 6, and **Farzandi Ardakaani** was arrested the previous evening. During the raids, agents from the Ministry of Intelligence seized their personal effects such as books and electronic devices.

They were arrested and taken to a detention centre. Latest reports indicate that the home raids have continued in Shiraz — more details are expected.

Soroush Abaadi was one of three Baha'is arrested on October 21, 2019: it was later claimed that the three Baha'is were holding a religious ceremony intended to eclipse the Arba'een Pilgrimage in Karbala. [!]

### ***Nine Baha'is summoned to prison in Andisheh and Karaj***

Hrana / Sens Daily (08.04.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/ZbvHQLi> - **Mr. Housham Khoushnam, Mrs. Ilhaam Salmaanzaadeh, Mr. Payaam Sha'baani, Mr. Keyaanush Salmaanzaadeh, Mr. Soroush Agaahi, Parvaan Ma`navi, Mrs. Jamileh Paakrou, Mr. Paymaan Ma`navi and Mrs. Neda Shabaani** have been summoned to report to prison within five days to serve one-year sentences. They were charged with propaganda against the regime through activity and propaganda for the Baha'is.

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.

### ***Four Baha'i women go to jail in Mashhad***

Hrana / Sens Daily (06.04.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/vbc0DMj> - **Nika Paakzaadaan, Saanaaz Es-haaqi, Nakisa Hajipour and Noghmeah Dhabihayan** began their one-year sentences in Mashhad's Vakil-Abaad prison on April 6. These four were arrested, tried and sentenced in a group of five: Faraaneh Daaneshgari is not mentioned in this report.

The five were arrested on November 13, 2015, at the same time as agents from the Ministry of Intelligence also arrested 15 other Bahais in Tehran and Isfahan, and Baha'i-run businesses were closed down in Mazandaran Province. Judge Baagh-dehi, sitting in the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad on 28 September, 2019, sentenced them to one year in prison and the Review Court for Khorasan Province confirmed the prison terms in late December.

### ***Maaraal Raasti and Mahnaaz Jaan-Nethaar begin their sentences***

Hrana / Sens Daily (03.04.2021) - **Maaraal Raasti and Mahnaaz Jaan-Nethaar** were taken to Bandar Abbas prison to begin their sentences on April 3. They were among the eight Baha'is who, as previously reported, were summoned in late February.

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## **News about Christians in Iran in April**

### **Christian converts released on condition they stop meeting together**

Article 18 (27.04.2021) - Four Christian converts arrested by agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence in the southwestern city of Dezful last week have been released without charge but only after they were ordered to sign commitments to have no further involvement in any Christian activities.

Hojjat Lotfi Khalaf, Esmaeil Narimanpour, Alireza Varak-Shah, and Mohammad Ali Torabi, also known as Davoud, were released on the evening of 21 April after two days in detention.

They were told to expect another summons for interrogation at any time.

According to Mohabat News, 10 to 15 other Christian converts have been interrogated over the past week in Dezful and ordered to sign such commitments to refrain from further Christian activities.

Continue reading [here](#)

## **Christian convert given 10-month sentence for 'propaganda against Islamic Republic'**

Article 18 (27.04.2021) - An Iranian Christian convert has been sentenced to 10 months in prison for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic".

Hamed Ashoori, who is 31 years old and lives in Fardis, west of Tehran, was verbally informed of the verdict on 12 April following his final court hearing on 7 March at the 4th Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Karaj.

Hamed has received no written confirmation of the verdict, which he intends to appeal, nor has he at any stage been given any information about the names of any of his arresting officers, interrogators or judges.

Continue reading [here](#)

## **Christian converts take appeals to Iran's Supreme Court**

Article 18 (22.03.2021) - Iran's Supreme Court is considering the retrial petitions for two high-profile cases involving Christian converts.

The first relates to the prison sentences given to a 62-year-old man with advanced Parkinson's disease, Homayoun Zhavah, and his wife Sara Ahmadi, 43, for belonging to a house-church.

The second concerns a court's decision to remove a two-year-old girl from her adoptive parents, Sam Khosravi and Maryam Falahi, because they are Christian converts and the girl, Lydia, is considered Muslim.

Continue reading [here](#)

## **Four Christian converts arrested in Dezful, others interrogated**

Article 18 (21.04.2021) - Four Christian converts have been arrested and others summoned for interrogation by intelligence agents in the southwestern city of Dezful. Hojjat Lotfi Khalaf, Esmail Narimanpour, Alireza Varak-Shah, and Mohammad Ali Torabi, also known as Davoud, were arrested on Monday, 19 April.

The following day – yesterday – a number of other converts were summoned for interrogation, though precisely how many is not yet known.

Continue reading [here](#)

## **Christian convert released after over three years in prison**

Article 18 - (15.04.2021) - Christian convert Majidreza Souzanchi has been released after more than three years in prison.

The 37-year-old was released on furlough from the Greater Tehran Penitentiary last Thursday, 8 April, and has told Mohabat News he does not need to return to serve the remaining few months of his sentence.

Continue reading [here](#)

# News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in March

## Baha'is

### Four Baha'is from Varamin re-sentenced in Tehran

Hrana/ Sens Daily (13.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3rVrxUf> - A Revolutionary Court in Tehran, under Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, has sentenced **Mrs. Mona Mehraabi, Elhaam Karam-Pisheh, Afsaaneh Yaadgaar-Ardestaani and Mr. Ehsaan-Allah Yaadgaar-Ardestaani.**

These Baha'is all live in Varamin, Tehran Province. In September or October 2018, they were sentenced by a revolutionary court in Tehran, in a secret trial without a hearing or defence. This trial was not reported on Sen's Daily. The court has since agreed to a retrial, and has announced sentences of three years each, in place of the original five years. They were charged with membership of illegal organisations with the aim of undermining state security.

