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## **A couple of Iranian converts under threat of deportation from Belgium**

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (23.08.2022) - Hamid Reza Hossein Khani (42) and Mariam Soltani (38), two converts from Shia Islam to Protestantism, have recently been denied asylum by the Belgian authorities and are under threat of being sent back to Iran where they are at risk of being arrested and sentenced to a prison term for apostasy.

They converted to Christianity about three years ago and are now attending a Protestant Church in Belgium (the United Protestant Church of Belgium recognized by the state). They run a website in Farsi language (<http://www.lightsindarkness.com>) through which they spread the message of the Bible to their fellow citizens in Iran and the diaspora.

Their website enjoys such an audience that [VOA News](#) has mentioned it in one of its programs in Farsi.

These Iranian converts were born and living in Qom, a city in Iran well-known for its university training radical Iranian and foreign Shia imams. Some of them from Azerbaijan who were educated in Qom were put in prison for extremism when they went back to their country.

I personally interviewed the couple of converts for two hours on 19 May 2022.

### **Hamid Reza Hossein Khani**

Hamid graduated from the Islamic Azad University of Qom as a teacher of English language and literature. He speaks Farsi, English and can manage it in Turkish.

Until he fled from Iran in 2020, he had been teaching English. In the year 1397 (2018), one of his students who happened to be a Christian shared his faith with him during several months and invited him to watch videos from YouTube about the Christian faith.

Hamid participated in house church meetings and in June 2019, he converted to Christianity. The religious meetings were taking place in different houses and convened about 6-7 converts in all.

In summer 2020, their meeting, which was taking place in Hamid's house, was interrupted by 'a visit' of intelligence services agents in civilian clothes. Hamid and Mariam managed to flee but other believers were arrested.

Some days later, Hamid and Mariam fled Iran in fear of being arrested and imprisoned.

Hamid has a 11year old daughter

They arrived in Belgium in September 2020.

### **Mariam Soltani**

Mariam comes from a pious Shia family. Her grandfather was a mollah.

She had a beauty salon in Qom. Through a Romanian client who happened to be in Iran, she was put in contact with the leader of a house church in 2019. She met Hamid at one of the house church meetings in the same year. There were some links between their own families and they knew each other.

Mariam has three children: two daughters (13 and 8 years) and one son (18 years)

Mariam's relatives and neighbors know that she has fled abroad and about her conversion and it seems the police are actively hunting her.

### **Persecution of Christians in Iran**

HRWF has a worldwide database of religious prisoners belonging to 19 religious groups in 18 countries. In Iran, HRWF has documented 14 cases of Protestants, mainly converts, who are behind bars <https://hrwf.eu/hrwf-prisoners- database-other-countires/>

More information about the persecution of Christians can be found on Article 18: <https://articleeighteen.com/latest/>

### **Opinion and conclusion**

After interrogating the two asylum-seekers for two hours, including about their conversion, my conclusions are that

- Hamid and Mariam really converted to Christianity in Iran
- They could have been arrested there at any time
- Mariam Soltani could be killed by her uncle, an Islamic hardliner, if sent back to Iran
- Hamid and Mariam are true Protestant believers who continue to actively participate in religious life in Belgium
- They should be granted political asylum.

*Photo : Hamid Reza Hossein Khani and Mariam Soltani*

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## **Germany denies refuge to Christian convert – after family member tortured, killed for his faith**

***An Iranian Christian convert in Germany faces likely death for his faith as deportation looms***

***Court deems it “unlikely” that a person would have really converted to Christianity after family member was killed for his beliefs***

**ADF International** (11.08.2022)- <https://bit.ly/3dAYd48> – A 44-year-old Iranian cabinetmaker who converted to Christianity has been denied protection in Europe, facing likely imprisonment or death upon return to his home country. The European Court of Human Rights has dismissed his attempt to appeal the decision on the basis of his right to freedom of religion. The 44-year-old is now threatened with deportation to Iran.

“No one should be persecuted for their faith. Iran is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for Christians, and converts are particularly at risk. In the last year, religious persecution has greatly worsened. So-called “religious deviants” can be given prison sentences, national security charges are continuously used to target religious minorities. The courts in Germany must take this into account when processing asylum applications,” said Lidia Rieder, Legal Officer at ADF International.

