

Table of Contents

- ***A Tehran court sentences seven Christians, including a clergyman, to a total of 32 years in prison***
- ***News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in May***
- ***Second Iranian Christian woman began prison sentence on Easter Saturday***
- ***Christian woman convert begins two-year prison sentence***
- ***News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in March***
- ***Database of Baha'i prisoners***
- ***News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in February***
- ***News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in January***
- ***Convert begins four-year prison sentence for 'spreading Christianity'***
- ***Iranian churches get behind #Place2Worship campaign***
- ***Nine Christian converts conditionally released following Supreme Court ruling***

A Tehran court sentences seven Christians, including a clergyman, to a total of 32 years in prison

Rev Joseph Shahbazian gets 10 years in prison, plus other penalties, including a ban on travelling abroad. Two converts get six years, while four other Christians can pay a fine to avoid jailtime. During the trial, the presiding judge, Iman Afshari, subjected the defendants to pressures, threats and humiliation.

AsiaNews (08.06.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3xiMCMZ> - An Iranian court has sentenced an Iranian-Armenian Christian clergyman to 10 years in prison. Along with him, two women converts from Islam were also given a six-year sentence for their role in house churches.

The court decision against Joseph Shahbazian and the two converts (*pictured*) came yesterday, this according to *Article18*, an advocacy group that documents religious oppression in Iran.

Four other Christians – Salar Eshraghi Moghadam, Farhad Khazaei, Somayeh (Sonya) Sadegh and her mother Masoumeh Ghasemi – were also given sentences ranging from one to four years but were also offered the option of paying fines ranging from US\$ 800 to US\$ 1,250 each in order to stay out of prison.

In total, the seven Christians were sentenced to 32 years in prison. However, the fate of Rev Joseph Shahbazian, 58, and the two converts – Mina Khajavi, 59 and Malihe Nazari, 48, is different. All three will have to go to prison following the sentence imposed on 29 May by Judge Iman Afshari, head of the 26th Branch of the Tehran Revolutionary Court.

The harshest sentence was imposed on Rev Shahbazian. In addition to his 10-year prison sentence, the Iranian-Armenian clergyman will serve two years of internal exile in a remote province in south-eastern Iran.

After his release, he faces a two-year ban on travelling abroad or membership in any political or social organisation, and must report to Iran's intelligence service for two years on an unspecified "seasonal basis".

In reading the verdict, Judge Afshari, who is building a reputation for convicting Christians, stressed that the clergyman "established a group to attract Muslims" and "under the cover of religious programmes for prayer has propagated Evangelical Christianity".

The judge accused the Christian pastor of engaging in "illegal activities and unfounded claims" and so "abused people's inner weaknesses and attracted some of them" to "his group".

Local sources report that, during a trial that lasted no more than four hours, Judge Afshari tried to put pressure on the two women defendants with the promise of a lighter sentence if they blamed Rev Joseph of cajoling them into converting.

Faced with their refusal, he threatened to increase their sentences. Using "harsh and sarcastic language", he tried to "humiliate them and denigrate their beliefs". When the defendants' lawyer objected, he replied that he was "only joking."

The crackdown against this group of Christians is but the latest in a long series. Last month, another court imposed a 10-year sentence on another Iranian-Armenian, **Anooshavan Avedian**, for "propaganda contrary to and offensive to the holy religion of Islam".

Experts and activists are increasingly worried about the escalating **violations of religious freedom**, which are also affecting Baha'is, Sufis, Sunnis and atheists.

Local sources report blatant violations of the right to defence, with insults against people and their religion during trials, as well as "confessions" extorted by force or deception during imprisonment.

In recent years, Iranian authorities have arrested thousands of Christians who worship in house churches with hundreds convicted on charges of "action against national security".

All this refutes claims by the Iranian government and its diplomats that Christians enjoy religious freedom and the right to worship in their churches and dedicate themselves to their own activities.

News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in May

Baha'is

Sa`ideh Khasousi free on bail in Tehran

Hrana / Sens Daily (25.05.22) - **Mrs. Sa`ideh Khasousi** was released from Evin Prison on bail of 2 billion tumans (44,000 euros ; \$US 47,000) on May 24. She was arrested on April 11.