**Mrs. Elhaam Karam-Pisheh and Mona Mehraabi** were arrested on February 16, 2015, in a raid on a meeting in Tehran where six Bahais were present. All were separately interrogated in the house, and the two women were arrested in accordance with a warrant and taken away in a car from the Ministry of Intelligence. During the search, which lasted five hours, all the books, pictures and religious symbols of those present, as well as computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones, were seized. One report adds that the officers demanded that those present should sign undertakings not to participate in Bahai meetings.

**Mr. Ehsaan Yaadgaar** was arrested in a neighbouring home at the same time, and again religious materials were seized, along with some gold coins. He was told to present himself to the public prosecutor's office in Varamin (the capital of Varamin County in Tehran Province). He did so, and was released after several hours. He was again arrested in early March, 2015, and taken to Evin Prison for questioning before being released.

**Mrs. Safa Forqani-Araani** was arrested in a raid on her home [apparently in Tehran] on February 17, 2015, and her father Mehrdaad was arrested at his home in Varamin an hour later.

During these raids a number of other Baha'is in Tehran were questioned, but they are not mentioned in this report.

### Iran to tighten repression of Baha'is and Sufis in Mazandaran Province

Hrana/ Sens Daily (11.03.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/wcFrVre> - A leak of confidential documents has revealed that a meeting of representatives from nine of Iran's security organisations, together with officials from government departments, held in Sari on September 3 last year, decided to tighten the repression of Baha'is and Sufis in Mazandaran Province.

The activities of Baha'is in the bazaar (in the economy) and in private meetings are to be more tightly controlled. The Directors of primary and secondary schools in Sari County are tasked with identifying Baha'i pupils and attracting them to Islam, while the heads of tertiary education in the County are required to ensure that the exclusion of Baha'is from tertiary education is enforced. The head of the Ministry of Industry and Mining was tasked with controlling the activities of Baha'is in the bazaar. Such a high-level meeting confirms anecdotal evidence that Baha'i and Sufi communities are growing in Iran, to the extent that they are seen as a threat.

### 5-year sentences confirmed for Sufeya Mobini and Negin Tadrissi



Hrana/ Sens Daily (10.03.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/7cFyTWH> - The Review Court for Tehran Province has confirmed the five-year prison sentences of Sufeya Mobini and Negin Tadrissi. They were initially sentenced in the Revolutionary Court by Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad. For the details see [a previous report](#) on this blog.

## Christians

### Parkinson's sufferer and wife summoned to begin prison sentences

Article 18 (25.03.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/8192/> - A Christian convert with advanced Parkinson's disease and his wife have been summoned to begin their prison sentences for belonging to a house-church.

**Homayoun Zhavah**, who is 62 years old, and his wife **Sara Ahmadi**, 42, received the summons on Friday, telling them to report to Tehran's Evin Prison within days.

Their lawyer has applied for a retrial.

**Homayoun** faces two years in prison, while his wife was given a stiffer sentence of eight years for her alleged leadership role within the house-church.

The sentences were handed down in November 2020 but only reported last week after the couple were informed by their lawyer that they could be summoned any day.

**Sara** was initially sentenced to 11 years in prison, but her sentence was reduced to eight years on appeal.

### Article18 calls for renewal of mandate of UN rapporteur on human rights in Iran

Article 18 (12.03.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/8073/> - Article18 has joined 38 other rights groups in calling for the renewal of the mandate of the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javid Rehman.

The renewal of Mr Rehman's mandate is set to be voted upon at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council, where he presented his latest report earlier this week.

In a joint letter sent today to all member states of the Council, we say the renewal of the mandate by at least another year is "essential in light of the persistence of widespread and systematic violations of human rights committed by Iranian authorities with total impunity".

[Continue reading on the link above.](#)

### UK ambassador calls on Iran to end persecution of Christian converts

Article 18 (11.03.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/8062/> - The UK's permanent representative to the UN has called on Iran to end its "persistent" discrimination and persecution of religious minorities, "particularly the Baha'i and Christian converts".

Julian Braithwaite was speaking as part of a 9 March interactive dialogue with the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javid Rehman, who was presenting his latest report.

## Honouring the Iranian Christian women persecuted for their faith

Article 18 (08.03.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/features/7989/> - On International Women's Day, we honour the Christian women who have been arrested, charged or imprisoned over the past 12 months in Iran as a result of their faith or religious activities.

This article highlights just 12 such women, but this is by no means an exhaustive list, nor does it include all the women whose husbands are currently serving prison sentences as a result of their faith and are thereby deprived of support in looking after their homes and children.

[Read more about each of them on the link above](#)

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## It's their land

### ***#ItsTheirLand: Unprecedented reaction makes voice of persecuted Bahá'ís in an Iranian village global***

BIC GENEVA (05.03.2021) — <https://news.bahai.org/story/1495/> - A global campaign in support of the persecuted Bahá'ís in Iran has generated an unprecedented outpouring of solidarity from officials at the United Nations and the European Union, statesmen, government officials, religious figures including Muslim leaders, lawyers, prominent human rights advocates, farmers' associations, actors, and other prominent figures.

Campaign supporters called for an end to the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran and particularly for the return of ancestral lands belonging to the Bahá'ís in Ivel, a village in northern Iran, which were illegally confiscated by the Iranian government solely because of the landowners' religious beliefs.

