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## **Three Baha'i women began serving their prison sentence in December**

HRWF (28.12.2021) – According to IranWire that **Parisa Sadeghi (Vahdati)**, a Baha'i citizen living in Tehran, has reported Evin Prison to serve her 6-month sentence

This Baha'i citizen was arrested by Ministry of Intelligence agents at her home on 18 October 2017, during a celebration of the 200th birthday of the founder of the Baha'i Faith. Parisa Sadeghi (Vahdati), was released on bail from Evin Prison after 25 days of temporary detention.

Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, presided over by Judge Moghiseh, sentenced Ms. Sadeghi (Vahdati), to five years' imprisonment on charges of running and membership in the Baha'i community, and up to one year 's imprisonment and a total of six years' imprisonment for sharing information about the Baha'i Faith.

Following a retrial in Branch 36 of the Court of Appeals, the sentence was commuted to five years 'imprisonment, and Ms. Sadeghi (Vahdati), was acquitted of propaganda charges. Finally, te Court of Administrative Justice reduced her sentence to six months' imprisonment.

**Mitrabandi-Amirabaadi-Baaghi and Heyva Yazdaan-Mahdiabaadi** were arrested on 13 December and taken to prison in Yazd to begin their 8-month sentences. They were convicted of "propaganda against the regime" because of their Bahai beliefs. They were arrested on 30 May 2021. In July 2021 the Revolutionary Court in Yazd, presided over by Judge Reza Javad Musavi sentenced them to two years and eight months in prison for membership of anti-regime groups, and to eight months in prison for propaganda against the regime. Only the propaganda accusation was upheld by the Provincial Review Court, in November this year.

*Photo : "Parisa Sadeghi to serve six months in prison"- Source: Iran Press Watch.*

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## **Give Persian-speaking Christians a #place2worship!**

Article18 (09.11.2021) - <https://bit.ly/33820k4> - Article18 has partnered with nine other Christian organisations in today sending a joint letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, asking her to seek answers from the Iranian regime to the question of "where Persian-speaking Christians can gather to worship freely without risking harassment and imprisonment on excessive charges".

In the letter, the full text of which can be read below, we also ask High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet to call for the "unconditional release of Christian prisoners of conscience currently incarcerated or exiled for peacefully practising their religious belief", and "an end to the ongoing crackdown on house-churches, their leaders and attendees".

As we point out in the letter, Persian-speaking Iranian Christians – comprising both converts to Christianity and Assyrian and Armenian Christians who wish to worship in the national language – currently have no place where they can worship collectively, in violation of both Iran's constitution and international law.

"The majority of Persian-speaking churches of all denominations have been forcibly closed in recent years," we note. "Only four small ones remain, which are kept under tight surveillance by the authorities. And these churches are also not allowed to accept visitors or take on any new members."

Meanwhile, the Iranian authorities do not permit Christian converts to attend the churches of the Armenian and Assyrian communities, and these communities are themselves prohibited from holding services in Persian to further dissuade converts from attending.

This means the only option available to Persian-speaking Christians is to worship in private homes, in what have become widely known as “house-churches”. However, the Iranian regime views membership of a house-church as an ‘action against national security’, punishable by up to five years in prison.

Meanwhile, the establishment or directing of these house-churches – also considered a ‘national security’ offence – carries a penalty of up to 10 years’ imprisonment.

*The full text of the letter can be read below. Meanwhile, you can sign our [petition](#) for all Persian-speaking Christians to be given a #place2worship, and see all the latest updates about our campaign [here](#).*

Ms Michelle Bachelet  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneva 10  
Switzerland

9 November, 2021

### **Persian-speaking Iranian Christians have no place where they can worship collectively**

Dear High Commissioner Bachelet,

We are a group of Christian organisations, united in our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and our desire to see human rights afforded to all, in Iran and internationally.

We write to solicit your urgent intervention on behalf of Persian-speaking Christians in Iran, whose enjoyment of the right to the freedoms of religion or belief (FoRB) and expression are being [violated comprehensively](#), as they currently have no place where they can gather to worship. This group includes converts to Christianity from a Muslim background, as well as ethnic Armenian and Assyrian Christians who wish to worship in the national language (Persian), as many do not speak or understand any other language.

The majority of Persian-speaking churches of all denominations have been forcibly closed in recent years, and only four small ones remain, which are kept under tight surveillance by the authorities. These churches are also not allowed to accept visitors or take on any new members.

The Iranian authorities do not permit converts to attend the churches of the Armenian and Assyrian communities, whose rights are recognised under the country’s Constitution. Moreover, these communities are themselves prohibited from holding services in Persian

to further dissuade converts from attending. This means the only option available to a Persian-speaking Christian is to worship in private homes, in what have become widely known as “house-churches”. However, the Iranian regime views membership of a house-church as an “action against national security”, punishable by up to five years in prison. The establishment or directing of these house-churches – also considered a “national security” offence – carries a penalty of up to ten years’ imprisonment.

Thus, gathering peacefully in community with others to manifest one’s religious belief, as articulated in international human rights conventions, has been labelled a “security”-related offence, and Christians are increasingly arrested merely for gathering together for prayer or Bible studies.

In 2020 alone, there were [at least 115](#) known separate instances of the authorities targeting Christians for the peaceful exercise of their religious belief in which a total of 237 individuals were targeted, and combined prison sentences of 147 years (1,760 months) were handed down. So far in 2021, at least 53 Christians have been arrested, and many more await imminent court hearings. At present, at least 17 Christians targeted on account of the peaceful practice of their religious belief are serving sentences of between two to 10 years. Two more are in state-ordered internal exile, having already spent years in prison.

