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Pastor Nadarkhani released as part of national amnesty

[CSW \(02.28. 2023\)](#) - Iranian church leader Yousef Nadarkhani was released on 26 February as part of a national amnesty issued by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei to commemorate the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

CSW's sources have confirmed that the pastor is now free and is still in Tehran to finish some formal procedures related to his release. He will join his family in Rasht as soon as these formalities are completed.

Pastor Nadarkhani was one of four Christians initially [arrested](#) in Rasht on 13 May 2016 during a series of raids by security agents on Christian homes. While the men were released on bail in 2017, they were re-arrested in another series of raids between 22 and 25 July 2018.

In June 2020, Pastor Nadarkhani and one of the other imprisoned men, Deacon Saheb Fadaie, who CSW's sources confirm was also released as part of the recent amnesty, had their sentences [reduced](#) to six years on appeal.

In February 2021, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [published](#) an opinion that the pastor's continued detention was arbitrary.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: 'We welcome the long-overdue release of Pastor Nadarkhani and Deacon Fadaie, but note that they have lost years of their life in prison on false charges as a result of Iran's continuing criminalisation of the Christian faith, among other religions and beliefs. We call on the Iranian authorities to ensure that these men are permitted to enjoy their freedom without further harassment or intimidation, and continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all others who are currently imprisoned on account of their religion or belief.'

Caption: Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani

Religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest February

Christians

'When I became a Christian, I was beaten and kicked out of the house'

Article 18 (22.02.2023) - Parsa's story is different from a lot of other Iranian Christians who have experienced persecution.

For most, the primary source of persecution is the state, but in Parsa's case, although he was also pressured by the security forces, the main point of pressure came from his family.

Parsa converted to Christianity at the age of 21, and this proved very difficult to accept for his family, who were devout Muslims.

[Continue reading...](#)

Second convert released as part of Islamic Republic anniversary celebrations

Article 18 (20.02.2023) - A second convert serving a long prison sentence for being part of a house-church has been released as part of a wider amnesty of prisoners on the occasion of the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Republic.

Hadi Rahimi, known as Moslem, was released last Wednesday, after spending more than a year in prison for "acting against national security" by "spreading 'Zionist' Christianity".

[Continue reading...](#)

Rights violations against Christians in the year of the new revolution

Article 18 (19.02.2023) - Article18 today releases its fifth joint annual report on "Rights Violations against Christians in Iran", with partner organisations CSW, Middle East Concern, and Open Doors International.

The 25-page report is released on 19 February to coincide with the 44th anniversary of the murder of Rev Arastoo Sayyah, the first Christian killed for their faith in the Islamic Republic of Iran – just eight days after its inception.

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Iran: “Christians are constantly watched as spies”

Bitter Winter (10.02.2023) - Forced to flee Tehran in 2010 because of her faith, this Assyrian Christian lady is now a pastor in a German-speaking Protestant community in Switzerland. She is a tireless campaigner for religious freedom in Iran, having been the voice of the voiceless at the United Nations, in her meeting with the US President, and at American think tanks.

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#Place2Worship campaigner released after nearly five years in prison

Article 18 (09.02.2023) - An Iranian convert jailed for “acting against national security by organising house-churches and promoting ‘Zionist’ Christianity” has been “pardoned” after nearly five years in Tehran’s Evin Prison.

Zaman Fadaie, who is known as Saheb, was unexpectedly released in the small hours of this morning. He then made his way home to Rasht – four hours’ drive north of Tehran – where he surprised his wife, Marjan, and their 15-year-old daughter Marta.

[Continue reading...](#)

‘Many Iranians don’t even know recognised religious communities are repressed’

Article 18 (08.02.2023) - “I faced oppression from a very early age”, says Dabrina Bet-Tamraz. The 37-year-old grew up in the Iranian capital, Tehran, where her father was a pastor in an Assyrian church. Now Dabrina lives in Switzerland, where she is a pastor and also helps political refugees from Iran. Recently, she was a guest speaker at the European Parliament launch of Open Doors’ World Watch List.

[Continue reading...](#)

Wife of imprisoned church leader released on bail

CSW (03.02.2023) - The wife of a leader from the Church of Iran denomination was released on bail on 28 January after spending over three weeks in Lakan prison in Rasht, the provincial capital of Gilan Province.

According to Middle East Concern, Anahita Khademi was released on a bail of 180 million tomans (approximately USD \$4,000), but faces charges of ‘propaganda against the system’ and ‘disturbing public opinion’.