The wave of concern—outstanding in its diversity and geographic spread—reflects an ongoing outcry from the international community over the human rights abuses Iranian Bahá'ís have suffered for decades.

"In the past week, the voices of the Bahá'ís in a small village in Iran became global, thanks to the extraordinary support offered by governments, organizations, prominent figures, groups, and thousands of sincere individuals around the world," said Diane Ala'i, Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. "This exceptional support not only condemns Iran's actions but shows the long-suffering Bahá'ís in Iran that the international community stands with them."

The campaign comes after Iranian courts ruled to confiscate Bahá'í-owned properties in Ivel, leaving dozens of families internally displaced and economically impoverished. The Bahá'ís are Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority and have been the target of 42 years of state-sanctioned systematic persecution—documented extensively by the United Nations.

Ahmed Shaheed, the UN's Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, said he stood in solidarity with the Bahá'ís in Iran "who are facing systemic persecution [and] egregious rights violations."

A [webinar](#) was held at the European Parliament on the situation in Ivel with participation from European Union officials and a former UN Special Rapporteur, Miloon Kothari. Additionally, the Chair of the European Parliament delegation for relations with Iran, Cornelia Ernst, [called](#) the Bahá'ís a "particularly vulnerable community" and condemned the Iranian government's "disastrous policies towards the Bahá'ís."

Brian Mulroney, a former Canadian prime minister, signed a high-profile [open letter](#) by more than 50 judges, lawyers, and former attorneys-general, addressed to Iran's chief justice, Ebrahim Raisi. The letter stated that the court ruling departs "not only from international human rights standards but also from the text and intent of the Iranian constitution itself." The open letter was widely publicized, including by [The Globe and Mail](#) newspaper and the [CBC](#).

Global food systems and agricultural experts, including officials at the UN Development Programme, the World Bank, the Rockefeller Foundation, business figures, and academics at universities around the world, signed an [open letter](#) describing the Bahá'ís in Ivel as "hard-working, low-income agricultural workers with no other assets and means of earning a livelihood aside from their homes and farmlands" and expressing "alarm" at the confiscation of their properties. The call was underpinned by a moving [video message](#) of solidarity on behalf of the farming community in Australia which called on the Iranian government and judiciary to "return the land and properties to their rightful owners: Bahá'í farmers in Ivel."

Canadian Members of Parliament also added their voices to the campaign in a [video](#) in which they called on Iran to "return the properties of Bahá'ís and respect their human rights as citizens of Iran."

The foreign ministers of Canada and Sweden, [Marc Garneau](#) and [Ann Linde](#), each made statements on the situation in Ivel, expressing alarm at the ongoing discrimination and seizure of properties owned by Bahá'ís. Other government officials and parliamentarians from [Brazil](#), [Germany](#), the [Netherlands](#), the [United Kingdom](#), and the [United States](#) also denounced the Ivel confiscations, urging Iran to stop persecuting the Bahá'ís.

Officials of two governments called for the recognition of the Bahá'í community in Iran. "Stop confiscating Bahá'í properties in the village of Ivel," [stated](#) Jos Douma, the Netherlands' Special Envoy for Religion or Belief. "And—at last—recognize Bahá'í[s] as a religious community." The German Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion, Markus Grübel, also [called](#) for Iran to recognize the Bahá'ís and to end the "discrimination and persecution of Bahá'í communities."

The [US statement](#), issued by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, condemned the "alarming escalation" of the Iranian government's "measures targeting Bahá'ís in Iran on the basis of their faith."

Muslim leaders around the world also joined the campaign, calling on Iran "to address this injustice," adding, "Islam does not permit a government to confiscate land from citizens just because they follow a different religion."

The statements, coming from Muslim leaders in India (the [All India Tanzeem Falaahul Muslimeen](#) and the [All India Safi Association](#)), the [United States](#), the [United Kingdom](#), [Canada](#), and [Australia](#), sent a powerful signal to Iran's government that, contrary to its claims, their co-religionists do not see their actions as consistent with Islamic law.

In addition to this, fourteen prominent Iranian religious scholars issued a [collective statement](#) to "urgently request" that Iran's government "end the brutal confiscation of

Bahá'í property throughout the country" and to address the "persecution, animosity, and insults" suffered by the Bahá'ís. A prominent op-ed article was also published in The Wall Street Journal by Reza Afshari, an expert on human rights in Iran.

Civil society organizations in the United States, including the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, the Anti-Defamation League Task Force on Middle East Minorities, United for Iran, the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, Freedom House, the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute, and others, signed yet another open letter addressed to the two judges who made the ruling, Mr. Hasan Babaie and Mr. Sadegh Savadkouhi.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Raoul Wallenberg Center, Brazil's National Council of Churches, South Africa's Legal Resources Centre, and Germany's International Society for Human Rights were also among the many faith and civil society groups that stood in solidarity with the Bahá'ís in Ivel.

Thousands of members of parliaments, human rights activists, actors, and ordinary citizens also joined a Twitter storm sharing articles and messages of solidarity about the land seizures in Ivel with the hashtag #ItsTheirLand. The social media push saw 35,000 tweets reaching some 52 million people around the world, at one point trending in Australia. The equivalent hashtag also trended in Persian-language Twitter.

Prominent Iranian academics, authors, activists, actors, and artists outside Iran, including Masih Alinejad, Max Amini, Nazanin Boniadi, Nina Ansary, Abbas Milani, Sina Valiollah, Omid Djalili, Maziar Bahari, Ladan Boroumand, and others, also joined the Twitter storm, as did the American actors Rainn Wilson, Justin Baldoni and Eva LaRue and the British novelist and comedian, David Baddiel.