In November last year, senior UN figures including special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, and special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javid Rehman, [wrote](#) to Iran about the reported “persecution of members of the Christian minority in Iran, including converts from Islam, as well as the detention of dozens of Christians, most of whom have been convicted for exercising their right to freely observe and worship their religion”. That same month, the UN’s working group on arbitrary detention [concluded](#) that Iran was guilty of arbitrary detention in the case of Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, a Christian convert serving a ten-year prison sentence – later reduced to six years – for leadership of a house-church.

Earlier this year changes were made to Articles 499 and 500 of Iran’s Islamic Penal Code – relating respectively to membership or organisation of “anti-security groups” and “propaganda against the state” – which provide even greater scope for the authorities to bring charges against members of unrecognised religious-minority groups, such as Persian-speaking Christians, on [spurious and ambiguous grounds](#).

Persian-speaking Christians are now [wondering](#) where they can freely gather to worship. Their appeal for freedom of worship, expression, association and the right to peaceful assembly also addresses a wider issue shared with other religious communities who are similarly experiencing violations of FoRB and associated rights and freedoms. Consequently, improvements in the human-rights situation for Persian-speaking Christians would also benefit other minority religious and ethnic communities, such as Baha’is, followers of Erfan-e-Halgheh (Inter-Universalism), Jews, Mandaeans, the non-religious, Sufi Muslims such as Gonabadi Dervishes, Sunni Muslims, Yarsanis, and Zoroastrians.

Iran is a signatory without reservation to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which in Article 18 provides for the right to worship and the right to adopt a religion or belief of choice. Persian-speaking Christians are being denied enjoyment of their very basic rights under the ICCPR. Additionally, Iran’s own [Constitution](#), per Article 13, considers “Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians,” regardless of their ethnicity, gender and language, as “recognised religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious

education." Thus, Iran is in clear contravention of its obligations under both international law, as well as the protections within its own Constitution.

**We would be grateful if you would kindly use your good offices to make representations to the Iranian authorities, requesting:**

1. Clarification on where Persian-speaking Christians can gather to worship freely without risking harassment and imprisonment on excessive charges.
2. The unconditional release of Christian prisoners of conscience currently incarcerated or exiled for peacefully practising their religious belief.
3. An end to the ongoing crackdown on house-churches, their leaders and attendees, and to all raids, arrests, prosecutions, imprisonments, and other forms of mistreatment against them.

We thank you for your vital work in promoting and protecting human rights in countries around the world, and for your time and consideration of this correspondence.

With our best wishes,

Article18  
CSW  
Middle East Concern  
Open Doors International  
International Christian Concern  
Release International  
Church in Chains  
Stefanus Alliance International  
Prayer Pioneers  
Steadfast Global

*Photo : The Central Assemblies of God Church in Tehran, which was forcibly closed in May 2013.*

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

### **Baha'is**

**Pedram Abhar's House searched while he remains detained in unknown detention center**

Iran Press Watch (26.11.2021) - On Tuesday, November 23, security forces raided and searched Baha'i citizen **Pedram Abhar's** house in Tehran. On November 21, security forces arrested Pedram Abhar at his father's home in Shiraz.

According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, at the time of arrest, they also searched the house and confiscated several family belongings such as identity cards, passports, cell phones, pictures and books related to the Baha'i faith. While Baha'i citizen, Pedram Abahar is still in detention in an unidentified detention center, his house in Tehran was searched by security forces again on Tuesday.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Pedram `Abhar arrested in Shiraz**

Hrana / Sens Daily (23.11.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/AYhZts6> - **Pedram `Abhar** a 37-year-old Baha'i from Shiraz, was arrested on November 21. He works as a private tutor of English. He was driving from Shiraz to Bushehr and stopped for a few minutes' rest in Dast-e Arzhan (a village, but also the name of the area which is a bird sanctuary). As he was about to return to his car, he was surrounded by several unmarked cars, detained, and returned to his parents' house in Shiraz, which was searched. He and his family were then interrogated (presumably in the house). The agents seized birth certificates, ID cards and passports, phones, laptops and several hard drives. He was formally arrested and taken away. He is the 18th Baha'i arrested in Shiraz since April this year.

### **Victims of State oppression defy Iranian government's denial of the right to mourn**

Iran Press Watch (26.11.2021) - The right to mourn is a human right, yet totalitarian regimes have long tried to deny this right to families who've lost loved ones from state oppression. Public mourning can expose and embarrass regimes that seek to silence dissent, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is no exception.

In Iran, a well-known example of families being denied the right to mourn can be seen in the state's enforced ban on those wishing to mourn their loved ones in south Tehran's Khavaran Cemetery.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Tehran 'stepping up hate campaign' against Baha'i minority**

Iran Press Watch (26.11.2021)- CHICAGO: The Iranian regime has sanctioned a "campaign of hate" to fuel public animosity against the country's Baha'i religious community, Baha'i officials told Arab News.

Anthony Vance, Baha'i public affairs director in the US, said Iran has adopted laws that target its 300,000 Baha'is, barring them from universities and public sector employment, as well as confiscating their property and arresting their leaders.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **US Congress introduces resolution condemning State-sponsored persecution of Iran's Bahai's**

Iran Press Watch (19.11.2021) - The US House of Representatives is preparing to vote on a draft resolution condemning the state-sponsored persecution of the Baha'i community of Iran in a bipartisan move.

Voices are mounting in Congress criticizing these violations against the Baha'i community.

The Iranian regime and its affiliated militias, like the Houthis in Yemen, are accused of persecuting the Baha'is.

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### **Baha'i Citizen Shiva Khalili arrested and released on bail in Babol**

Iran Press Watch (17.11.2021) - On Tuesday, November 16, Baha'i citizen **Shiva Khalili** was arrested after being summoned and appearing at Branch 1 of the Public and Revolutionary Court of Babol.

According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, Khalili was released the following day on a bail of 700 million tomans until the end of legal proceedings. Shiva Khalili, a resident of Babol in Mazandaran Province, was summoned to the Revolutionary Court of Babol by phone.