### ***A dangerous journey to Christianity***

Hassan – whose name has been changed to protect his identity and is recorded only as “H.H” in public documents – applied for asylum in 2018.

He testified before the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees that he had learned about Christianity in Iran through his wife's brother. His brother-in-law had been imprisoned for his activities with a house-church, and was ultimately killed for practicing his faith in jail.

"My wife's brother had become a different person by becoming a Christian. We wanted to see if we would get this feeling when we became Christians," H.H. told the authorities.

"I had had many problems in Iran...I had many questions, but I was not allowed to ask them. When I asked questions, I was beaten at school. This led me to want to know which God I was facing. One day my brother-in-law said to me and my wife that he had good news. There is a treasure, there is a living God, Jesus Christ, we are His children and not His slaves...He said there is a free salvation available," he continued, reflecting on his conversion experience.

Subsequently, Hassan's wife adopted the Christian faith and eventually the whole family converted. Once discovered, security forces then stormed their house and confiscated books, the computer, their passports and their Bible. The family fled to Turkey, and from there to Germany.

"In Germany I share the gospel, I organize prayer circles here in the accommodation. I want to be a good example, to win the others to faith in Jesus Christ. My greatest goal would be for my children to be able to find Christ in freedom, and to do good," said Hassan.

### ***Credibility under Question***

When H.H.'s asylum application was rejected by German authorities, he appealed to the Greifswald Administrative Court. The court dismissed H.H.'s case, declaring that it was "not particularly likely" that a Muslim would decide to become a Christian after his brother-in-law had been tortured and killed and his wife abused. It was more likely that the events described, if they had actually taken place, would have a deterrent effect on third parties," said the Administrative Court.

"There are national and international guidelines for asylum applications based on religious grounds. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), decision-makers need to be objective and not arrive at conclusions based solely upon their own experiences. General assumptions about a certain religion or country should be avoided. Unfortunately, this guidance is being used very selectively by the German decision-makers. They do not understand that maintaining a religious belief when persecuted can be appealing to others and not just a deterrent as seen from the history of Christianity," Rieder continued.

This week, the European Court of Human Rights quickly declined to hear arguments in Hassan's defense, leaving him vulnerable to deportation to a country where religious conversion can carry a prison penalty.

### ***Inconsistent allocation of asylum decisions nationwide***

According to OpenDoors, Iranian asylum seekers in Germany are often confronted with suspicions of feigned conversion. The situation varies

greatly across the country: a comparison of the federal states shows an inconsistent picture of very low to very high rejection rates with regard to the recognition or rejection of converts by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and the administrative courts, which suggests subjective examination procedures.

"There appears to be a tragic disregard for the application of a uniform and objective standard of examination for these kinds of dire asylum cases, in violation of international law. When decision-makers and judges decide on asylum applications according to their own criteria and without regard for the on-the-ground situation in the countries of origin, it results in severe personal suffering. H.H.'s case is a very worrying example of this," said Lidia Rieder.

### ***Situation of Christians in Iran worsens***

Iran is ranked 9th on the World Watch List, a ranking of countries with the worst persecution of Christians worldwide. The extent of persecution is "extreme".

In 2021, Iran passed amendments providing for prison sentences for "insulting Islam" and "deviant activities". Last year, several Christians were arrested on this basis, charged and sentenced to five years in prison each. According to a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, the persecution of converts to Christianity is particularly bad.

"Every person must be able to freely choose their faith. Iran systematically fails to protect its citizens' right to religious freedom. Iranian law must be amended to be brought into accordance with international human rights law, which protects the right of every individual to choose and freely practice their faith. Until this happens, countries like Germany have a responsibility to help to protect vulnerable religious minorities when they have an opportunity to do so. Ignoring that responsibility can have fatal consequences." said Kelsey Zorzi, Director of Global Religious Freedom at ADF International.