"The show of support for the Bahá'ís in Ivel demonstrates that the Iranian government's religious motivation for the persecution of the Bahá'ís has been exposed to the world. Iran's treatment of its Bahá'í community is, more than ever, condemned by a growing chorus of governments, civil society groups, and individuals, not only in the international community but by Iranians themselves," stated Ms. Ala'i.

"The freedom to believe is a fundamental right that cannot be taken away from any individual by a government. The world is watching Iran and demands that the government bring to an end the utterly baseless persecution of innocent Bahá'ís for their beliefs."

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## **News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in February**

### **Baha'is**

#### ***Confiscation of assets from Baha'is in Bandar Lengeh***

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (23.02.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3b1fP5h> - The business, homes and bank accounts of two Baha'is in the Southern port city of Bandar Lengeh have been confiscated by court order. The workshop and houses of Mohabatullah Thaabet and Erfaan Noahnezhaad were ordered to be seized following pressure from the "security office" [ie, agent of the Ministry of Intelligence, ~ Sen] in the town's Tax Department, and the levy of a substantial, and abnormal, fine on the Baha'is.

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

### ***Eight Baha'is summoned to prison in Bandar Abbas***

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

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

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

The eight were sentenced on 12 December 2020 in Branch Two of the Islamic Revolutionary Tribunal of Bandar Abbas, presided over by Judge 'Ali Balaador. They were charged with conspiracy to undermine national security, based on evidence that they had conducted children's classes and youth classes for Bahai children, and music classes, and had attended a "Ruhi" study circle and collected donations [from Baha'is] for the Baha'i "Feasts" (community devotionals).

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

### ***Three Baha'is sentenced in Tehran Revolutionary Court***

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

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

She was released on bail of 500 million tumans (105,000 euros; \$US 119,000 ) on March 16, 2019, and Saeed and Hamid were released for the same bail amount on April 18 and 24, respectively.

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

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

### ***Touraj Amini begins his 6-month sentence***

HRANA/ Sen's Daily (01.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3q16QVZ> - On January 29, Baha'i researcher and author Touraj Amini was summoned to the Prosecutor's office and taken to Karaj Central Prison, near Tehran, to begin his six-month sentence. He was originally sentenced by the Revolutionary Court in Karaj to one year in prison and two years of exile from the city, but this was reduced by the Alborz Provincial Review Court. On August 4, 2019, security forces searched his home, seizing books and notes and a laptop, and he was previously detained for a short time, in March 2008. He was charged with "propaganda against the regime."

His books include one on the role of religious minorities in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911; "The Hidden Awakening", on the relationship between Iranians intellectuals and the Babi and Bahai Faiths; a five-volume collection of source documents relating to the Bahais in Iran, and a volume of "Documents of Contemporary Zoroastrians of Iran."

## **Christians**

### ***Ebrahim Firouzi released on bail, but charges not dropped***

Article18 (28.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7933/> - Iranian Christian convert Ebrahim Firouzi has been released on bail after nearly three weeks in detention.

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

Read the full article [here](#)

### ***Yasser Mossayebzadeh granted conditional release from prison***

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

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

Article18 understands that Yasser's 10-year sentence – on charges of "forming a house church" and "promoting Zionist Christianity" – was reduced to three years during a court hearing last month, and that he was subsequently released from prison on Monday, 22 February.

Read the full article [here](#)



### ***Iran found guilty of 'arbitrary detention' of Christian pastor***

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

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

Read the full article [here](#)

### ***Iran passes bill that threatens further repression of Christian converts***

Article 18 (19.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7872/> - Iranian president Hassan Rouhani has signed into law two controversial amendments to the Penal Code, which it is feared will be used to further clamp down on unrecognised religious minorities, including Christian converts.

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

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

Read the full article [here](#)

### ***UN rapporteur tells Iran to 'release all imprisoned for exercising right to religious freedom'***

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

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

Read the full article [here](#)

### ***Annual Report: Rights Violations Against Christians in 2020***



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

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

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

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

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

Read the full news [here](#)

### ***Converts face prison for 'promoting Christianity'***

Article 18 (01.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7727/> - An appeals court in the southwestern Iranian city of Bushehr has upheld the one-year prison sentences given to three Christian converts for "propagating against the Islamic Republic through promoting Christianity".

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

Read the full news [here](#)

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## **"An extraordinary wave of support": Muslim leaders and government officials denounce Iran's persecution of Baha'is**

**Baha'i International Community (18.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/37D6oqC> - Leading Muslims, government officials, and parliamentarians around the world have joined a growing outcry at the unjust confiscation of properties owned by Baha'is in the farming village of Ivel in Iran. The ruling to allow Iranian authorities to confiscate the properties, clearly motivated by religious prejudice, was recently upheld in an appeals court and has left dozens of families internally displaced and economically impoverished.**

The [American Islamic Congress](#)(link is external), the [Canadian Council of Imams](#)(link is external), Chair of the Virtues Ethics Foundation and one of the leading Islamic scholars in the United Kingdom [Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra](#)(link is external), [the All India Tanzeem Falahul Muslemin](#)(link is external), and [the All India Saifi Association](#)(link is external)

[external](#)) have all issued statements in support of the Baha'is in Ivel, expressing grave concern about the confiscation of the properties.