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## **Christians**

### **Iran's Supreme Court rules Christians did not act against national security**

Article 18 (25.11.2021) - Iran's Supreme Court has ruled that nine Christian converts serving five-year prison sentences for their involvement in house-churches should not have been charged with "acting against national security", in what has the potential to become a landmark ruling.

While the ruling is not enough on its own to set an official "precedent", nevertheless it has the potential to influence all current and future cases involving Persian-speaking Christians.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Disregard of the human dignity of refugees in Germany**

Article 18 (10.11.2021) - A new report by a Christian charity in Germany is highly critical of its immigration service for failing to recognise the testimony of pastors when considering the claims of asylum-seekers professing to be Christian converts, the majority of whom are Iranian.

The report by Open Doors Germany, released in German in October and now in English, found that since 2017, of 5,207 Christian converts who received certificates from pastors

testifying to the integrity of their faith – 3,081 of whom were Iranian – 2,045 subsequently saw their asylum claims rejected.

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### **Christian converts told to return to prison**

Article 18 (09.11.2021) - Christian converts **Sasan Khosravi** and **Habib Heydari** have been summoned back to prison to serve the remainder of their one-year sentences for “propagating against the Islamic Republic by promoting Christianity”.

The two Christians have been on furlough since March, having only begun their sentences in February, but have now been told they must return to Bushehr Central Prison by Thursday, 11 November, to complete their sentences.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Give Persian-speaking Christians a #place2worship!**

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In the letter, the full text of which can be read below, we also ask High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet to call for the “unconditional release of Christian prisoners of conscience currently incarcerated or exiled for peacefully practising their religious belief”, and “an end to the ongoing crackdown on house-churches, their leaders and attendees”.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Christian converts summoned to begin prison sentences for ‘deviant propaganda’**

Article 18 (08.11.2021) - Three Christian converts have been summoned to begin three-year prison sentences for “engaging in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam”.

**Amin Khaki, Milad Goodarzi and Alireza Nourmohammadi** will be the first Christians sent to prison under the newly amended Article 500 of the penal code, which ARTICLE 19, an organisation dedicated to the protection of freedom of speech, has called “a full-on attack on the right to freedom of religion and belief”.

[Continue reading...](#)

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## **News about Baha’is and Christians in Iran in October**

**Baha’is**



### Four Baha'is bailed in Shiraz

Hrana / Sens Daily (27.10.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/RR8sztv> - **Mo`in Mithaaqi, Negaareh Qaderi, Haayedeh Forutan** and her son **Mehran Mosallanezhad** were freed on bail on October 26. The first two were arrested in Shiraz on September 22, and Mrs. Mosallanezhad and her son on October 27. They were taken to Facility 201 — run by the city Police, rather than the Ministry of Intelligence — and held in solitary confinement for their interrogations. Bail was set at 800 million tumans each, which (if it is not a mistake for rials) is unusually high: 164,000 euros or \$US 190,000.

### Appeal of the Baha'is of Ivel against expropriations rejected

Hrana/ Sens Daily (22.10.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/JR8d6xd> - An appeal by the Baha'is of the village of Ivel against the state seizure of their lands and homes has been rejected, without a hearing or a reason. **Mohammad-Hadi `Erfaaneyaana-Kaas**, a lawyer for the judiciary, announced on September 21 that he had decided not to allow a retrial. A lawyer acting for the Baha'is had lodged a request for a new hearing on February 23 this year.

The village has been the scene of severe anti-Bahaism. The Baha'i population of the village was expelled after the 1979 revolution, and some at least of the properties were confiscated. Many of the Baha'is fled to the city of Sari, but some continued to farm land and pick fruit, without living in the village. In 2010, about 50 Baha'i-owned homes were demolished.

### Latest in a series of raids on Baha'i homes in Shiraz

Hrana/ Sens Daily (18.10.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/KR8fnNd> - On October 16, agents from the Ministry of Intelligence in Shiraz raided the home of **Soroush Abaadi** and **Nora Momtaaziyaan**, their fourth raid on this home in the space of two years. Because of the previous raids, there was little to find in the house, but they took away Mrs. Momtaaziyaan's mobile telephone and some pieces of paper. Mrs/ Momtaaziyaan has been summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence's Facility 100 for interrogation, on October 21. Mrs. Momtazian's father, **William Momtaaziyaan**, lives in the same block of apartments. His apartment was searched on April 7 this year, when agents seized a computer hard drive, mobile telephones, electronic equipment and Baha'i books.

At around 10 am on October 16, agents rang his doorbell and were admitted to the lobby, but they went unannounced to the apartment of Mr Abaadi and Mrs Momtaaziyaan. Mr. Abaadi was not home, and the agents had no female officer with them, but they entered and searched the home, and gave Mrs. Momtaaziyaan a summons. Mr. Abaadi was arrested on October 21, 2019, and the home was searched at that time with the seizure of all electronic devices and some personal effects. He was arrested again on April 6, 2021, and books and electronic devices were again confiscated. He was released on bail on May 8 2021. I do not have a record of the fourth raid on this home that HRANA mentions: it may be the raid on the apartment of Mrs. Momtaaziyaan's father, or perhaps my records are incomplete.

### Optician in Qaemshahr fired for Baha'i beliefs

Hrana / Sens Daily (17.10.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/pR8gmbJ> - Six years ago, the optician's business of **Soheil Haqdust** in Qaemshahr was closed down by the authorities

because he had taken a free day to observe a Baha'i Holy Day. He went to work in the office of an ophthalmologist in the city, but has now been fired because the Republican Guard put pressure on his employer. Then he was arrested, on the accusation that he had spread information about the closure of his shop, and the businesses of other Baha'is in the Province of Mazandaran. After four days he was freed on bail, and the Revolutionary Court of Sari later sentenced him to one year in prison for "propaganda against the regime." The Provincial Review Court reduced this to four months, but in February 2019 he was among those pardoned on the anniversary of the triumph of the 1979 Revolution.