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Baha’is

Iran issues more jail terms against Baha’is in Iran – Including a third former leader

Iran Press Watch (23.02.2023) - This week, two Baha'i women in Iran, Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, have entered the fourth month of unjust 10-year jail terms in Evin Prison. Together with five others, they were members of an informal leadership group of the Baha'i community in Iran until 2008, when the group was disbanded, all seven were arrested, and imprisoned for 10 years.

[Continue reading...](#)

Resolution condemning Iranian persecution against Baha'is introduced in Senate

Iran Press Watch (21.02.2023) - Senate Resolution 74 (S.Res.74), condemning the recent surge in state-sponsored persecution of the Baha'i community of Iran, was introduced on February 16th in the United States Senate. It reflects a serious rise in a range of human rights abuses against the Baha'is over the last half of 2022, much of which occurred within the broader context of the government's massive crackdown on protesters and the wider society.

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Jailed Baha'i refuses to confess against himself for release

IranPress Watch (16.02.2023) - A member of Iran's persecuted Baha'i religious minority has refused to sign a false confession in exchange for his release, IranWire understands. **Payam Vali**, a Baha'i citizen who has been held in jail for 145 days, has reportedly rejected demands by officials that he sign a false confession against himself to secure his release from prison.

[Continue reading...](#)

Eleven Baha'i citizens sentenced to a total of 36 years in prison

Iran Press Watch (10.02.2023) - According to these verdicts, **Afif Na'imi, Saman OstovarKamyar Habibi, Rameleh Tirgarnejad, Mahsa Tirgar, Shahrzad Mastouri, Sadaf Sheikhzadeh, Negin Rezaie, Nakisa Sadeghi, Elham Shareghi Arani and Sabin Yazdani**, to 36 years for "insulting and propaganda against Islamic Sharia, forming and participating in groups to act against national security through teaching and preaching the Baha'i faith to children in Kindergartens, promoting against Islamic Sharia through holding coaching courses" They have also been fined and banned from residing in Alborz province, leaving the country and other social deprivations.

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Habibollah Azizi: A Baha'i and the Islamic Republic's first dual national murder

Iran Press watch (05.02.2023) - On January 14, the Islamic Republic executed Alireza Akbari, a former deputy defense minister and an Iranian-British dual national. But Akbari was not the first dual national sent to the gallows by the Iranian judiciary. In 2011, Zahra Bahrami, a UK resident with dual Iranian-Dutch citizenship, was sentenced to death by the infamous "hanging judge" Abolghasem Salavati.

[Continue reading...](#)

The Islamic Republic is on the path to committing a mass atrocity. The World should pay attention.

Iran Press Watch (05.02.2023) - According to the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), since Mahsa Jina Amini was killed by the so-called morality police in September 2022, demonstrations have occurred in at least 163 cities and at 144 universities in Iran. Security forces have killed over five hundred protesters and over nineteen thousand have been detained. Sunni majority-ethnic minorities in Kurdistan province and Sistan and Baluchistan province have experienced persecution at a greatly elevated scale.

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Zaman Fadaie, a Christian, released after nearly five years in prison

Article 18 (09.02.2023) - <https://bit.ly/3Yw7NHZ> - An Iranian convert jailed for "acting against national security by organising house-churches and promoting 'Zionist' Christianity" has been "pardoned" after nearly five years in Tehran's Evin Prison.

[Zaman Fadaie](#), who is known as Saheb, was unexpectedly released in the small hours of this morning. He then made his way home to Rasht – four hours' drive north of Tehran – where he surprised his wife, Marjan, and their 15-year-old daughter Marta.

Saheb had been in prison since July 2018, having initially been [sentenced](#), alongside three other members of the "Church of Iran", to 10 years in prison, followed by two years' exile.

In 2020, Saheb's prison sentence was [reduced](#) to six years, but until today he still faced exile upon his release.

Now, however, that Saheb has been "pardoned", he will no longer have to journey into exile.

It is also important to note that Saheb's pardon constitutes an "unconditional release". On several occasions during his imprisonment, Saheb was offered "conditional release", contingent upon him admitting he had acted wrongly, and committing to refrain from doing so in the future. But Saheb refused to accept any limitation upon his future freedom to worship.

In 2021, Saheb was one of three imprisoned converts to write an open [letter](#), querying where they may worship upon their release, free from fear of re-arrest and imprisonment.

This letter inspired the ongoing [#Place2Worship](#) campaign, which seeks an official place of worship for Christian converts and other Persian-speaking Christians.