Amin Dhulfaqaari begins 8-month sentence in Yazd

Hrana / Sens Daily (25.05.22) - **Amin Dhulfaqaaribegan** his prison sentence in Yazd on May 24. Amin Dhulfaqaari was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on May 21, 2021 [but the HRANA report says 2020], and released on bail on June 23. He was accused of teaching the Baha'i Faith. In July 2021 the Revolutionary Court in Yazd, presided by Judge Reza Javad Musavi sentenced him, and three other Baha'is, 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. The Review Court rejected the charge of membership of anti-regime groups and reduced these sentences to eight months.

Sa`ideh Khasousi's interrogation ends after 40 days

Hrana / Sens Daily (24.05.2022) - After over 40 days' detention by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, **Mrs. Sa`ideh Khasousi** has been transferred to Tehran's Evin Prison. Her son Arsalaan Yazdaani reports that she will be released on bail. She was arrested on April 11 after responding to a summons to the court at Evin Prison in Tehran. On May 19 she was allowed a telephone call and told her family she was being (or had been?) transferred to the Revolutionary Guards' interrogation centre "A1". Her son **Arsalaan** was arrested on September 1, in a raid on the family home, and taken to Evin Prison. The agents also seized some personal effects. In another raid on September 30, agents seized more personal belongings, including Mrs. Khasousi's new mobile phone. Arsalaan was released on bail on October 16 after 45 days in detention, however Mrs. Khasousi was summoned to Evin prison in late March, only to be told she should return on April 11, which she did.

Group of 26 Baha'is to stand trial six years after arrests

Iran Press Watch (24.05.2022) - A group of 26 Iranian Baha'is who were arrested almost six years ago in September 2016 were due to appear in court on Wednesday even though a judge has repeatedly called the case against them "incomplete". Prosecutors recently issued a fresh indictment against the 26 and sent the case to Branch 1 of Shiraz Revolutionary Court. The group are variously charged with "propaganda against the regime", "membership in groups opposed to the Islamic Republic", "organizing an anti-regime group" and "connections to hostile governments".

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Sahba Farnoush begins 2-year sentence (reduced from 6 years)

Hrana / Sens Daily (13.05.2022) - **Sahba Farnoush** began serving his two-year sentence in Tehran's Evin Prison on May 11. He was initially sentenced to 16 years, which was reduced to six years by the Review court for Tehran Province. This was appealed to the Supreme Court, which reduced the sentence to two years. His crime was celebrating the birthday of Baha'u'llah. Mr. Farnoush was arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence on November 15, 2015. He was one of 20 Bahai's arrested in Tehran, Isfahan

and Mashhad on that day. Agents from the Ministry of Intelligence also closed down Baha'i-run businesses in the Province of Mazandaran. It appears that the Ministry of Intelligence actions all related to Bahai's commemorating the birth of Baha'u'llah.

RWCHR Statement concerning the confiscation of Bahá'í property in Iran

Iran Press Watch (10.05.2022) - The Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR) strongly condemns the continued confiscation of Bahá'í-owned property by Iranian authorities. Recent reports from the Bahá'í International Community found that groups connected to Iranian leadership are "orchestrating a rising trend of confiscations of properties belonging to Iranian Bahá'ís," including in Ivel, Semnan and Kata, among other localities. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief recently cited property confiscation as a dimension of "state-driven and systematic" persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran.

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Christians

House-church members still detained, families told upcoming appeal doomed

Article 18 (17.05.2022) - Three house-church members already facing five-year prison sentences remain in detention more than a week after they were re-arrested.

Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh and **Ahmad Sarparast** were arrested following raids by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) intelligence agents on their homes on 8 May.

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Ahmad Sarparast, Morteza Mashoodkari, Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh

Article 18 (17.05.2022) - Christian converts Ahmad Sarparast, **Morteza Mashoodkari**, and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh are the second group of Christian converts to have been convicted under the amended Article 500 of the penal code, for "engaging in propaganda and educational activities for deviant beliefs contrary to the holy Sharia", and "connections with foreign leaders". They have been sentenced to five years in prison.

Europe should seek new relationship with Iran grounded on human rights.

Article 18 (13.05.2022) - 'Challenging Minority Discrimination in Iran' was the title of a conference held at the European Parliament in Brussels on Wednesday.