### **Arsalaan Yazdaani bailed in Tehran (updated)**

Hrana / Sens Daily (16.10.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/0R8jQ5p> - **Arsalan Yazdani**, a Baha'i living in Tehran, was released on bail on October 16 after 45 days in detention. He was arrested on September 1, in a raid on the family home, and taken to Evin Prison. The agents also seized some personal effects. On September 30, agents raided his parents' home and seized more personal belongings. On October 6, an order was issued for the return of some of the materials that had been seized, including their own and their childrens' laptops and mobile phones.

IranWire later reported that when the agents searched the couple's home, they did not find any Baha'i books, but he had a collection of old (non-Baha'i) books that belonged to his mother. One of these was a life of **Hazrat-e Abbas**, meaning the martyr Al-Abbas ibn Ali, who was martyred in Karbala in the year 689. Being an old book (dating from pre-inflation days!) it had the price printed on the cover: "Bahaa (price): 57 Rials." The arresting officer thought that "Bahaa" was the same as Baha'i.

### **Shayda Taa'id released on bail**

Hrana / Sens Daily (16.10.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/kR8hKcq> - **Shayda Taa'id**, a Baha'i from **Qaemshahr**, was released on bail on October 4. Bail was set at 900 million tumans (18,400 euros ; \$US 21,400). She was arrested in her home on September 23 this year. Agents searched her home and seized her mobile phone, electronic devices, books, photographs and writings. She has been imprisoned for her faith before: on January 21, 2013 she was arrested, and three years later was sentenced to one year in prison. She served that sentence in Babol Prison. My information is that she was also arrested in 2010, when she was living in Sari (a short distance from Qaemshahr): I do not know what the outcome of that arrest was.

### **Mo'in Mohammadi paroled**

HRANA/ Sen's Daily (15.10.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/WR7wx1Y> - **Mo'in Mohammadi**, a Baha'i from Yazd, has been told he will serve the remainder of his sentence on parole. 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. On May 6 this year he was summoned to the punishments implementation office and told he must report to prison within 10 days.

### **16 Baha'i students excluded, & a short history of discrimination**

HRANA/ Sen's Daily (07.10.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/SR7wRdd> - IranWire has a short history of the various disguises used to exclude Baha'i students from tertiary education in Iran. Since the results of the 2021 national entrance exams were announced in late September, Baha'i students who obtained passing grades and went to the education assessment site found they were under "General Disqualification." Because of his or her faith, a Baha'i student does not meet one of the general conditions set out for the 2021 entrance exam.

The first paragraph of these general conditions states that the student is required to follow Islam or one of the religions recognized in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. The report lists 16 Baha'is known to have been barred from entering university in this way: Nora Motlagh, Leva Motlagh, Sepehr Nikki, Ava Shahriari, Nora Nabipour, Mesbah Misaghi, Foroutan Rahmani, Rosa Mokhlesi, Nasim Shahriari, Farhan Shizadi, Elena Qolizadeh Roshankoochi, Mahsa Forouhari, Forouzan Nikokar, Parsa Charkhand, Lena Kamjoo and Emilia Hakimian.

### **Christians**

#### **UN told: 'Don't forget Iran's persecuted Christians'**

Article 18 (29.10.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9495/> - Article18 has partnered with seven other organisations to ask senior UN figures not to forget Iran's persecuted Christians in future reports about the human rights situation in the country. In their letters sent at the end of October to the UN's secretary-general, António Guterres, and the special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman, they asked that in all future reports they "include specific reference to the main victims of FoRB [freedom of religion or belief] violations", including Christians. See their well documented letters [here](#).

#### **Christian prisoners of conscience ask: 'Where can I worship after I'm released?'**

Article 18 (27.10.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9468/> - Three Iranian Christians serving long prison sentences for their membership of a house-church have written a joint letter and recorded video statements, asking where they should worship once they are released.

As the three Christians, **Babak Hosseinzadeh**, **Behnam Akhlaghi**, and **Saheb Fadaie**, point out, the churches of Iran's recognised Christians of Armenian and Assyrian descent are not permitted to welcome Persian-speaking Christians like them, so their only option is to worship in their homes in what have become known as "house-churches".

#### **Christian convert denied parole – he never applied for it**

Article 18 (25.10.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9449/> - An Iranian Christian convert who has spent more than three years in Tehran's Evin Prison for leading a house-church was told yesterday he has been denied parole for a second time – despite never applying for it.

**Zaman (Saheb) Fadaie**, who is 40 years old, has been in prison since July 2018, serving what was initially a 10-year sentence, later reduced to six years has consistently refused to apply for conditional release, saying he cannot accept the condition of no further involvement with a house-church.

### **Christians summoned to Tehran prosecutor for final defence**

Article 18 (20.10.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9422/>  
Five Iranian Christians who were among dozens arrested during coordinated raids on house-churches in three cities last year were summoned on 16 October to give their final defence before a Tehran prosecutor.

The charges included: "weakening the foundation of the family", "attracting Muslims to house-churches", "being members of hostile groups to the Islamic Republic in order to damage national security", "weakening the belief in Muslim clerics", "propagating Christian Zionism", and "establishing and organising corrupt meetings". They denied all the charges.

### **Christian convert released on bail after a month's incommunicado detention**

Article 18 (04.10.2021) - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9337/> - **Ayooob Poor-Rezazadeh** (28), a Christian convert detained incommunicado for almost a month following his arrest by agents of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps has finally been released from custody, albeit only on bail.

He was one of three Christians arrested on the evening of Sunday 5 September in the northern city of Rasht – two at a house-church service, and the third at his home.