"We are calling for the Higher court in Mazandaran and all responsible personnel to take action and to help the Baha'i community in Ivel get back their properties," reads the statement from the American Islamic Congress. Echoing these sentiments, the Canadian Council of Imams writes, "We are deeply concerned by the ruling issued by an Iranian Court to confiscate the properties of 27 Baha'is in the farming village of Ivel." Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra from the United Kingdom specifically called upon Iran's Chief Justice, Ebrahim Raisi, "to address this injustice", adding that "Islam does not permit a government to confiscate land from citizens just because they follow a different religion".

"The sight of Muslim leaders around the world coming to the aid of their Baha'i friends in Iran in an extraordinary wave of support is a powerful signal to the Islamic Republic that their co-religionists around the world condemn their actions," says Diane Ala'i, Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. "Statements of support from leading Muslims for the Baha'is in Ivel, who have lived there for more than 150 years with their Muslim neighbours, show that the Iranian government's invocation of Islamic law is a thin veil covering its persecution of the Baha'is." Ms. Ala'i added.

In a further sign of international support for the Baha'is in Iran, government officials around the world have condemned the Iranian court decision. The Canadian Foreign Minister, Marc Garneau, [says](#) (link is external) his government is concerned by the ruling, urging Iran to "eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religion or belief." The call has been echoed by officials in [Germany](#) (link is external), the [Netherlands](#) (link is external), [Sweden](#) (link is external), the [United Kingdom](#) (link is external), [Brazil](#) (link is external), the [United States](#) (link is external), the [European Parliament and the United Nations](#) (link is external). In Sweden, 12 members of parliament and elected representatives have also [strongly called on Iran](#) (link is external) to return the lands of the Baha'is of Ivel.

"Stop confiscating Baha'i properties in the village of Ivel," states [Jos Douma](#) (link is external), the Netherlands' Special Envoy for Religion or Belief. "And—at last—recognize Baha'i[s] as a religious community." The German Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion, Markus Grübel, also [called](#) (link is external) for Iran to recognize the Baha'is as a religious community in the country and to end the "discrimination and persecution of Baha'i communities."

South Africa's Legal Resources Centre, an organization known for its human rights work during apartheid, has also issued a [letter](#) (link is external) condemning the property confiscations.

Confiscation of Baha'i-owned properties in Ivel began in the early years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. In 2010, properties belonging to some 50 Baha'is in Ivel were [burned and demolished](#), driving them away from their ancestral farms and homes.

The Baha'is in Ivel have repeatedly appealed for their rights in the past, filing complaints with the authorities at all levels and taking legal action to reclaim their lands, to no avail.

"The world is watching and is appalled by the Iranian government's blatant injustices towards the Baha'i community," says Ms. Ala'i. "The innocence of the Baha'is is more evident than ever to the international community, and Iran is being held accountable for the gross injustices it has inflicted on the Baha'i community in Iran. The government must take the necessary steps to not only return the lands to the Baha'is in Ivel but to end the systematic persecution of the Baha'is throughout the entire country once and for all."

## Background

- The fresh support comes after a former Canadian prime minister and more than 50 others in Canada's legal community signed an [open letter](#) to the head of Iran's judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, expressing "deep concern" over the confiscations.
- The ruling to confiscate the properties was made in a Special Court for Article 49 of the Iranian Constitution, which allows the Iranian government to seize any properties in the country. Article 49 states that the "ruling must be carried out by the government after investigation, research and proof through Islamic law."
- However, despite the requirements of law, [numerous court rulings](#) and official documents reveal the discriminatory motives behind the confiscations. The seizure of properties is part of Iran's systematic persecution of the Baha'is, reported [extensively](#) by the United Nations.
- In October 2020, despite many efforts by the Baha'is—whose lawyers were denied the chance to see files related to their case, to prepare their defense—an appeals court upheld the ruling by the Special Court. The ruling allowed the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, a foundation under Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to sell the lands owned by the Baha'is.
- Confiscation of Baha'i properties—holy places as well as individual properties—has been part of Iran's systematic campaign of economic, cultural and social persecution against the Baha'is. It has been part of a four-decades long effort to destroy the Baha'i community as a viable entity in the country.
- Confiscation of Baha'i-owned properties in Ivel began in the early years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Baha'is were also denied access to health clinics and other institutions, which they had helped to establish; teachers found various means to persecute Baha'i pupils, including by failing them in their exams; the 100-year old Baha'i cemetery in the village was confiscated and sold for conversion into residential property; and in 1983, more than 130 Baha'is were locked in a local mosque, held captive for three days without food and water, and pressured to recant their faith.

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## Iranian converts have to prove their faith to obtain asylum

***A significant proportion of Iranians seeking asylum in France say they are persecuted because of their conversion to Christianity***

By Anne-Bénédicte Hoffner

La Croix International (17.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2N7kObE> - When Ali (not his real name) went to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) for his interview, he knew that he would be questioned about his personal history, particularly about his conversion to Christianity in Iran.

He was asked to name a scripture passage that was important to him. He chose the Passion of Jesus Christ.

"How did this passage resonate with you?" the protection officer asked.

"What attracted me most is that a human being, even at the moment of being tortured, asks people for forgiveness, even though he is here because of their faults. (...) That's what made me begin to love Jesus and this gesture," Ali said.

The interviewer was not convinced. He informed Ali a few days later that his request for asylum had been rejected.

"When asked to describe the personal journey that led him to convert to Catholicism, the person described a family environment marked by a rigorous practice of Islam and his words remained impersonal, invoking only the notion of forgiveness," wrote the OFPRA agent.

"The agency cannot consider him to be at risk of persecution upon return to Iran, as the sincerity of his approach was not considered to be established," the official said.

### **Assessing the sincerity of a convert's faith**

Every year, just over 100,000 foreigners seek France's protection because of the threats they face in their home countries.