The two-hour discussion was hosted by Italian MEP Fabio Massimo Castaldo, and jointly organised by Minority Rights Group International, The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), and the Centre for Supporters of Human Rights.

The discussion focused on the human rights situation in Iran, the structure of the government's religious ideology, the situation of ethnic minorities, and violations of their rights.

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Converts already facing charges re-arrested in Rasht

Article 18 (09.05.2022) - Four "Church of Iran" members already facing criminal charges relating to the practice of their faith, with two having spent over two years in prison, were re-arrested last night, while a fifth was ordered to hand himself in today.

Behnam Akhlaghi, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Ahmad Sarparast, and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh were arrested at their homes last night by intelligence agents of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and taken to an IRGC detention centre.

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Persian-speaking Christians demand right to work

Article 18 (03.05.2022) Twenty-five Iranian Christians have signed a joint statement highlighting the Islamic Republic's deprivation of Persian-speaking Christians' right to work.

The statement, released on Sunday to coincide with International Workers' Day, says this deprivation is just one of the ways the Islamic Republic has targeted this unrecognised religious minority over the past four decades, with the ultimate aim of its elimination.

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Second Iranian Christian woman began prison sentence on Easter Saturday

Article 18 (28.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/381Da8p> - A second Iranian woman convert to Christianity began a two-year prison sentence on Easter Saturday on charges related to the practice of her faith.

Sakine (Mehri) Behjati handed herself in to the authorities at Evin Prison in Tehran on the same day as [Fariba Dalir](#), and both are now serving two-year sentences on similar charges.

Mehri was later permitted a transfer to Lakan Prison in her home city of Rasht, so she could be closer to her young child.

Who is Mehri Behjati?

Mehri was one of four Christian converts first arrested in February 2020 for their membership of a house-church in Rasht.

The four Christians – also Mehri's nephew [Hadi \(Moslem\) Rahimi](#) and married couple Ramin Hassanpour and Kathrin (Saeede) Sajadpour – were officially charged in May 2020 and [taken to Lakan Prison](#) after being unable to afford the bail set for them – of 500 million tomans (around \$30,000).

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

The Christians were sentenced in August 2020 to between two and five years in prison for “acting against national security” by belonging to a house-church and “spreading Zionist Christianity”. Ramin was given a five-year sentence, Moslem four years, and Mehri and Saeede two years.

Their appeals were rejected in September 2020.

On 9 January 2022, Moslem left behind his nine-month-old daughter to [begin serving his four-year sentence](#) at Evin Prison so that the property deed submitted by a friend to secure his bail may be released.

A month later, the other three Christians were [told](#) they must hand themselves in to the authorities in Tehran by the end of February. However, Mehri was later permitted an additional six weeks at home, in order to be able to spend the Iranian New Year, Nowruz, with her family.

Mehri and her nephew, Moslem, applied to the Supreme Court for a retrial, but their applications were rejected by Branch 9 of Iran’s highest court in February.

Christian woman convert begins two-year prison sentence

Article 18 (16.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3KKmfUZ> - A 51-year-old woman Christian convert today began serving a two-year prison sentence in Tehran’s Evin prison for “acting against national security by establishing and leading an Evangelical Christian church”.

Fariba Dalir, whose case has not been reported until now, was one of six converts arrested in Tehran in July last year, including her fiancé at the time and now husband, Soroush.

Five of the Christians were sentenced in December – Fariba to two years, and the other four, including Soroush, to 10 months for membership of the church.

However, due to time already spent in detention, these four were told they could instead choose to pay fines of 5 million tomans each (around \$250) to escape further imprisonment.

The sixth Christian, a 17-year-old girl, was released without charge, but only after spending 10 days in solitary confinement, and being subjected to intense interrogations in a detention centre of the Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Fariba and Soroush themselves each spent over a month in solitary confinement at the detention centre following their arrests on 19 July 2021 – Fariba at a hair salon, and Soroush while driving his car.

Three of the other Christians, including the 17-year-old and another woman and her daughter, had been arrested at their homes the previous day.

The sixth Christian, a man, was arrested on the same day as Fariba and Soroush, but the names of these other Christians have not been divulged.

After spending around 50 days each in solitary confinement, Fariba was transferred to Qarchak women's prison and Soroush to the Greater Tehran Penitentiary, where they were detained for two months longer, before being released on bail – of 600 million tomans (\$25,000) for Fariba, and 300 million tomans (\$12,500) for Soroush.