*Photo: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees*

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## **Iranian Christian converts struggle to get asylum in Germany**

***Human rights activists and pastors denounce that "the recognition rate of asylum applications has dropped from close to 100% to close to single digits".***

Evangelical Focus (05.08.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3dvMhk7> - According to human rights activists, asylum applications by **Iranians** who have converted to Christianity have less and less chance of success in **Germany**.

**"Human rights violations on religious grounds are an everyday reality in the country"**, said Martin Lessenthin, board spokesman of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM), in a press conference about the situation of Christian converts from Iran in Germany.

At the IGFM's press conference, pastor Gottfried Martens called the **Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)** "a political authority that **is not concerned with the individual case of an [asylum](#) application**".

According to Martens, "the **recognition rate of asylum applications** from Christian converts **has dropped from close to 100%** a few years ago **to now a figure close to single digits**".

He pointed out that **politicians show a "certain indifference"** and **"shrug their shoulders"** when Christians from Iran are deported because of their faith.

### **Administrative courts**

Martens stressed that the **asylum seekers "have no choice but to go to the administrative courts"**. The trials he has experienced with converts from Iran and Afghanistan of his church, "are often a pure game of chance. I wonder how that could be reconciled with the rule of law".

"In many cases these **administrative judges presume to be experts in matters of faith** in such a way that one is simply stunned. They would sometimes openly say that they knew better about the seriousness of a conversion than a pastor", he added.

For the pastor, "the hearings are less about the seriousness of the conversion and much more about the personal attitude of the judge".

### **Churches support**

Lessenthin also **called on "to the churches, especially the big churches in Germany, to [stand up](#) for the interests of their brothers and sisters in faith"**.

"This is where the church leadership would have to position itself more clearly" , concluded the IGFM spokesman.

*Photo: Berlin, Germany. / Photo: Florian Wehde, Unsplash, CC0*

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

### **General**

#### **14.07.2022 - USCIRF releases new report on religious repression in Iran**

This country update reports on widespread religious repression in Iran. Baha'is, Christian converts, Sunnis, and Gonabadi Sufis in particular continue to face ongoing violations of their freedom of religion or belief. The Iranian government continues its widescale arrests of Baha'is, and despite a Supreme Court decision to the contrary, courts in Iran continue to convict Christians on national security charges for membership in house churches. The country update also notes the violation of religious freedom for women in Iran, including

a recent crackdown on women not observing mandatory religious head covering laws, and lenient punishments rooted in religion for the perpetrators of so-called "honor killings.

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### **22.07.2022 - USCIRF releases new report on Iranian propaganda against religious minorities**

This report details efforts by Iran's government to spread misinformation and cultivate derogatory public opinion about religious minorities. The report identifies major traditional and social media outlets responsible for disseminating this messaging, and reviews the major themes Iran's government deploys against Jews, Sunni Muslims, Gonabadi Sufis, Christian converts from Islam, and Baha'is. It demonstrates Iran's systematic campaign to deny freedom of religion or belief to groups that do not conform to the government's singular interpretation of Ja'afri Shi'a Islam.

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### **Baha'is**

#### **"Senseless cruelty": Fresh wave of arrests and raids across Iran as Bahá'ís absurdly accused of "colonialism"**

Baha'i world news service (01.08.22) - Iran's Ministry of Intelligence issued an appalling statement of oppressive hate propaganda against the persecuted Bahá'í religious minority yesterday in an attempt to justify the raids on the homes and businesses of 52 Bahá'ís across Iran and the arrest or imprisonment of 13 individuals.

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#### **Afif Na'imi and Saamaan Ostavaar arested in Karaj**

Hrana / Sens Daily (31.07.22) - Following on today's previous report from Karaj, that the homes of **Kaamyaaar Habibi, Saamaan Ostavaar and Mozaffar Nabili** were raided, HRANA now reports that **`Afif Na'imi** and Saamaan Ostavaar were arrested, and that the homes of **Nasir Heravi and Saara Sha'baan** were raided and some of their personal effects, including mobile phones, electronic devices, and printed material relating to the Baha'i Faith were seized. Correcting the earlier report, it appears that only one workplace was searched and sealed: that of Kaamyaaar Habibi. The home of **`Afif Na'imi** was raided in November 2020. In December 2018 he was released at the end of a ten-year prison sentence for his Baha'i beliefs. He was the last of the seven Yaran (national facilitators for the Baha'i community in Iran) to be released, although they all had 10-year sentences, because during his sentence he was granted two medical furloughs of several months, and had several periods of hospitalisation. He suffers serious heart problems, blood clots, lymph node problems and acute swelling of the throat.