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

### ***HRWF Digest***

#### **Baha'is**

### **Baha'i students again barred from tertiary education in Iran**

Hrana / Sens Daily (26.09.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/9EC61QY> - HRANA reports the case of **Nasim Shahyaari-Zavaareh**, an 18-year-old Baha'i from Tehran who was successful in the University Entrance examinations, but has been barred from university because of her Baha'i beliefs. On the web site of the National Assessments organisation, her profile has the word "rejected," a shift from previous years when the words "file incomplete" were used. A number of other Baha'i students have also received the message "rejected." When Miss Shahyaari followed up on her rejection, she was told that the Ministry of Intelligence had tagged her. She was then asked about her beliefs and her

family's beliefs, and told, "I cannot do anything: if you insist you are a Baha'i your problem probably cannot be solved."

### **Shayda Taa'id arrested in Qaemshahr**

Hrana/ Sens Daily (25.09.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/6EVq39R> - **Shayda Taa'id**, a Baha'i living in Qaemshahr, was arrested in her home on September 23. Agents searched her home and seized her mobile phone, electronic devices, books, photographs and writings. They initially put her elderly mother, Farideh Ta'ed in their vehicle as well, but then unloaded her in the middle of the road. It is not known where Mrs. Taa'id is being detained.

### **Haayedeh Forutan (Mosallanezhad) and her son arrested in Shiraz**

Hrana/ Sens Daily (24.09.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/8EVw9h7> - **Haayedeh Forutan** and her son **Mehran Mosallanezhad** were arrested in Shiraz on September 23, after responding to a summons to the office of the Ministry of Intelligence. On the previous day, agents raided the home **Mo`in Mithaaqi** and **Negaareh Qaderi** and arrested them, and raided the home of Mrs Forutan and seized some personal effects, but they were unable to arrest her as she was not home.

### **Kiaana Sho`aai and Soroush Abaadi sentenced in Shiraz**

Hrana / Sens Daily (22.09.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/uEVeHPX6> - **Soroush Abaadi** and **Kiana Sho`aai** have been sentenced by a Revolutionary Court in Shiraz to 31 months and 16 days in prison and a 2-year ban on leaving the country. The Judge in that court is Mahmud Saadaati. The trial was held on September 12. They were charged with "membership in anti-regime groups with the intention of undermining national security." They were also given a concurrent sentence of 7 months and 16 days in prison on a charge of "propaganda against the regime in cyberspace." In the case of Mrs. Sho`aai, 30 months of her sentence has been suspended for a period of five years, which probably means that — given the time already in detention — she will not have to go to prison, but will have to report to the Ministry of Intelligence every month for five years. Mrs. Sho`aai was first tried on May 15, 2021, but her case was referred back to the Prosecutor's Office for revision.

Mr. Abaadi and Mrs. Sho`aai were arrested by Intelligence agents in Shiraz on October 21, 2019, along with Farzaan Ma`sumi. 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. Mrs. Sho`aai was released on bail on November 6, 2020, and Mr Abaadi was bailed on December 1.

Soroush Abadi 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, 2021. was released on bail of 800 million tumans (156,000 euros ; \$US 190,000) on May 8 this year.

### **Baha'i cemetery vandalized in the village of Kata**

Hrana / Sens Daily (09.09.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/YEVrP5X> - Buildings in the Baha'i cemetery in the village of Kata, Dana County, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, have been vandalized. A video obtained by HRANA shows that the walls, bathroom and toilet were extensively damaged overnight. It is not clear from the video whether

machinery was used to knock down the walls, or what has happened to the roof, if there was a roof. It seems likely that the building was under construction.

### **Arsalaan Yazdaani arrested in Tehran**

Hrana / Sens Daily (04.09.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/iEVyCz4On> - Wednesday, September 1, **Arsalan Yazdani**, a Baha'i living in Tehran, was arrested by security agents in a raid on the family home. His wife **Samira Ebraahimi** has recounted the events of the raid, and disputed a report on social media that the agents were armed. It is not known which security agency conducted the raid, or where Mr. Yazdani is being held. The full story in english on [Iran Wire](#). The Persian report [is here](#).

## **Christians**

### **Iran: Two converts freed on bail, one still missing**

MEC (22.09.2021) - Iranian Christians are thankful that **Morteza Mashhoudkari** and **Ahmad Sarparast** have been released from prison, but concerns remain for their friend **Ayoub Poor-Rezazade** whose location is still unknown.

Morteza (38), Ayoub (28) and Ahmad (25) were arrested in Rasht on 5 September and taken to security offices for interrogation. On 18 September Morteza and Ahmad were transferred to Lakan Prison in Rasht. Iranian intelligence informed Ayoub's family that he had also been taken to the same prison, but Morteza and Ahmad said that Ayoub was not there. His present location is still unknown to Ayoub's family and friends.

On 21 September Morteza and Ahmad were granted release on 400 million tomans bail (about US\$ 15000). Charges against them are not clear at this point, but in court the recently amended penal code Articles 499 and 500 were mentioned.

Article 499 imposes prison sentences and fines for insulting "divine religions or Islamic schools of thought recognized under the Constitutions with the intent to cause violence or tensions in the society." Article 500 penalizes those who conduct "any deviant educational or proselytizing activity that contradicts or interferes with the sacred law of Islam."

### **Iran: Convert summoned to serve three-year sentence**

MEC (13.09.2021) - Iranian Christians request prayer for Milad Gourdazi who has to present himself by September 21 to start serving his prison sentence.

On 11 November 2020, Iranian intelligence agents raided the homes of **Milad Goodarzi**, **Amin Khaki** and **Alireza Nourmohammadi**, as well as the homes of several other converts, 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 – which they refused to do.

Following a hearing in Karaj Revolutionary Court in June, Amin, Milad and Alireza were each handed down the maximum five-year prison sentence under the recently amended



Article 500 of the penal code for “propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam” and fined 40 million tomans (approx. US\$1600).

At an appeal hearing on 25 August, the convictions were upheld, but the prison sentences reduced to three years each.