The couple married in the months between their release and sentencing, which took place on 4 December 2021 at Branch 26 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court, but now they are apart again.

Fariba was in fact initially sentenced to five years in prison after the court wrongly stated that she had a previous criminal record. Her sentence was later revised once the court was informed of the error.

News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in March

Baha'is

Iranian Baha'is sentenced to 170 years in prison in 1400

Iran Press Watch (31.03.22) - The Iranian calendar year 1400, which ended on March 20, appears to have been one of the hardest in recent years for the country's dwindling Baha'i population. IranWire's surveys indicate at least 36 members of [the Baha'i community](#) were sentenced to jail terms of one to 12 years, totalling 170 years and three months, purely for practising their faith.

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A thousand Baha'is await jail summons in Iran

Iran Press Watch (25.03.22) - More than 1,000 Baha'is in Iran are in a "limbo" between their initial arrests, their legal hearings and their final summons to prison, according to a new statement by the Baha'i International Community (BIC), a situation that is "causing devastation to innocent people's lives".

The statement was delivered by the BIC's representative, Simin Fahandej, by video to the 49th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

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Shahnaaz Saabet resumes prison sentence in Shiraz

Hrana / Sens Daily (16.03.2022) - <https://cutt.ly/aDLP74b> - Shahnaaz Saabet resumed her two-year prison sentence in Shiraz on March 12. She was arrested and informed that the High Court hearing she had requested had confirmed her sentence. She was not present or represented at the "hearing." She began her sentence on October 6, 2020. In May 2021 she was released pending the rehearing, so she has already served seven months. She suffers from a number of illnesses, including back pain and kidney stones. 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.

Baha'i citizen Shahram Najaf-Tomaraei jailed in Evin prison

Iran Press Watch (15.03.22) - Last Sunday, March 13, 2022, Baha'i citizen Shahram Najaf-Tomaraei was sent to Evin Prison to serve his two-year sentence. Earlier, the Revolutionary Court of Tehran sentenced him to two years imprisonment. According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, Baha'i citizen Shahram Najaf-Tomaraei was jailed in Evin prison for sentencing.

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Shahram Najaf-Tumara'i goes to prison in Tehran

Hrana / Sens Daily (14.03.2022) - <https://cutt.ly/wDLPt3r> - Shahram Najaf-Tumara'i, a Baha'i who previously served as one of the Khadamin (area facilitators) for the Baha'is in District 7 in Tehran, began serving a 2-year sentence on March 13. He was arrested on November 27, 2015 and released on bail on December 29. At the time, web sites linked to the regime accused him of espionage. The actual pretext for his sentence is not reported.

UN report decries "criminalisation" and persecution of Baha'is across MENA region

Iran Press Watch (11.03.2022) - A new report and its annex, "Rights of persons belonging to religious or belief minorities in situations of conflict or insecurity", by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Dr Ahmed Shaheed, has highlighted the "increasing insecurity that Baha'i communities experience" in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. The annex is the first time such a document has given exclusive focus to the situation of the Baha'is in several countries.

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Christians

Article18 calls for renewal of special rapporteur's mandate

Article 18 (25.03.2022) - Nine Christian converts who spent a combined nearly 20 years in prison for "acting against national security" and "promoting Zionist Christianity" have been acquitted by a Tehran appeal court.

The ruling by Branch 34 of the Tehran Court of Appeal, issued and communicated to the nine Christians today, comes after a Supreme Court judge [ordered](#) a review of their convictions in November.

[Continue reading...](#)

Article18 joins call for withdrawal of draconian Internet bill

Article 18 (17.03.2022) - Article18 has today joined with over 50 other human rights groups in signing a joint statement calling on the Iranian parliament to immediately withdraw a draconian Internet bill that would violate a plethora of human rights including freedom of expression.

In the statement, a full copy of which is included below, the 55 signatories call on Iran to immediately withdraw the "Regulatory System for Cyberspace Services Bill" in its entirety, and on the international community "to ensure promotion and protection of human rights in Iran is prioritised" in all diplomatic relations with Tehran.

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As the world celebrates Nazanin's release, let's not forget those still in prison

Article 18 (16.03.2022) - After nearly six years' unjust detention, it finally seems as though this is the end of the ordeal for British-Iranian political prisoner [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#) and her family.