That converts to Christianity are unrecognised was highlighted when, in 2020, Saheb and another convert were [flogged](#) as part of a separate conviction for drinking wine as part of Communion. (It is illegal for Muslims to drink alcohol in Iran, but there are exemptions for recognised religious minorities, including Assyrian and Armenian Christians. Converts, however, are not recognised as Christian.)

Saheb is the third of the four men initially sentenced to 10 years in prison to be released, after [Youhan Omidj](#) and [Yasser Mossayebzadeh](#).

Now, only [Yousef Nadarkhani](#), the most well-known of the quartet, remains in prison, despite the UN ruling in 2021 that his detention was “[arbitrary](#)”.

Saheb’s “pardoning” was part of a wider pardoning of prisoners ahead of the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Republic.

Each year, the Islamic Republic announces a wave of pardons to coincide with particular events – for example in October last year, when Christian converts [Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh](#) and [Fariba Dalir](#) were pardoned on the occasion of Muhammad’s birth.

Photo: Saheb Fadaie, with his wife Marjan and daughter Marta. Article 18

“Christians are constantly watched as spies”

A conversation with Pastor Dabrina Bet-Tamraz from Iran before she testified at the European Parliament in Brussels.

By Willy Fautré

[Bitter Winter](#) (10.02.2023) - Forced to flee Tehran in 2010 because of her faith, this Assyrian Christian lady is now a pastor in a German-speaking Protestant community in Switzerland. She is a tireless campaigner for religious freedom in Iran, having been the voice of the voiceless at the United Nations, in her meeting with the US President, and at American think tanks.

Dabrina’s parents, Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz and Shamiram Issavi Khabizeh, were sentenced to 15 years in prison. They fled Iran in 2020 when they were summoned to start serving their prison terms, and joined their daughter in Switzerland.

“What does it mean to be a Christian in Iran,” I asked Dabrina as a first question.

"During my life in Tehran we were shadowed all the time by officers of the Ministry of Intelligence and the police, she said. Wherever we went, they would follow our car and take pictures of us. They even followed me when I was alone on the street and sent my picture to my parents to show that they were watching each of us in the family. We lost our privacy. They would call us on a regular basis to check where we were. On several occasions, they broke into our home, just to show we were under surveillance. This is what it meant to be a Christian in Iran. I had got used to that sort of life. It was so normal that when I started living in another country, I was shocked to realize that it was not normal at all. It took me eight years in Switzerland to stop looking back in the mirror of my car and checking all the cars passing by before parking."

"Were you arrested when you were living in Iran?"

"When I was 17, I spent three years and a half in England to study Evangelical theology. I went back home in 2007 and started studying psychology at the university but I was also serving the church with my parents. I was arrested several times in 2009 when our church was closed by the authorities. I was repeatedly called for interrogations by the police. They wanted me to 'cooperate' with them, which meant giving them the names of our members and leaders, the times and places of our private gatherings, the number of people attending but also the activities of pastors in other cities. They wanted me to work for them as their spy about my family, our church but also other churches. As I refused to do so, they threatened me with rape, arrest and imprisonment for five years. Finally I was expelled from the university and I thought it was time for me to leave a country where I had no more future."

"Article 13 of the Iranian constitution recognises Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians as protected religious minorities with the right to worship freely and form religious societies but your picture of religious life in Iran is very different and suggests that religious minorities are severely discriminated against. How can you explain that?" I asked.

"Christianity is only partly recognized, and we suffer from harsh limitations in the practice of our faith, our freedom of assembly and worship she answered. Since the 1979 revolution, the regime has imposed a new identity on the Iranian people which is based on people's religious beliefs. If you are a Shia Muslim, no problem. If you are not a Shia believer, you will face restrictions. As a child, I was discriminated against and stigmatized at school. Christian children were considered 'unclean' and were mistreated. In the 1990s, more than eight pastors and church leaders were killed because of their faith. My father was arrested and interrogated on a regular basis. He was asked to 'cooperate' with the authorities. As he didn't, he was discriminated against and threatened."

"My father was arrested in 2014, she continued, my brother and my mother in 2016, because of their church activities and for allegedly acting against national security and training spies. My brother is still in Iran with his family. He spent three months in prison, and then six months. He was released in 2020 during the coronavirus epidemic. He is still out of jail right now."

"You said Christians endured restrictions to the practice of their faith. Can you give some examples?" I asked.