A handful are Iranians -- around 350 in 2020, a little more in previous years -- and among them, many say they have converted to Christianity.

Though he does not keep statistics about the "motive", the director of OFPRA, Julien Boucher, observes that "for two decades" the issue of conversion has often appeared in the files of Iranians, most of the time within a Protestant Church.

Boucher says that, because religious persecutions "touch on the intimate", this is the reason why "the examination is very specific".

"We are fully aware of this. It is not a question of judging the sincerity of the applicant's faith, but of assessing the validity of the alleged fears," he points out.

Threats are very real for those the Iranian regime considers to be "apostates". But how can the true danger of such threats be verified without actually trying to assess the sincerity of the asylum seeker's conversion?

### **An obstacle course for Iranian asylum-seekers who have converted to Christianity**

Father Jean-Marie Humeau assists the Iranian Catholic community. On his desk are seven files of Iranian converts whose requests have been rejected by OFPRA.

"In all seven cases, OFPRA asked spiritual questions to see whether or not the conversion is genuine and to challenge the risk of persecution. This raises questions," the priest argues.

Arshad, 36, is currently in France awaiting the decision of OFPRA. He's familiar with the obstacle course for Iranian converts.

He was arrested in Tehran while he was reading the Gospel with friends and subjected to several weeks of interrogation and psychological torture in prison before finally being released on bail.

After he returned home, he started receiving anonymous threats over the telephone. Pressure was put on those close to him, he lost his job and, finally, he did what many people do -- he fled to another country.

"The difficulty of the French interrogations is famous," he says.

OFPRO asked one of his friends "the name of the twelve apostles", another to say "what the Trinity means to him".

"I understand that they are trying to verify whether the danger is real, but that they decide that our faith is not 'complete' seems really strange to me," Arshad says.

For the National Association of Border Assistance for Foreigners (Anafé), these "intrusive" questions are even more incomprehensible when applicants are in waiting areas, such as ports, train stations or airports.

They are summoned to explain themselves in a few hours, face-to-face or over the phone, sometimes not even knowing whom, exactly, they are speaking with.

"The protection officer asked the man many questions about the Christian religion, its rituals, its saints and its beliefs, and expected him to give precise answers," said an Anafé employee who witnessed an Iranian couple being interviewed in 2017 at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport.

The man had to indicate how often he went to Mass, although going to religious services is illegal for Iranians who do not belong to recognized churches.

He was even asked "the date of Christmas, without taking into account the fact that Iranians do not have the same calendar".

### **Ordinariate for Catholics of the Eastern Churches offer to help**

"While it is only supposed to verify the credibility of the request, OFPRO often launches into a substantive examination, under conditions that do not allow it," says Anafé's director, Laure Palun.

"And it is not even certain that those who have been Christians for a long time know how to answer these questions," she notes.

But OFPRO's director, Julien Boucher, denies that.

"Under no circumstances do we ask protection officers to give a kind of knowledge test," he insists.

He claims his organization takes its lead from the good practices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Agents limit themselves to asking questions concerning the person's "path of conversion", the "circumstances" of the conversion, the new religious practice and, finally, the persecutions suffered or feared.

"Something the claimant says may, in turn, prompt further questions from the instructor," Boucher explains.

The role of the interpreters -- in the vast majority of Iranian and Shia Muslim cases -- is also regularly questioned.

Do they know the Christian terms used? Do they risk distorting certain words because of their own bias against or disapproval of conversion?

OFPRA's director points out that interpreters are bound by a "strict code of ethics" and have received "awareness-raising and (other) training". In addition, "the recording of all interviews" are "available in case of a dispute".

The Ordinariate for Catholics of the Eastern Churches in France is trying to help improve the handling of these complex cases and has offered assistance, again based on UNHCR recommendations.

"Refugee status determinations based on religion could also benefit from the assistance of independent experts with particularized knowledge of the country, region and context of the particular claim and/or the use of corroborating testimony from other adherents of the same faith," UNHCR guidelines state.

But OFPRA's management, so far, has declined the Ordinariate's offer to help.

"Our information, documentation and research division already mobilizes many external resources to refine our knowledge of countries of origin," says Boucher, OFPRA's director.

"As for testimonials, we take them into consideration, but assess their probative value," he adds.

Photo : The family during Mass in a Catholic church in Tehran. (Photo by ATTA KENARE/AFP)

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## **News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in January**

HRWF (04.02.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7906/> - Human Rights Activists (HRA) in Iran have published their "[Annual Statistical Report of Human Rights Conditions in Iran](#)". A section is devoted to the persecution of members of religious minorities and illustrated by maps, tables and pie charts. Here is an excerpt of their report:

"In this category, 136 reports have been registered by the Department of Statistics in 2020. According to these reports, 77 arrests, 49 cases of prevention from economical activities, 126 cases of summon by the judicial and security institutions, and 22 cases of depriving and preventing from education, and 69 cases of police home raids, has taken place.

98 individuals of the religious minorities were sentenced by the judicial institutions to a total of 4351 months of imprisonment. Additionally, the ministry of cultural heritage of Tehran and the Municipality of Tehran demolished the Adventist church of Tehran in the past year.

In the field of religious minorities, the Baha'is constitute the highest of the Human Rights reports on religious minority violations with 45%, Sunnis 26%, Christians 15%, Dervishes 4%, Jews and Yarsans 1%, and others 9%, of the total reports. Note that

the reports labeled as "Others" are those that did not belong to a specific group of religious minorities.

The number of citizens arrested in the category of religious minorities has decreased by 42 % in 2020 compared to 2019, and the imprisonment sentences issued by the judiciary has increased by 28.9 %."