But while the world rightly celebrates Nazanin's hard-won freedom, let us not forget those who still remain in detention as a result of equally absurd convictions.

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"They tortured me with their threats"

Article 18 (04.03.2022) - Ehsan Khoshgoo was a university student when he was arrested at a Tehran house-church gathering in November 2015.

When he was released on bail six weeks later, he was told he could no longer study at the university and that if he went back there, he would be arrested and sent back to prison.

By the start of the next academic year, Ehsan had fled the country.

A year later, he was sentenced in absentia to five years in prison.

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Supreme Court summarily dismisses Christian convert's long-awaited retrial bid

Only one day after nine Christian converts were [acquitted](#) of "acting against national security" by worshipping in house-churches, another Christian convert serving a 10-year sentence on very similar grounds has been denied his own retrial.

Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh, who is 60 years old, has served over four years of his [10-year prison sentence](#) for “acting against national security with the intention to overthrow the regime”, due to alleged links to churches and Christian organisations abroad.

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Database of Baha’i prisoners

HRWF (14.03.2022) - As of early March 2022, HRWF Database of Baha’i prisoners contained 53 documented cases. Details about each prisoner can be found [here](#).

LAST NAME	First Name
AGAAHI	Soroush
AHAMADAYI (KHORRAMI)	Atousa
AHMADI	Ali
AMIRABAADI	Mitra
ATRIAN	Shahriar
BAZMANDEGAN	Navid
BOLBOLAN	Afshin
DAANESHGARI	Faraaneh
DAVARDAN	Milad
ESKANDREYAN	Behnaam
FAHANDEJ	Farhad
FARAMARZI	Farrokhlagha/Leqa
FENAA'EYAN	Ardeshir
FIROUZEYAAN	Yalda
GHADERI	Bahareh

GHEDAMIAN	Negin
HAGHIGHAT	Soheila
HAGHIGHAT	Soodabeh
HAKIMI	Niloufar
IZADINIA	Farough
JABERI	Emad
KHOUSHNAM	Houman
MAALEKI	Ataa'ollah
MAALEKI	Ru'ya
MAALEKI	Sa'id
MAANAVI	Parvaan
MAANAVI	Paymaan
MAQSUDI	Samin
MA'SUMI	Farzaan
MOBEINI	Sophia
MOHAMMADI	Arzu
MUHAMMADI	Mo'in
NAEIMI	Adel
NASSERI	Pooneh
NOUZDAHI	Kaviz
PAAKROU	Jamileh
PURMORADIAN	Nora

RAEINEH	Anousheh
SAABET	Farhaam
SAALEHI	Atieh
SADEGHI	Parisa
SAHBA	Farhang
SALMAANZAADEH	Ilham
SALMAANZAADEH	Keyaanush
SAMIN	Maghsoudi
SAMIZADEH	Elaheh
SANI	Ali
SHABAANI	Neda
SHA'BAANI	Payaam
SHAHIDI	Kaamraan
TADRISI	Negin
TAGHIPOUR	Sohrab
YAZDAAN	Heyva

Photo : Fr.dreamstime.com

News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in February

Baha'is

One year imprisonment against Baha'i citizen Shiva Khalili upheld on appeal

Iran Press Watch (24.02.2022) - Recently, the Court of Appeal of Mazandaran Province upheld the initial verdict of one year in prison against Baha'i citizen Shiva Khalili. Moreover, in this verdict, her cell phone, which they ruled has been used as a "crime tool", will be confiscated.

[Continue reading...](#)

Saba Sefidi free on bail

Hrana / Sens Daily (23.02.2022) - <https://cutt.ly/WAw4V0d> - **Saba Sefidi**, a Baha'i from Tehran, was freed on bail from Evin Prison on February 23. Bail was set at 1.5 billion tumans (315,000 euros ; \$US355,000). She was summoned to the court at Evin Prison on January 11, and arrested when she appeared there. Since then, she has had only brief contact with her family. There is no indication of the reason for her arrest and detention.