Milad is the first of the three to receive a prison summons, but it is assumed that Amin and Alireza will shortly be summoned as well.

### **New arrests and threats as pressure increases on Rasht Christians**

Article 18 (06.09.2021) - Three Christian converts were arrested last night in the northern city of Rasht, in the latest blow to the beleaguered Christian community there.

**Ahmad Sarparast, Morteza Mashoodkari, and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh** were arrested at around 10pm – two at a house-church meeting, and another at his home – and are now being held in an unknown location.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Iranian Christian among prisoners to be ‘adopted’ by UK parliamentarians**

Article 18 (01.09.21) - Iranian **Christian Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh** will be one of the first four prisoners of conscience to be “adopted” by UK parliamentarians as part of a new initiative to highlight abuses of religious freedom around the world.

Nasser and the three others – Vietnamese Buddhist **Nguyễn Bắc Truyền**, Nigerian Christian **Leah Sharibu**, and Nigerian humanist **Mubarak Bala** – will be adopted by members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, who will advocate on their behalf.

[Continue reading...](#)

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## **News about Baha’is and Christians in Iran in August**

*HRWF Digest*

### **Baha’is**

#### **One-year sentences confirmed for Ataa-ollah Zaffar and Abbaas Taa’ef in Tehran**

Hrana / Sens Daily (30.08.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/kWQQHBD> - The Review Court for Tehran Province has upheld the one-year sentences of **Mr. Ataa-ollah Zaffar** and **Abbaas Taa’ef** They were both arrested on September 27, 2019, following home raids by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence. They were charged with undermining national security by leading and participating in the Baha'i sect. It appears that the home raids, in Tehran and Karaj, related to Baha'i burials in Tehran, where Mr. Zaffar was involved with a Baha'i cemetery. Mr. Taa’ef was freed on bail on November 25, 2019; I do not know when Mr. Zaffar was bailed.

The Review Court judge was Seyyed Ahmad Zargar, with Counsellor `Abbas`Ali Houzaan. The verdict was dated July 6.

### **Ali Ahmadi begins prison term in Qaemshahr**

Hrana/ Sens Daily (29.08.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/vWQWe8j> - On August 26, `Ali Ahmadi was arrested and transferred to Qaemshahr Prison to serve a one-year sentence. He was arrested on November 20, 2018, by agents who insulting his religious beliefs and calling him "unclean" and "Baha'i dog." They also seized some religious books mobile phone and computer. He was freed on bail on January 2, 2019, after posting bail of 150 million tumans (31,000 euros ; \$US 35,000). He was sentenced to 11 years of prison for "spreading propaganda against the state and managing a Baha'i organization." The Review Court for Mazandaran Province reduced this to one year of prison.

He has been arrested several times in the past decade or so. On the first occasion he was sentenced to 10 months in prison, and on the second occasion he was acquitted. In 2011 he was arrested with two others and charged with participation in Baha'i activities. He suffers from diabetes, heart problems, and thyroid illnesses.

### **Dorsa Dehqaani free on bail**

Hrana/ Sens Daily (08.08.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/RWQWQz6>- **Dorsa Dehqaani** who was arrested at Shiraz railway station on June 14, was released on bail on July 1. In 2014, when she was 19 years and had just been barred from tertiary education because of her Baha'i beliefs, Miss Dehqaani wrote a letter to Saadeq Laarijaani, who was at that time the head of the Judiciary in Iran, protesting against the discrimination and oppression suffered by the Baha'is in Iran.

### **Saanaaz Notqi sentenced in Ahvaz**

Hrana / Sens Daily (02.08.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/ZWQWG1T> - **Saanaaz Notqi**, a Baha'i from Ahvaz, has been sentenced to five years in prison by a revolutionary court there. Her arrest and detention were not previously reported on Sen's Daily. The 5-year sentence relates to the charge of "membership of the illegal Baha'i organisation." She also received a concurrent 8-month sentence for "propaganda against the regime." The trial was held on July 17, 2021. I do not know the date of her arrest, or further details.

## **Christians**

### **Christian convert given leave from prison**

Article 18 (27.08.2021) - Christian convert **Hamed Ashouri** has been released on leave from prison.

Article18 understands that the 31-year-old, who is serving a 10-month sentence for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic", may be permitted to spend the rest of his sentence at home, with an electronic tag.



At least two other Christian converts have been released with electronic tags so far this year, in what appears to be an increasing trend.

He was arrested by Ministry of Intelligence agents as he left his home in Fardis on the morning of 23 February 2019.

He was then taken to Rajaei Shahr Prison in Karaj, where he was held in solitary confinement for 10 days, before being transferred to Ghezel Hesar Prison, also in Karaj, for another two days.

During interrogations, Hamed was offered a large monthly salary if he “cooperated” by becoming an informant against other Christians.

When he refused, he was beaten.

Hamed was finally released on bail after submitting guarantees in the form of payslips.

The case against him was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but Hamed was eventually sentenced in April 2021 following a court hearing a month earlier at the 4th Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Karaj.

He was summoned to begin his prison sentence after the failure of his appeal on 26 June. Hamed was initially told to submit himself to prison within 10 days of his failed appeal, but he was later given a few weeks longer.

### **Christian converts' sentences reduced but appeals rejected**

Article 18 (27.08.2021) - Three Christian converts were informed today that their appeals against five-year prison sentences have been rejected, but their sentences reduced to three years.

Amin Khaki, Milad Goodarzi and Alireza Nourmohammadi were given the maximum five-year prison sentences in June for “engaging in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam”. They were also each fined 40 million tomans (\$1,800).

They were the first Christians convicted under controversial new amendments to Article 500 of the penal code, which came into force earlier this year.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Intelligence agents 'refusing to return Christians' property'**

Article 18 (26.07.2021) - Intelligence agents in the southwestern city of Dezful are reportedly refusing to hand back the personal belongings of four Christian converts recently charged with “propaganda against the Islamic Republic”, despite being ordered to do so by the court.