What follows is not part of this report but is a compilation of facts gathered from various sources by *Human Rights Without Frontiers*.

## **Baha'is**

### **Touraj Amini begins his six-month sentence**

HRANA (30.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3cEbG8s> - On January 29, Baha'i researcher and author Touraj Amini was summoned to the Prosecutor's office and taken to Karaj Central Prison, near Tehran, to begin his six-month sentence. He was originally sentenced by the Revolutionary Court in Karaj to one year in prison and two years of exile from the city, but this was reduced by the Alborz Provincial Review Court. On August 4, 2019, security forces searched his home, seizing books and notes and a laptop.

His books include one on the role of religious minorities in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911; "The Hidden Awakening", on the relationship between Iranians intellectuals and the Babi and Baha'i Faiths; a five-volume collection of source documents relating to the Baha'is in Iran, and a volume of "Documents of Contemporary Zoroastrians of Iran."

For more information: <https://bit.ly/3roUuIt>

### **Three Baha'is sentenced in Tehran**

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (29.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2YGk3Z5> - Mrs. Marvash `Adaalati `Ali-Abaadi, who in previous reports was named as Mahvash `Adaalati-Za'iri, Mrs. Sepideh Keshavarz and Mr. Farid Ismaa`ili have been sentenced to three years and seven months in prison by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran. They were tried around January 1 this year.

The Judge, Muhammad-Reza Amouzad, issued his verdict on January 10, but the accused were only informed in the past few days. This sentence refers to the charge of "collusion intended to undermine national security by conducting Bahai activities." They were also found guilty of "propaganda against the regime in the form of teaching and spreading the Baha'i Faith," and sentenced to eight months. However, if the sentences are confirmed by the Review Court, they will serve only the longer sentence.

The home of Mrs Mahvash `Adaalati-Za'iri in Tehran was searched by security forces for three hours on November 20, 2018, with the seizure of Baha'i books and other personal effects, and she was summoned to Evin Prison for interrogation on November 26, and arrested after two hours of interrogation. Interrogations continued in the following days, and she was released on bail on November 29.

The home of Farid Ismaa`ili was raided on the same day. Agents seized his mobile telephone, laptops and books and images relating to the Bahai Faith. They left a summons requiring him to report to Evin Courthouse in Tehran. According to the latest



HRANA report he was released on bail the following day: I have no previous record of that.

### **Mazhdeh Eqteraafi and Houshmand Taalebi bailed at last**

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (24.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3pM6SIk> - Mazhdeh Eqteraafi and her husband Houshmand Taalebi, Bahais from Vilashahr, were released from prison in Isfahan on January 24. They have been detained since August 23, 2020. After their arrest, officers went to the Baha'i 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 were also confiscated. During their interrogation, they were charged with propaganda against the regime and links to foreign governments.

### **Sufeya Mobini's sentence reduced to five years**

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (21.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/36CsusE> - In an unusual step, a Revolutionary Court in Tehran has reduced the sentence of Sufeya Mobini, from ten years to five years. This is not a Review, but the correction of an administrative error within the Revolutionary Court system.

Her sentence, and Negin Tadrissi's five-year sentence in the same case, will still be considered by the Provincial Review Court, which reviews all the findings of the Revolutionary Courts, and often reduces the sentences. The accused are usually free on bail until the Review Court has spoken. The correction in this case was made by Judge Muhammad-Reza Amouzad. The initial 10-year sentence, handed down by the notorious Judge Moqayeseh, was based on Article 498 of the Islamic Penal Code, which provides for a maximum of 'only' five years' imprisonment for "acting against national security" [i.e., commemorating a birth that took place 200 years ago !

Mrs Mobini and Tadrissi were arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence in October 2017, during the bicentenary celebration of the Birth of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet Founder of the Baha'i Faith.].

The precise charges in this case are "acting against national security by administering the Bahai organisation and promoting its teachings." In his ruling, Judge Moqayeseh had also accused them of paying the tuition for an Afghani student to attend language classes, of giving counselling regarding behavioural, sexual and economic awareness, and of writing in a personal journal that "the people in this region need education."

### **Two more Baha'is barred from universities**

Hrana/ Sen's Daily (18.01.2021) - In two separate items, HRANA has reported that Mahsa Foruhari, a Baha'i student from Karaj, and Sima Fattaahi-Mirshekaarlu, a Baha'i studying in Urmia (Urumiyyeh), have been barred from tertiary education because of their Bahai beliefs.

Ms. Foruhari registered for the tenth consecutive year for entrance to tertiary education with exemption from the University Entrance examination. This exemption is available to those with good academic records, and her average was just over 19 [out of 20, presumably]. Nevertheless, she was rejected for "incomplete file" - the usual term used when students are excluded because of Baha'i beliefs. After the most recent University Entrance examination, HRANA reported 21 other cases of Baha'is excluded from university for "incomplete file."

Ms. Fattaahi, who began a Master's degree in International Law at Urmia Azad University about two years ago, received a message on the university website on January 17, saying that she was barred from defending her dissertation and continuing postgraduate studies because of her adherence to the Bah'ai Faith. This message refers to a letter dated December 29, 2019 regarding the exclusion of Baha'i students and the expulsion of Ms. Fattaahi. The report does not explain who wrote the letter, but the image caption says it is from the "Security Office," the on-campus branch of the the Ministry of Intelligence. Presumably it was addressed to the University, who had no choice but to obey.