Naatoli Derakhshaan free on bail

Hrana / Sens Daily (09.02.2022) - <https://cutt.ly/nAw7bNR> - **Naatoli Derakhshaan**, a Baha'i poet, has been released on bail pending his trial. The Public Prosecutor has claimed that he was arrested in relation to membership of a pyramid selling scheme. He was previously arrested by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence on February 21, 2012, and released on bail of 200 million rials (13,000 euros, \$US18,000) on March 27 that year. The charge against him was said to be "propaganda against the regime." He had published an open letter to Ayatollah Khamenei, drawing attention to human rights violations against the Baha'is and others in Iran, the exclusion of Baha'i youth from tertiary education, and the false denials of these facts by Iran's representatives at the United Nations. Mr. Derakhshaan himself is excluded from tertiary education because he is a Baha'i.

Four Baha'i citizens still in detention and awaiting legal process

Iran Press Watch (8.02.2022) Four Baha'i citizens, **Natoli Derakhshan**, **Saba Sefidi**, **Pari Kargarian Marvasti** and **Daniel Bani-Nejad**, are still in detention and awaiting further legal proceedings. On January 11, Derakhshan and Sefidi were arrested in Sari and Tehran cities, respectively. Marvasti and Bani-Nejad were also arrested last week in Marlik District, located in Tehran Province.

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Arrests of Baha'i citizens in Marlik, Tehran

Iran Press Watch (07.02.2022) - **Pari Kargarian Marousti**, **Daniel Bani Nejad**, both Baha'i citizens, along with another citizen, were detained by security forces, while they were together at Ms. Kargarian's home in Marlik, Tehran. They were taken to an unknown location. Security forces raided the home of Ms. Kargarian and confiscated personal belongings, including mobile phones, electronics, pictures, books and works related to the Baha'i faith.

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Sina Shahri bailed in Tabriz

Hrana / Sens Daily (03.02.2022) - <https://cutt.ly/5Aw5ugD> - On February 2, **Sina Shahri** was released on bail in Tabriz, pending his trial. He was arrested on January 17 when agents from the Ministry of Intelligence raided his home, confiscating a number of personal effects relating to the Baha'i Faith, and arresting him. He later told his family by telephone that he was detained in a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre. On January 22, his wife **Negaar Nasiri** was summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence facility in Tabriz known as "Room 37" and questioned for some hours before her release.

Christians

Case closed: Christians' house-church worship was not 'action against national security'

Article 18 (28.02.2022) - Nine Christian converts who spent a combined nearly 20 years in prison for "acting against national security" and "promoting Zionist Christianity" have been acquitted by a Tehran appeal court.

The ruling by Branch 34 of the Tehran Court of Appeal, issued and communicated to the nine Christians today, comes after a Supreme Court judge ordered a review of their convictions in November.

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Iran's Vatican embassy angry at claim Catholic archbishop and nun denied visas

Article 18 (24.02.2022) - The Iranian embassy to the Holy See has reacted angrily to an article on a Catholic website highlighting the challenges faced by Christians in Iran.

In the article, published by AsiaNews on 16 February, Chaldean bishop Thomas Meram of Urmia explained the "many difficulties" faced by the Catholic community in Iran, while it was also noted how the new Catholic archbishop, Fr Dominique Mathieu, had not been able to enter Iran despite his appointment by the Pope early last year, and how a long-serving Italian nun, 75-year-old Sister Giuseppina Berti, was also denied a renewal of her visa.

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'We are just Christians worshipping according to the Bible,' say converts in last defence

Article 18 (16.02.2022) - Three Christian converts facing up to 10 years in prison for alleged "deviant propaganda" and ties with foreign organisations have denied all the charges against them and said they are "just Christians worshipping according to the Bible".

Ahmad Sarparast, Morteza Mashoodkari, and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh, who were giving their last defence this morning at Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court of Rasht, in northern Iran, added that they "have not engaged in any propaganda against the regime or any action against national security".

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Christian converts absolved by Supreme Court now face 'propaganda' charges

Two of the nine Christian converts cleared by a Supreme Court judge of "acting against national security" have now been charged with "propaganda against the state".

Just six weeks after they were released from prison pending a review of their five-year sentences, **Behnam Akhlaghi** and **Babak Hosseinzadeh** were summoned last week to see a Tehran prosecutor, who on Saturday told them to return today with pay slips so they could be officially charged and released on bail.