The lawyer for the four men, Iman Soleimani, told Mohabat News that the Christians cannot afford to purchase replacement items, and that several of the items, such as phones and computers, are “urgently needed” for their children ahead of the new academic year.

The four Christians – Esmail Narimanpour, Alireza Varak-Shah, Mohammad Ali (Davoud) Torabi, and Mohammad Kayidgap – were charged on 3 August at the 4th branch of the prosecutor's office of the Civil and Revolutionary Court of Dezful.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **'If you won't recant your faith, you're no longer my sister!'**

Article 18 (13.08.21) - When Arina's brother came to visit her in prison, he told her that if she refused to give up her Christian faith, he would no longer consider her his sister. Like her interrogators before him, Arina's brother told her she had been "deceived" into converting to Christianity and said he felt guilty for not supporting her enough through her divorce.

Arina replied: "I have been a Christian for three years now, and I am active in the church. My faith isn't an emotional reaction to what I've been through. I have come to faith as a result of personal research, and I'm not willing to give it up."

Arina, whose full name is Fatemeh Zarei, was one of half a dozen Christian women arrested during a raid on a house-church leader's meeting in Shahinshahr, near Isfahan, in February 2013.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Christian convert fitted with electronic tag**

Article 18 (09.08.21) - Christian convert Reza Zaeemi was yesterday released from prison, on the condition he wears an electronic tag for the remainder of his nine-month sentence.

He is also banned from leaving the country for two years following the completion of his sentence.

Reza has spent 80 days in detention overall, including just over two months in Karaj's Central Prison since starting his sentence there on 2 June.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Four more Christian converts charged with 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic'**

Article 18 (04.08.21) - Four Christian converts from the south-western city of Dezful are the latest Iranian Christians to be officially charged with "propaganda against the Islamic Republic".

The charge was read out to Esmail Narimanpour, Alireza Varak-Shah, Mohammad Ali (Davoud) Torabi, and Mohammad Kayidgap at the 4th branch of the prosecutor's office of the Civil and Revolutionary Court of Dezful yesterday.

Meanwhile, the lawyer for the four men, Iman Soleimani, told Article18 that while the other four Christians who are part of the same case – Hojjat Lotfi Khalaf, Alireza Roshanaei Zadeh, and Mohsen Saadati Zadeh – have not yet been officially charged, he has "no doubt" that they too will be summoned to the next Revolutionary Court hearing.

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

### HRWF Digest

#### Baha'is

##### Touraj Amini released from jail in Karaj

Hrana / Sens Daily (29.07.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/gQjjjJs> - Baha'i researcher and author **Touraj Amini** was released from Karaj Prison on July 28 after serving a six-month prison sentence. In June, 2020, he was sentenced by the Revolutionary Court in Karaj to one year in prison and two years of exile from the city, but this was reduced to a six-month sentence by the Review Court. He was charged with "propaganda against the regime."

On August 4, 2019, security forces searched his home, seizing books and notes and a laptop. Mr. Amini was previously detained for a short time, in March 2008. 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'is Faiths, and a five-volume collection of source documents relating to the Baha'is in Iran.

##### Four Baha'is sentenced by a Revolutionary Court in Yazd

Hrana/ Sens Daily (21.06.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/uQjkq9Y> - A Revolutionary Court in Yazd, presided over by Judge Reza Javad Musavi has sentenced four Baha'is to two years and eight months in prison for membership of anti-regime groups, and to eight month in prison for propaganda against the regime.

**Amin Dhulfaqari** was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on May 21, and released on bail on June 23. He was accused of teaching the Baha'i Faith. **Mahbubeh Mithaaqiyaan-Dehqaan** was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on June 1, and bailed on June 16, 2020. **Mitra Bandi-Amirabaadi-Baaghi** and **Heyva Yazdaan-Mahdiabaadi-Bahifar** were arrested on May 30, and released on bail on September 1 after three months of detention.

Mrs. **Bani-Mahdiabadi** and Mrs **Yazdaan-Mahdiabaadi** had also been arrested in late November, 2017, for teaching music to children. The report says that both were given suspended sentences, which have expired, but does not indicate when this occurred.

##### Sina Kamali Sarvestaani bailed in Shiraz

Hrana/ Sens Daily (11.07.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/yQjkSr6> - **Sina Kamali Sarvestaani**, who was arrested in Shiraz on June 15, was released on bail on July 11. After his arrest, he was taken first to a detention centre run by the intelligence arm of the Republican Guard. A short time later he was transferred to Adelabad prison. On July 3 he was permitted telephone contact with his family from Adelabad prison.

##### Four Baha'is released in Bushehr

Hrana / Sens Daily (05.07.2021) – <https://cutt.ly/TQjlf0> - **Mrs. Minou Reyaazati, Ehteraam Shakhi, Farideh Jaaberi** and **Mr. Asadollah Jaaberi**, Baha'i prisoners in Bushehr prison, were recently given furlough and have now been told they will not be required to return to prison. They were among seven Baha'is sentenced to three years in prison and a two-year ban on leaving the country by a Revolutionary Court in May 2019. These four Baha'is began their sentences on January 25, 2020. They were charged with "membership in the Baha'i group and sect with the intent of disrupting national security."

All seven were arrested in raids on Baha'i homes in Bushehr on February 2018. They were released on bail six weeks later, and tried by the Revolutionary Court in May, 2019. Their sentences were confirmed by the Provincial Review Court in November, 2019.

## **Christians**

### **Christian convert begins prison sentence for 'propaganda against Islamic Republic'**

Article 18 (28.07.2021) - Christian convert Hamed Ashouri has begun his 10-month prison sentence for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic".