## Christians

### Iranian Christian group 'dismantled' for 'creating moral deviations'

Article18 (25.01.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7717/> - An Iranian news agency linked to the Revolutionary Guard Corps has reported the arrest of a "network" of Christians in "several provinces" for "creating moral deviations" and "promoting [religious] conversion".

According to the [report](#), published by Fars News Agency on Saturday, the "Zionist" group was "dismantled" in a coordinated operation, though there is no indication of the number of Christians arrested, nor when or where the arrests took place.

The report accuses "Christian-affiliated networks" of "extensive" efforts against Iran's national security over the past two years.

There are currently [at least 15](#) Christians in prison in Iran for alleged "actions against national security" – because of their membership or leadership of house-churches.

### Mary Mohammadi told she can't have old job back, arrested again

Article18 (21.01.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7699/> - Iranian Christian convert Fatemeh (Mary) Mohammadi has been arrested again – this time for alleged "improper" hijab – and continues to be denied employment a year after her latest release from prison.

The 22-year-old was arrested by Iran's "morality police" on Monday, 18 January, and told her trousers were too tight, her headscarf was not correctly adjusted, and she should not be wearing an unbuttoned coat.

Mary has already spent six months in prison as a result of her membership of a house-church – recently [labelled](#) by the Iranian regime as "enemy groups" belonging to a "Zionist" cult – and was last year given another [suspended prison sentence](#) for participating in a peaceful protest.

Mary says she has been unable to return to her work as a gymnastics instructor since her [release](#) from prison in February last year, despite good relations with her employer.

For more information: <https://bit.ly/2NZCAxn>

### Iran denies persecuting Christians, calls house-churches 'enemy groups'

Article18 (20.01.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7675/> - Iran has denied systematically persecuting Christians and called house-churches "enemy groups" of a "Zionist cult", in response to a formal enquiry by six senior UN rights experts.

In a letter dated 11 November but only **made public** after Iran failed to respond within the 60-day deadline, the experts\* – including the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, and special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman – expressed "serious concern" over "numerous" reports of "continued systematic persecution" of Christians, "particularly discriminatory practices and violations of their human rights".

Iran has since written a **response**, denying the accusations and claiming "nobody is prosecuted on religious grounds". Instead, Iran says it has taken legal action against members of "enemy groups" and "private churches" (house-churches), which it accuses of belonging to a "Zionist Christian cult" with "anti-security purposes".

The rapporteurs name 24 Iranian Christians reported by organisations including Article18 to be either currently in prison or awaiting summons, and include details of each case.

### **Iran ranks eighth in global persecution of Christians**

Article18 (14.01.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7669/> - Iran has risen to eighth place in the latest annual listing of the 50 countries in which the persecution of Christians is most prevalent.

The **2021 World Watch List** was published yesterday by international Christian charity Open Doors. North Korea, Afghanistan and Somalia top the list, as they did last year. Iran was ranked ninth last year.

According to the new list, Eritrea and Yemen are ahead of Iran, with Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Saudi Arabia ranking 11th to 14th, respectively.

"The Iranian government sees the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as an attempt by Western countries to undermine the Islamic rule of Iran. Christians from a Muslim background are persecuted the most. Secret house-churches are often raided, and their leaders and members have been arrested and given long prison sentences for 'crimes against national security'," Open Doors' report states.

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## **German FoRB Commissioner calls for an end to persecution of Baha'is in Iran**

**Iran Press Watch (03.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3rpRFHb> - German MP and Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion Calls for an End to the Discrimination and Persecution of Bahá'í Communities in Iran**

**Press release (15 January)**

**On World Religion Day on 17 January 2021, Markus Grubel, Member of the German Parliament and Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom**

***of Religion, calls for an end to the discrimination and persecution of Bahá'í communities in Iran:***

**“I call on the Iranian government to recognise the Bahá'í as a religious community and to respect the rights of all religious and faith minorities. Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians and other communities, too, must be able to live according to their beliefs in freedom. Conversion, which carries the threat of the death penalty, must be decriminalised. Freedom of religion or belief is a universal right that applies equally for all people.”**

*World Religion Day is observed annually on the third Sunday of January. The day was initiated in 1950 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í in the United States and is now celebrated around the world by the Bahá'í and other religious communities. The focus of the celebration is the common ground of the world's religions. People of all religions are called upon to remember their shared values of respect and tolerance, and to work for peace and justice in the world.*

Markus Grübel:

“In a world in which religions continue to be misused for conflicts and in which religious minorities in many places are subjected to repression by the state and by society, World Religion Day is an important sign for constructive cooperation between and with the religions. The Bahá'í community in Iran has been subjected to discrimination and systematic persecution by the government ever since it first came into being in 1844. Unlike Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, the Bahá'í are not recognised by the predominantly Shi'ite government. They are not permitted to practise their faith publicly and they suffer arbitrary arrests and torture. Their educational institutions and prayer houses are often attacked and even destroyed. Children are intimidated, access to higher education is denied to the Bahá'í.

Since January 2020, citizens have to use a new form when applying for an identity card in Iran. Since then, members of religious minorities that are not officially recognised are no longer able to state their religious affiliation on their identity cards. This means that the Bahá'í and other minorities face the choice of either not applying for an identity card – and being denied the possibility of participating in public life – or of denying their faith by declaring a different belief on the application form.

The political, economic and societal discrimination of the Bahá'í has further intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. The community reports that arrests, displacement and expropriation of property have been increasing. In August 2020, an administrative court confirmed a judgement which described Bahá'í ownership of land in the village of Ivel in northern Iran as “illegal”.

Markus Grübel

Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion,

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<https://www.bmz.de/religionsfreiheit/>