[Continue reading...](#)

Converts summoned to begin prison sentences for 'spreading "Zionist" Christianity'

Article 18 (09.02.2022) - Three Christian converts from the northern city of Rasht have been summoned to begin serving prison sentences of between two and five years for "acting against national security" by attending a house-church and "spreading 'Zionist' Christianity".

Ramin Hassanpour, his wife Saeede, and another woman, **Sakine (Mehri) Behjati**, have until the end of February to hand themselves in to Branch 1 of the Office for the Execution of Judgments in Tehran's 33rd district.

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UN rapporteur highlights Iran's arrest of Christians 'for practice of beliefs'

Article 18 (10.02.2022) - The UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Iran has reiterated his "concern" at the regime's "continued repression of religious minorities", including arresting Christians "for the practice of their beliefs".

In his latest report, released ahead of the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council later this month, Javid Rehman specifically references the arrest of at least 53 Christians between 1 January and 1 December last year "for the practice of their religious beliefs".

[Continue reading...](#)

News about Baha'is and Christians in Iran in January

Baha'is

Farhaam Saabet and Farzaan Ma`sumi begin 2-year prison terms

Hrana / Sens Daily (26.01.2022) - <https://cutt.ly/mOYKHRJ> - On January 23, **Farhaam Saabet** and **Farzaan Ma`sumi** reported to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz to begin serving their 2-year sentences. Mr Saabet and Ma`sumi were initially sentenced to five years in prison (with an additional one-year concurrent sentence) by Judge Sayyid Mahmud Saadaati, sitting in the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz. The Provincial Review Court reduced this to two years in prison.

Jamaal Afshaar bailed in Ahvaz

Hrana / Sens Daily (22.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3AYVkkV> - **Jamaal Afshaar** was freed on bail from the Central Prison in Ahvaz on January 22. He is the last of seven Baha'is arrested in home raids in Mahshahr on December 27 to be freed. Five of these were questioned and released after a few hours, while Behzaad Afshaar was bailed on January 14.

Negaar Nasiri summoned in Tabriz

Hrana / Sens Daily (22.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3qt5DnT> - On January 22, **Negaar Nasiri** was summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence facility in Tabriz known as "Room 37." Her husband **Sina Shahri** was arrested during a raid on their home in Tabriz last week (the precise day is not specified).

Property of Shayda Taa'id confiscated by Article 49 court

Hrana / Sens Daily (20.01.2022) - <https://cutt.ly/OOYXrJi> - A special court for Mazandaran Province has ruled that the property of **Shayda Taa'id**, a Baha'i living in Nur County, Mazandaran, should be seized and handed to "The Executive Headquarters of the Imam." This organisation, known as **Setad**, is a parastate organization controlled by the Supreme Leader of Iran. It was created from thousands of properties confiscated in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and serves as a front company for the dubious assets of the ruling elite.

Samira Ebraahimi arrested, released on bail

Hrana / Sens Daily (16.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Lc4eQP> - **Samira Ebraahimi** was arrested in Tehran on January 10, after answering a summons, and freed from Evin Prison on bail on January 11. Bail was unusually high, at 800 million tumans (165,000 euros ; \$US 189,000). Mrs. Ebrahimi is the wife of **Arsalan Yazdani**, who was arrested on September 1, 2021, in a raid on the family home. He was detained for 45 days, and then released on bail of one million tumans (200 euros ; \$US 240).

Behzaad Afshaar released, Jamaal Afshaar still held in Ahvaz

Hrana / Sens Daily (15.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3LjnvjA> - **Behzaad Afshaar**, A Baha'i from Mahshahr, in Southwest Iran, was released from Ahvaz prison on bail on January 14, while **Jamaal Afshaar** is still detained in Ahvaz. They were among seven Baha'is arrested in home raids in Mahshahr on December 27. The other five were questioned and released after a few hours.

Baha'i poet Naatoli Derakhshaan arrested in Sari City

Hrana / Sens Daily (12.01.2022) - <https://cutt.ly/mOYVx7P> - On January 11, **Naatoli Derkshaan**, a Baha'i poet, was arrested by intelligence agents at his home in Sari City and transferred to an unidentified location. The reasons for this arrest, the charges against him and his whereabouts are unknown at the time of writing.