#### **Three Baha'is detained in Yazd: Community "suffering worst coordinated attack in years"**

Iran Press Watch (25.07.22) - IranWire understands that three Baha'i citizens near the city of Yazd, – **Nematollah Shadpour** and his son **Nima Shadpour**, and another individual, **Shafiq Eslami** – were arrested after being summoned to appear before judiciary officials. The Shadpour family are farmers and cattle breeders outside Yazd.

A source told IranWire that security agents then searched the homes and places of business of these citizens and confiscated several of their belongings.

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### **Persecution of Baha'is in Iran intensifies for second month in a row**

Iran Press Watch (23.07.22) - More than 20 Baha'is in Shiraz, Tehran, **Yazd and Bojnourd**, have been arrested, jailed or subjected to home searches and business closures since the beginning of July. Last month 44 Baha'is were arrested, arraigned or imprisoned, suggesting an escalating crisis in the Iranian government's systematic campaign against the country's largest non-Muslim religious minority, and the Baha'i International Community (BIC) believes that this month's cases now confirm the crisis.

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### **Eight Baha'i Citizens Arrested in Shiraz and Yazd**

Iran Press Watch (20.07.2022) - On July 19, security forces arrested three Baha'i residents of Yazd identified as Nematollah Shadpour, Nima Shadpour and Shafiq Eslami, searched their houses, and confiscated their personal belongings.

On the same day, five Baha'i individuals were also arrested in Shiraz, which HRANA has identified as **Niloofer Hosseini, Bahyeh Manavipour, Misagh Manavipour, Elhan Hashemi, and Hanan Hashemi**.

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### **Baha'i citizen Haleh Gholami imprisoned**

Iran Press Watch (19.07.2022) - According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, on July 16, 2022, **Haleh Gholami** was taken to Evin Prison for sentencing.

Earlier, the Revolutionary Court of Tehran sentenced Gholami to two years in prison on the charge of "acting against national security." In her trial, membership in Baha'i organizations was presented as an act against national security.

On January 27, 2017, Gholami was arrested and transferred to Ward 209 of Evin Prison. On March 6, 2017, she was released on bail until the end of the legal proceeding.

Freedom of religion is a breach of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The United Nations Covenant holds that every person has the right to practice religion freely, freedom of converting to a religion, as well as freedom of expression, individually or collectively, openly or secretly.

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### **Three Baha'i citizens arrested in Bojnurd**

Iran Press Watch (17.07.2022) - A court in Iran has sentenced 26 followers of the Baha'i faith to prison terms ranging from two to five years, as well as other measures, on

charges of “conspiracy to disrupt internal and external security” in what the religion’s leaders say is another sign of the persecution they face.

According to reports received by [Radio Farda](#), the verdict issued by the Revolutionary Court of the southern city of Shiraz is related to a series of arrests of Baha’is in Shiraz between July 2016 and December 2016.

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### **44 Iranian Baha’is arrested, arraigned or jailed in June as leading human rights figure says situation is “getting worse”**

Bic (04.07.22) - The Iranian government’s systematic campaign to persecute the Baha’i religious minority accelerated again this past week with the arrest, court hearing or imprisonment of at least 18 more Baha’i citizens across the country, bringing the June total to 44 people. Hundreds of others, meanwhile, also await summonses to court or to prison.

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## **Christians**

### **'Misinformation campaign' used to justify 'baseless' charges - report**

Article 18 (01.08.2022) - Iran’s “misinformation campaign” against religious minorities, including Christian converts, is the focus of a new report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.

The [report](#), written by Shahin Milani of the US-based Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), says religious minority adherents are arrested and prosecuted on “baseless national security charges”, while propaganda is used “to justify the measures taken”.