The 31-year-old submitted himself to Karaj's Central Prison yesterday. Before doing so, he recorded a short video, in which he explained that he had been arrested for his Christian activities.

Hamed was arrested by Ministry of Intelligence agents two and a half years ago as he left his home in Fardis on the morning of 23 February 2019.

He was then taken to Rajaei Shahr Prison in Karaj, where he was held in solitary confinement for 10 days, before being transferred to Ghezel Hesar Prison, also in Karaj, for another two days.

During interrogations, Hamed was offered a large monthly salary if he "cooperated" by becoming an informant against other Christians.

When he refused, he was beaten.

Hamed was finally released on bail after submitting guarantees in the form of payslips.

Hamed and another family member were then forced to attend "re-education" sessions with an Islamic cleric.

After four such sessions, Hamed refused to participate in any more, and it was then that the court proceedings against him began.

He was summoned to begin his prison sentence after the failure of his appeal on 26 June. Hamed was initially told to submit himself to prison within 10 days of his failed appeal, but he was later given a few weeks longer.

## **Christians summoned to answer charges of 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic'**

Article 18 (23.07.2021) - Eight Christian converts in the southwestern city of Dezful have been summoned to answer charges of "propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran". The eight Christians – Hojjat Lotfi Khalaf, Esmail Narimanpour, Alireza Varak-Shah, Mohammad Ali (Davoud) Torabi, Alireza Roshanaei Zadeh, Masoud Nabi, Mohammad Kayidgap, and Mohsen Saadati Zadeh – were summoned on Tuesday, 20 July, to appear at the 4th branch of the prosecutor's office of the Civil and Revolutionary Court of Dezful within five days.

Four of the men – Hojjat, Esmail, Davoud, and Alireza Varak-Shah – were arrested in April and released two days later, after signing statements pledging to appear when summoned.

The charges against the eight men fall under Article 500 of the Islamic Penal Code, one of two articles controversially amended earlier this year.

It is not yet clear whether the charges against the eight Christians will contain the new phrasing of Article 500, but this was the case when three Christian converts in Karaj were given the maximum sentences of five years in prison last month for "engaging in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam".

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

Article 18 (16.07.2021) - An Iranian human rights lawyer says the latest move by the judiciary to stifle the independence of lawyers shows the presence of "even a small number of human rights defenders is intolerable for the judiciary".

Hossein Ahmadieniazi, who now lives and works in Europe, was speaking to Article18 after new regulations were introduced last month, giving the judiciary the power to issue and revoke lawyers' licenses – a power until now held by Iran's independent Bar Association. "For 42 years, the Iranian judiciary has been trying to undermine the relative independence of the Bar Association and gain more control over it," Mr Ahmadieniazi explained.

"All the efforts and goals of the Iranian judiciary are to suppress independent lawyers and human rights defenders. The judiciary itself has become a tool of repression and violation of the law of advocacy."

[Continue reading...](#)

## **'Just because I'm Christian, I'm deprived of any promotion'**

Article 18 (13.07.21) - An Iranian-Assyrian Christian claims he was denied a promotion and received much less compensation than he was entitled to after an injury at work – only because he is a Christian.

"Farough" told IranWire that after losing three fingers due to a lack of safety provisions at his factory, "they were supposed to do an expert examination and pay me

[compensation], but when I was paid, I realised that the amount I received was much lower based on the fact that I was a religious minority”.

He added that when he returned to work, he was offered an office job due to his injury, so he decided to get a university degree to further his career; but after gaining a degree in business management – in an attempt to secure a promotion – Farough says a Muslim colleague was promoted instead of him.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **Iran’s recognised Christians – the unlikely allies of the Islamic Republic**

Article 18 (06.07.21) - The Iranian state propaganda machine continues to use the country’s recognised Christian minority groups – of Armenian and Assyrian descent – as tools to speak out against the rise of evangelical Christianity in Iran.

The latest example is a video published yesterday by Roshangar Media – which introduces itself as a “centre for the study of religions and sects” – in which senior Armenian and Assyrian representatives distance themselves from Iran’s burgeoning house-church movement, denounced by the regime as “enemy groups” of a “Zionist cult”.

“We do not encourage people to change their religion,” says Iranian-Armenian Catholic archbishop Sarkis Davidian in the video. “People must remain in their religion.”

[Continue reading...](#)

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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’i 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 Dehqaani arrested in Shiraz

Hrana/ Sens Daily (14.06.2021) - <https://cutt.ly/DmaKd7f> - Late in the day of June 14, security forces arrested **Dorsa Dehqaani** 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 Dehqaani who, in 2014, was barred from entering university because of her Baha'i 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 Sarvestaaniin** 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 siezed 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 motorcross — have been banned from being present at motorcross tracks, participating in competitions, and practicing or teaching motorcross 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 Baha'is 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/Knrx3Gi> - 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 Keshavarz** 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 Rastinejad** 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](#), Mozghaan 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/tnve7Oe> -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/RnvtTk> - **Soroush Abadi, 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 Mohammadi** 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 Baha’is 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 Baha’i 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 Kohgiluyeh 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 Rastinejaad**, **Sanaaz**

**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. Houshan 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 Noghmeh 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 Baha'is 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, Esmaeil 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](#)

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## 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 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. One report adds that the officers demanded that those present should sign undertakings not to participate in Baha'i 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 Zhaveh**, 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.baha'i.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 Falahul 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/3q6GbgF> - A Review Court has confirmed the sentences of eight Baha’is 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 Baha'i 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 Baha'i 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 Nasseri, 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 Nasseri 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 **Noghme Dhabihayan, Nakisa Hajipour, Nika Paakzaadan, 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 Baha'is 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 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."

## **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](#)) 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.

OFPRA 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, OFPRA 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 OFPRA'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 Baha'i 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 Baha'i 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, Baha'is 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 Tadrise'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 Tadrise 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 Baha'i 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 Baha'i 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 Grübel, 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

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