Samira Ebraahimi summoned for questioning again

Hrana / Sens Daily (05.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3L7G2Pw> - **Samira Ebraahimi**, the wife of Arsalan Yazdani, has been summoned to the Tehran Revolutionary Court for questioning, for the second time in three weeks. She is due to report to the court on January 8. Her previous questioning was about December 21. Arsalan Yazdani was arrested on September 1, 2021, in a raid on the family home. He was detained for 45 days, and then released on bail of one million tumans (200 euros ; \$US 240).

Seven arrested in home raids in Mahshahr: two still held

Hrana / Sens Daily (02.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3HttFLE> - On December 27, seven Baha'is were arrested in a raid on their home in Mahshahr, in the Southwest of Iran: five were questioned and released, and two have been taken to the city of Ahvaz, capital of Khuzestan Province. They are **Jamaal Afshaar** and **Behzaad Afshaar**. The five who questioned and released a few hours later are **Farideh Farzaaneh, Mehraan Afshaar, A`zam Afshaar, Kiomaarh Afshaar** and **Golnoush Afshaar**. During the raid, some personal effects were seized. Mehraan. A`zam and Golnoush Afshaar were also summoned to return to the Security Agency next day, when they were again questioned and released after a few hours.

Christians

Date set for historic appeal hearing

Article 18 (27.01.2022) - Eight of the nine Christian converts recently released from prison pending a review of their case have been told their appeal will be heard next month.

The eight men – **Shahrooz Eslamdoust, Behnam Akhlaghi, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Mehdi Khatibi, Khalil Dehghanpour, Hossein Kadivar, Kamal Naamanian and Mohammad Vafadar** – were informed yesterday by SMS that their appeal will be heard on 22 February at Branch 34 of Tehran's appeal court.

[Continue reading...](#)

Iran's Supreme Court agrees to review Christian convert's 10-year prison sentence

Article 18 (26.01.2022) - Iran's Supreme Court has finally agreed to review the case of a Christian convert serving a 10-year prison sentence for "acting against national security" through his involvement in a house-church.

Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh has spent the past four years in Tehran's Evin Prison, and during that time has pleaded on numerous occasions for a review of his case, only to be repeatedly refused.

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Iranian Christians decry denial of education to converts and their children

Article 18 (25.01.2022) - A group of Iranian Christian former prisoners of conscience between them sentenced to over 50 years in prison have published a joint statement decrying the denial of education to Persian-speaking Christians in Iran.

The statement, written in Persian, was released yesterday to coincide with the International Day of Education.

[Continue reading...](#)

Annual report: Supreme Court ruling gave hope but Persian Christians still have no #place2worship

Article 18 (25.01.2022) - Two rulings at the end of 2021 offered hope that one day Iranian Christians may no longer be charged with "acting against national security" for simply meeting together to worship in their homes.

[Continue reading...](#)

Isfahan brothers still missing after Christmas arrest

Article 18 (24.01.2022) - Two brothers remain missing more than a month after their arrest at a Christmas gathering near Isfahan.

Mansour Mardani-Kharaji, 42, and his brother **Mahmoud**, 40, were with around eight other Christians at a house-church meeting in Fooladshahr on 22 December when the celebration was raided by plainclothes officials, who showed no warrant and did not state which agency they came from.

[Continue reading...](#)

Christian converts conclude prison sentences, but one now faces exile

Article 18 (20.01.2022) - Two Christian converts have been released from prison at the conclusion of their one-year prison sentences for belonging to a house-church, but one of them now faces two years' exile.

Sasan Khosravi, who is 36 years old, and **Habib Heydari**, who turned 40 just last week, were released from Bushehr Central Prison this morning.

[Continue reading...](#)

Christian convert back in prison just two weeks after release

Article 18 (18.01.2022) - Just two weeks after the release on bail of nine Christian converts, pending a review of their case ordered by Iran's Supreme Court, one of them is already back in prison – thanks to a ruling by a different branch of that same Supreme Court.

[Continue reading...](#)

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

Article 18 (11.01.2022) - 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.

[Continue reading...](#)

Christian converts granted belated Christmas break from prison

Article 18 (4.01.2022) - Three Christian converts serving three-year sentences for "engaging in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam" have been given 10 days' leave from prison after inquiring why they weren't included in the publicised mass furlough of Christian prisoners over Christmas.

[Continue reading...](#)

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 Dehghanpour](#), [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