"Iran has signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, she explained. According to these international instruments, all the citizens of Iran should fully enjoy their right to freedom of religion,

including the right to share their beliefs and the right to convert. Before Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was president of Iran from 2005 to 2013, we were allowed to have religious services in Farsi, the official language of Iran, and to have religious literature in Farsi. When Ahmadinejad became president, we were not allowed any more to conduct services in Farsi language, to have literature or books in Farsi. Only Assyrian people could enter the church and only the language of the Assyrians could be used. Muslim converts to Christianity were not recognized as Christians by the authorities although they are in majority in the Christian community of Iran. We were not allowed to have Iranians and converts in the church. We were not allowed to worship in Farsi. Under Ahmadinejad, Protestants were considered terrorists, Zionists, and a threat to national security. Ten years after Ahmadinejad's rule, Christians like us are still not allowed to share their faith with Iranians in their own language."

Was it easy to get political asylum in Switzerland?" I enquired.

"I went to Switzerland, thinking that the situation would improve in Iran and I could go back home six months or a year later, she answered. After some time, I realized there was no hope and I asked for political asylum. It took me two years to get this status. I had to provide evidence that I was really an Assyrian Christian and that I and my family were persecuted in Iran. After 12 years spent in Europe, it is still my hope and my dream to go back to a free Iran."

See the official interview on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4I844XHfU>

Human Rights Without Frontiers urges Iran to release 13 Ahmadiis detained for 8 weeks

HRWF (10.02.2023) - On 15 December 2022, [15 Iranian Ahmadiis](#) were arrested and taken to the notorious Evin Prison because of their religious beliefs:

Six of them are from Tehran: **Mohammadreza Shekariyanasl, Saeed Goodarzi, Hamidreza Yousefi, Amir Mahdi Behrouz, Mohammad Amin Noori, Arman Feidh-Abadi.**

Five are from Gorgan: **Alireza Akbari Erzati**, his wife **Maryam Naghshbandi** and their two children **Mohammed Hassan** and **Mohammed Hussein**, and **Owais Akbari Erzati.**

The four others from other cities: **Ghasem Yousefi Rameneti** from Babol, **Mohammad Hashem Bazrafshan** from Shiraz, **Saba Sedaqat** from Tabriz, **Farzan Faraji Zadeh**, from Mashhad.

A number of them had unsuccessfully tried to flee the country on 8 December.

Hamidreza Yousefi was released on 24 January and Ghasem Yousefi Rameneti on 30 January.

As of 10 February, 13 Ahmadiis were in [pretrial detention](#), waiting for their case to be examined by the Special Clerical Court in Tehran.

During their detention, they were pressured to sign papers by which they would recant their faith and defame their religion.

Two of the 15 men had already been previously jailed because of their faith in the [Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light](#), as they call themselves in Iran.

Three prisoners are minors and two are women.

Human Rights without Frontiers is concerned about the safety and the life of members of this religious group labelled "heretics" and "infidels" in Iran.

Human Rights without Frontiers urges the Iranian authorities to release all the Ahmadi arrested on 15 December and to drop all the charges related to their beliefs.

Wife of imprisoned church leader released on bail

CSW (03.02.2023) - <https://bit.ly/3I9gUlz> - The wife of a leader from the Church of Iran denomination was released on bail on 28 January after spending over three weeks in Lakan prison in Rasht, the provincial capital of Gilan Province.

According to Middle East Concern, Anahita Khademi was released on a bail of 180 million tomans (approximately USD \$4,000), but faces charges of 'propaganda against the system' and 'disturbing public opinion'.

Ms Khademi was [arrested](#) on 3 January 2023, days after her husband, Pastor Matthias (Abdulreza Ali) Haghnejad, was arrested along with two other Christians in Anzali city in Gilan Province on 26 December 2022.

Pastor Haghnejad remains in prison on charges of 'acting against the security of the country by forming a group and propagating Christianity outside the church and in the house church, and giving information to the enemies of Islam'. The pastor had been acquitted of these same charges in 2014, yet they were [reinstated](#) in January 2022, shortly after he was [acquitted](#) of 'endangering state security' and 'promoting Zionist Christianity,' for which he spent nearly three years in prison from February 2019 to December 2021. The reinstated charges carry a six-year sentence.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: ***'While CSW welcomes the release on bail of Anahita Khademi, we maintain that the charges against her are completely unfounded and should be dismissed immediately and without pre-condition. The same is true of her husband, Matthias Haghnejad, who faces charges which were dismissed on appeal in 2014, in a clear violation of article 14:7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a signatory. We continue to call for the pastor's immediate and unconditional release, as well as that of all others currently imprisoned in relation to their religion or belief. We also urge Iran to end its effective criminalisation of Christianity, and to respect, protect and fulfil the right to freedom of religion or belief for every citizen regardless of their religious affiliation and belief.'***

Religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest January

Christians

Son of murdered pastor releases film in response to Iran executions

Article 18 (23.01.2023) - The son of a murdered Iranian pastor has produced a short film in protest against state executions in Iran.

