

Table of Contents

- ***Convert begins four-year prison sentence for 'spreading Christianity'***
- ***Iranian churches get behind #Place2Worship campaign***
- ***Nine Christian converts conditionally released following Supreme Court ruling***

Convert begins four-year prison sentence for 'spreading Christianity'

Article 18 (11.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/32fNEy0> - Christian convert Hadi (Moslem) Rahimi has begun serving his **four-year prison sentence** for "acting against national security" by attending a house-church and "spreading 'Zionist' Christianity".

The 32-year-old delivery driver, who has a nine-month-old daughter, handed himself in to Tehran's Evin Prison on Sunday morning (9 January) so that the property deed submitted by a friend to secure his bail may be released.

Moslem was one of four Christian converts to **receive sentences** in August 2020 of between two and five years in prison.

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

Their appeals were rejected in September 2020.

The other Christians remain free on bail, for now.

Background

The four Christians, all members of the non-Trinitarian "Church of Iran", were first arrested in February 2020.

In May 2020, they spent a week in Lakan Prison in Rasht, having been **unable to afford** the 500 million toman bail (\$30,000) set for them after the charges against them were read out at Branch 10 of the Revolutionary Court in Rasht.

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

Ramin and Kathrin have two sons – one of whom was 16 when they were taken to prison and forced to look after himself for the week – and the other was just seven and therefore went to stay with his grandfather.

Photo : Article 18

Iranian churches get behind #Place2Worship campaign

Article 18 (14.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3qFaloA> - Iranian-speaking churches in the diaspora have added their voice to the call for Persian-speaking Christians to be given a place to worship.

The [#Place2Worship](#) campaign was launched late last year in response to a question from three Christian prisoners of conscience, who [asked](#) where they might worship once they were released, having been imprisoned for gathering together in house-churches because converts to Christianity are not permitted to attend the churches of Iran's recognised Christian minority of ethnic Armenians and Assyrians.

This campaign has been supported by numerous former prisoners of conscience, and now has the support of 33 churches from 10 different countries – the UK, USA, Canada, Turkey, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Austria, Norway, and Georgia.

Their joint statement, and the list of signatories, can be read below:

Statement by Iranian churches in support of the #Place2Worship campaign

We, the leaders of Persian-speaking churches outside Iran, in unison with imprisoned Christians, have a simple question for the authorities of the Islamic Republic: "Where can a Persian-speaking Christian worship?" and not risk imprisonment.

We also join Article18 in noting that Persian-speaking Christians are not only deprived of a church but are also arrested by security agents when they gather in their homes to pray and read the Bible. So not only have these citizens been deprived of their freedom of thought, religion and community, but they and their families are not even safe at home.

The Iranian government has not stopped at closing churches; it has even turned the worship of Christian converts into a security issue, by confiscating their Bibles and sentences these citizens to long prison terms.

In the last four decades, Persian-speaking churches have been closed and many imprisoned Christian leaders have been forced to flee, and some have even been killed.

Deprivation of a church is the tip of the iceberg of structural discrimination and systematic repression against Persian-speaking Christians.

The government does not recognise the Persian-speaking Christian minority, depriving them of their basic human rights and rights as citizens. In the view of the Islamic Republic, the hundreds of thousands of Christian converts have no formal existence and are nothing more than ghosts.

So standing together with the #Place2Worship campaign, we call on the Iranian government to stop persecuting Persian-speaking Christians, to recognise the human rights and citizenship rights of this minority, and to allow them to have a church.

We note that according to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory, "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

We also call on all Iranians to stand by Christian citizens in this campaign and not to leave them alone in their campaign for freedom of belief.