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### **Grandfather with cancer among four Christians arrested in Neyshabur**

Article 18 (19.07.2022) - A grandfather in his late fifties who has cancer is one of four Christian converts still detained more than three weeks after their arrest at a house-church gathering in a conservative Shia Muslim region of northeast Iran.

**Gholamreza Keyvanmanesh** is being held in Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad, a holy city for Shiites, two hours’ drive from Neyshabur, where the arrests took place on Sunday 26 June.

The other three – two women and another man in their forties and fifties, whose names cannot be reported – are being held in Neyshabur Prison.

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### **Converts face second trial on identical charges**

Article 18 (11.07.2022) - Three house-church members already [facing five years in prison](#) for “engaging in propaganda and education of deviant beliefs contrary to the holy

Sharia" have today been informed they must return to court next week to face a second trial on identical charges.

Ahmad Sarparast, Morteza Mashoodkari, and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh, who were only sentenced in April, were re-arrested in May, before their appeals in their initial case had even been rejected, and they remain in detention in Lakan Prison in Rasht, northern Iran.

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### Convert fined and deprived of social right for teaching others about christianity

Article 18 (08.07.2022) - A Christian convert has been fined and "deprived of social rights" for five years for "engaging in educational activities contrary to the holy religion of Islam by establishing house-churches".

**Rahmat Rostamipour**, 49, must pay 6 million tomans (around \$185) now and a further 18 million should he "re-offend" in the next two years.

He is the latest Iranian Christian to fall foul of Iran's amended Article 500 of the penal code, which allows charges to be brought for educating others in a way deemed "contrary to Islam".

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

### Baha'is

#### Fardin Qamsari begins a 1-year sentence in Tehran

Hrana / Sens Daily (30.06.2022) - On June 18, **Fardin Nadaafeyaan Qamsari** was summoned to Evin Prison in Tehran to begin a one-year sentence. His arrest, in October 2019, and sentencing were not previously reported on Sen's Daily. In October 2019, a Revolutionary Court headed by a notorious abuser of human rights, Judge Moqayeseh who was also responsible for the sentencing of the seven 'Yaran' (national facilitators for the Bahais in Iran) to long prison terms), sentenced him to one year in prison, with a deduction for days he was detained before the trial. This sentence was confirmed by the Provincial Review Court. He was charged with making images and sculptures relating to the Baha'i Faith, and holding Baha'i meetings.

Older items can be found in the archive, [here](#). Even older news is [here](#).

#### Three Baha'i citizens arrested in Shiraz

Iran Press Watch (28.06.22) - On Sunday, June 26, 2022, three Baha'i citizens, **Shaghayegh Khaneh-Zarin, Negar Ighani and Zhila Sharafi Nasrabadi** were arrested by security forces in Shiraz and taken to an unidentified location.

According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, on Sunday, June 26, 2022, security forces arrested three Baha'i individuals in Shiraz.

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## **Iranian authorities separate Baha'i parents from their children with Shiraz sentences**

Iran Press Watch (27.06.22) - A campaign by Iranian authorities to uproot the Baha'i community in Shiraz took a dark step forward, earlier in June, when Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced 26 Baha'is to a combined total of 85 years in prison. Each individual was sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to five years.

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## **Haayedeh Raam begins prison term in Shiraz**

Hrana / Sens Daily (25.06.2022) - On June 17, **Haayedeh Raam** was taken to Adelabaad Prison in Shiraz to begin serving his ten-year sentence. He is charged with "acting against the security of the country by publishing and propagating the thoughts of the Baha'i sect." Various personal effects relating to the Baha'i religion were also ordered confiscated. Five of his fellow-defendants in this case have also been summoned and are expected to begin their sentences soon.

In May, 2021, a Revolutionary Court in Borazjan, the chief city of Dashtestan county, Bushehr Province, handed down 10-year sentences to Mr. Raam, along with **Borhan Ismaa`ili, Maryam Bashir, Faraanak Shaykhi, Minu Bashi and Darna Ismaa`ili**. The court findings cited the accused's involvement with child education and membership of the counter-revolutionary web site, Facebook.