Joseph Hovsepian, whose father Haik was murdered in January 1994, posted the film, 'We Will Win', on his Instagram page following the first public executions of protesters last month.

In the film, a little girl looks outside her apartment window to see a rope being placed around a man's neck.

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Iran ranked eighteen hardest country to be christian

Article 18 (18.01.2023) - Iran has risen back to eighth place on an annual list of the countries where it is hardest to practise the Christian faith.

This marks a return to Iran's 2021 ranking on the World Watch List, which is produced by Christian charity Open Doors International, after a year in ninth place.

For the past five years, Iran has oscillated between eighth and ninth place on the list. This year, Iran has moved back above Afghanistan, which last year topped the list, even ahead of perennial "winner" North Korea.

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Apostasy never codified in Iranian law 'due to international pressure'

Article 18 (17.01.2023) - Iran refrained from codifying the "crime" of apostasy in its penal code due to fears of an international outcry, a retired judge involved in revising the text has admitted.

"At one time, I was in the process of approving the Islamic penal bill, and apostasy was supposed to be included in our criminal code, but it was left out for fear of international pressure," Alireza Mirkamali said during a roundtable discussion organised by state media.

The comments, made late last year, were brought to light earlier today by VOA News.

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Four Christians arrested in Gilan Province

csw.org.uk (04.01.2023) - Reports have emerged of the arrest of the wife of a leader from the Church of Iran denomination on 3 January in Rasht, the provincial capital of Gilan Province.

According to CSW's sources, **Anahita Khademi** is being held in Lakan prison in Rasht. Her arrest follows that of her husband, **Pastor Matthias (Abdulreza Ali) Haghnejad**, in Anzali city in Gilan Province. The pastor was on prison furlough when he was arrested on the evening of 26 December while visiting the home of **Amir Roshandal**, who was also detained along with another Christian named **Massoud Veis-Khani**. All three were subsequently transferred to a prison in Rasht.

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Iran's supreme leader hints at loosening hijab rules after months of protests over young woman's death

Nbc news (04.01.2023) - Iran's supreme Leader on Wednesday hinted that the government may loosen the strict dress codes that were blamed for a young woman's death and triggered nationwide demonstrations that have shaken the country's clerical establishment.

"Women who do not have full hijab should not be considered as people outside of religion or against the Islamic Revolution," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the most powerful person in the country, said during a speech, according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

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Amid hijab protests, Christianity expands foothold in Iran, two experts say

Washington times (04.01.2023) - Two expatriate Christians say a spiritual transformation is underway in Iran, fueled part by sustained protests over the Sept. 22 death of Mahsa Amini, the Kurdish-Iranian student who died in the custody of the Islamist regime's "morality police" allegedly for improperly wearing the mandatory head covering for women known as the hijab.

"Spiritually speaking, there has been a revival going on in Iran," said Hormoz Shariat, president of Dallas-based Iran Alive Ministries, which broadcasts Christian programming in the Islamic Republic.

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Baha'is

Jailed Iranian Baha'i accused of communicating with foreign Media

Iran Press Watch (30.01.2023) - An Iranian prosecutor has accused a member of the country's persecuted Baha'i religious minority of having established "extensive" contacts

with Persian-language media outlets outside Iran and spreading “propaganda” against the Islamic Republic.

Payam Vali, who has been behind bars for more than four months, “has had extensive communications with enemy media,” a prosecutor at Branch 7 of the General Court in the city of Karaj said on January 27, citing the BBC’s Persian service, London-based Manoto TV, and the U.S.-based Human Rights Activist News Agency.

[Continue reading...](#)

Hami Bahadori, Baha’i citizen, transferred to “Greater Tehran” prison

Iran Press Watch (26.01.2023) - **Hami Bahadori**, a Baha’i citizen living in Tehran, was transferred from Ward 209 (detention center of the Ministry of Intelligence known as Evin Prison) to the Greater Tehran Prison. He has been incarcerated since his arrest by security forces on October 22, 2022, and remanded to Evin prison.