Iranian Church, San Jose, California, USA
New Life Church, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Naviderahaie, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Eternal Life, Cologne, Germany
Anchor of Hope, Tbilisi, Georgia
Crown Church, Essen, Germany
Word of Love, Eindhoven, Netherlands
Ambassadors of Christ Church, California, USA
Church on the Rock, Toronto, Canada
Emmanuel Iranian Church, Québec, Canada
The Spirit of God Church, Bremen, Germany
Zwolle and Apeldoorn 222 Church, Germany
Yalova Iranian Church, Turkey
Assemblies of God Church, Denizli, Turkey
Almere 222 Church, Almere, Netherlands
The International Church of the Cross, Oslo, Norway
Richmond Hill Iranian Church, Canada
Iranian Christian Fellowship (Chiswick), London, UK
North London Iranian Church, London, UK
Croydon Iranian Church, London, UK
East London Iranian Church, UK
Armenian Christian Fellowship, London, UK
St Aphrahat Iranian Church, Manchester, UK
Liverpool Iranian Church, UK
Brighton Iranian Church, UK
Glasgow Iranian Church, UK
Iranian Christian Church, Stuttgart, Germany
New Life Church, Oslo, Norway
Iranian Church of Gothenburg, Sweden
Hamgaam Iranian Church of Vienna, Austria
Linz Iranian Church, Austria
Hamgaam Iranian Church of Linz, Austria
Disciples Church, Toronto, Canada

Photo : St Luke's Anglican Church in Isfahan, one of just four Persian-speaking churches still permitted to operate inside Iran, but not allowed to take on new members. Article 18

Nine Christian converts conditionally released following Supreme Court ruling

Article 18 (01.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3HYUvLz> - Nine Christian converts serving five-year prison sentences for their involvement in house-churches have been conditionally released from prison, pending a review of their case.

The nine men were informed on Wednesday 29 December that they would be released on or before the New Year.

The first of the men, Abdolreza Ali Haghnejad, was released from Anzali Prison the following day, 30 December, and the remaining eight were released from Tehran's Evin Prison earlier today.

Their conditional release follows a [Supreme Court ruling](#) in November, in which the judges questioned the legality of their conviction and affirmed that "merely preaching Christianity, and promoting the 'Evangelical Zionist sect', both of which apparently means propagating Christianity through family gatherings [house-churches], is not a manifestation of gathering and collusion to disrupt the security of the country, whether internally or externally".

This decision followed the launch of a campaign, [#Place2Worship](#), which was inspired by two of the nine men, Behnam Akhlaghi and Babak Hossainzadeh, who during a short furlough in October had recorded videos and wrote an open letter to the Iranian authorities asking, "Where can we, as Persian-speaking Christians, worship once we have finished serving our prison sentences?"

All nine men – [Abdolreza Ali Haghnejad](#), [Shahrooz Eslamdoust](#), [Behnam Akhlaghi](#), [Babak Hosseinzadeh](#), [Mehdi Khatibi](#), [Khalil Dehqanpour](#), [Hossein Kadivar](#), [Kamal Naamanian and Mohammad Vafadar](#) – are members of the non-Trinitarian "Church of Iran" from the northern city of Rasht.

They were arrested during raids on their homes and house-churches in January and February 2019, and each [sentenced](#) to five years in prison in October 2019 by Judge Mohammad Moghiseh, who has earned the nickname the "Judge of Death" for his harsh treatment of prisoners of conscience.

The Supreme Court verdict issued on 3 November had paved the way for their immediate release – until a Revolutionary Court had time to reconsider their case and issue a fresh judgment – however for unknown reasons their release was delayed until now.

Their temporary release is not related to a recent directive of the judiciary to give a 10-day furlough to Christian prisoners over the Christmas period, as prisoners convicted of "acting against national security", or sentenced to more than five years, were not included in the directive.

Photo : Clockwise from top-left: Shahrooz Eslamdoust, Mehdi Khatibi, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Hossein Kadivar, Mohammad Vafadar, Abdolreza Ali Haghnejad, Behnam Akhlaghi, Khalil Dehghanpour, Kamal Naamanian – Article 18