## **Baha'i children's rights activist Samin Ehsani imprisoned**

Iran Press Watch (17.06.2022) - On Wednesday, June 15, 2022, Baha'i children's rights activist **Samin Ehsani** was arrested and taken to Evin Prison to serve a five-year sentence.

According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, Baha'i children's rights activist Samin Ehsani was taken to Evin Prison for sentencing.

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## **After six-year trial, 26 Baha'is sentenced to prison In Iran**

Iran Press Watch (14.06.2022) - A court in Iran has sentenced 26 followers of the Baha'i faith to prison terms ranging from two to five years, as well as other measures, on charges of "conspiracy to disrupt internal and external security" in what the religion's leaders say is another sign of the persecution they face.

According to reports received by [Radio Farda](#), the verdict issued by the Revolutionary Court of the southern city of Shiraz is related to a series of arrests of Baha'is in Shiraz between July 2016 and December 2016.

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## **Bahai Cemetery in Tehran fenced off by authorities**

Hrana / Sens Daily (07.06.2022) - Authorities have installed a new wall and gate around the Bahai cemetery in Tehran that adjoins the Khavaran cemetery, where executed prisoners of conscience were buried following the 1979 Revolution. The gate is locked. This appears to relate to recent earthworks to create a new cemetery of Muslims on an adjoining site, and relocating the entrance to the Khavaran cemetery. Last year, the Bahais were informed that new burials would have to be made among the mass graves in the Khavaran cemetery.

### **Payman Sobhani: The untold story of a Baha'i teenager killed by fanatics in Iran**

Iran Press Watch (04.06.2022) - In 2008, the Baha'i International Community published the names of 221 Iranian Baha'is who had been murdered or executed in the three decades since the Islamic Revolution. The youngest on this list was **Payman Sobhani Ezabadi**, a resident of Saravan in the southwestern province of Sistan and Baluchistan, who was only 15 at the time. Based on his father's written memoirs, as related by his sister, IranWire is publishing his story for the first time.

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## **Christians**

### **Youhan Omid returns home from four years' prison and exile**

Article 18 (29.06.2022) - After two years in prison and nearly two more in internal exile over 1,000km from his home and family – not to mention being flogged for drinking Communion wine – **Mohammad Reza (Youhan) Omid** is finally free, at least for now. The 49-year-old, who began his exile in September 2020, four weeks after concluding a two-year prison sentence for "acting against national security by propagating house-churches and promoting 'Zionist' Christianity", was on 6 June told he could return home for 14 days' leave, after which his term in exile would be considered complete.

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### **Anooshavan Avedian awaits imprisonment as converts summoned to Tehran prosecutor**

Article 18 (29.06.2022) - A 60-year-old Iranian-Armenian Christian is awaiting a summons to begin his 10-year prison sentence for "engaging in propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam". This comes after his case, and that of two Christian converts facing exile from their home city of Tehran, was sent to the court responsible for executing judgements.

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### **Converts' five-year prison sentences for 'deviant beliefs' upheld.**

Article 18 (27.06.2022) - Three house-church members who have been held for over a month in solitary confinement have now been informed that their appeals against five-year prison sentences have been rejected.

**Ahmad Sarparast, Morteza Mashoodkari, and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh**, all members of the "Church of Iran" in Rasht, were re-arrested early last month, despite

already facing imprisonment for “engaging in propaganda and education of deviant beliefs contrary to the holy Sharia”, under the amended Article 500 of the penal code

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### **Iran claims 'no-one prosecuted for merely holding an opinion'**

Article 18 (22.06.2022) - Iran has once again denied imprisoning anyone because of their beliefs, in a strongly-worded response to the UN Secretary-General’s latest annual report on the the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic.

“No one is prosecuted in Iran for merely holding an opinion or belonging to a particular class or group,” said a statement released yesterday by Iran’s High Council for Human Rights.

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### **Seven Iranian Christians sentenced to total of 32 years in prisons**

Article 18 (07.06.2022) 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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## **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.

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## 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".

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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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.

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## 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.

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## **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading ...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **"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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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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*

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## **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

## 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.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **'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”.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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...](#)

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## **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.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **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...](#)

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## **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*

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## 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*

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## **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*