According to HRANA news agency, the news organ of the Human Rights Activists in Iran, on Wednesday, January 18, 2023, Hami Bahadori (Baha’i citizen) was transferred to the Greater Tehran prison.

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Baha’i couple arrested in Iran, faces security-related charges

Iranwire.org (26.01.2023) - Iranian judicial officials have charged a Baha’i couple with “acting against national security” and “communicating with enemy governments,” amid an intensified crackdown on members of the religious minority.

Pouya Amri and his wife **Nafisa Sa’adatyar** were arrested on January 21 by intelligence agents of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) at their house in the northern city of Gorgan, according to IranWire sources.

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German lawmakers call for release of Baha’i jailed in Iran

Iran Press Watch (20.01.2023) - Two German lawmakers have joined together to politically sponsor a member of Iran’s persecuted Baha’i religious minority who has been imprisoned for nearly four months.

“We have accepted political sponsorship for **Arash Zamani**, and call on the Iranian government to release him immediately and without any pre-condition,” said Hamburg parliament members Ali Simsek and Ekkehard Wysocki.

Zamani is among dozens of Baha’is who have been arrested across Iran in recent weeks amid an intensified crackdown on the faith.

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No charge, but still imprisoned: concerns raised over Baha’i man jailed in Iran

Iran Press watch (18.01.2023) - Five weeks after the arrest of Faraz Haghghatjo, a member of Iran's persecuted Baha'i religious minority, his relatives still don't know what he is being accused of.

The prosecutor in charge of Haghghatjo's case has recently extended his detention, a source close to the family told IranWire, fueling concern that his interrogators have pressured him to confess to crimes he did not commit.

Iranian authorities routinely extract confessions from prisoners or their family members by force, which are then broadcast for propaganda purposes and used in court to convict people in unfair trials.

[Continue reading...](#)

Iranian Baha'i violently arrested, taken to unknown location

Iranwire (12.01.2023) - Iranian authorities have arrested a member of the country's persecuted Baha'i religious minority in the northern city of Qaemshahr, IranWire has learnt, amid an intensified crackdown on the faith.

The news about **Matin Gorji's** arrest comes amid rising concerns over the fate of another jailed Baha'i, Pouya Sarraf, who has been in solitary confinement for more than two months.

[Continue reading...](#)

Iran urged to free Baha'i poet "unjustly" sentenced to 10 years in rison

Iranwire (05.01.2023) - The Australian chapter of PEN International, a freedom of expression group, has strongly condemned the detention of award-winning Baha'i writer and poet **Mahvash Sabet** in Tehran's Evin Prison, where she is being held in solitary confinement, and the 10-year prison sentence handed down against her.

Sabet, aged 69, was arrested in July and, on December 10, according to the Baha'i International Community, was sentenced to a decade in prison along with Fariba Kamalabadi, another member of Iran's persecuted Baha'i religious minority.

[Continue reading...](#)

The persecution of Christians in the world, especially in Iran, highlighted at the European Parliament

By Willy Fautré

[The European Times](#) (26.01.2023)- The persecution of Christians in Iran was the focus of the presentation of the 2023 World Watch List of the Protestant NGO Open Doors yesterday, Thursday 25 January, at the European Parliament (EP). According to their report, 360 million Christians around the world suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith, 5621 Christians were murdered and 2110 church buildings were attacked last year.

The event was hosted by **MEP Peter Van Dalen** and **MEP Miriam Lexmann** (EPP group).

Peter Van Dalen commented on the damning Open Doors report as follows:

"It is highly concerning to see that persecution of Christians is still increasing in the world. It is therefore very important that in all its work on human rights, the European Parliament does not overlook the right to freedom of religion or belief! I am grateful for organisations like Open Doors who keep reminding us of the urgency and importance of these matters."

MEP Nicola Beer (Renew Europe Group), one of the EP Vice-presidents, had a special address focusing on the positive and constructive role of religious communities in democratic societies and consequently the necessity to defend freedom of religion or belief.

Ms Dabrina Bet-Tamraz, a Protestant from the Assyrian ethnic minority in Iran, who is now living in Switzerland, had been invited to testify about the persecution of Christians in Iran, through the example of her own family.

When I was a teenager we were constantly under surveillance; we were bugged and there were spies in the church. We didn't know who we could trust. We were ready for anyone in the family to be killed at any time as it had happened in many other Christian communities. At school, I was discriminated against by the teachers and the principal. I was stigmatized both as a Christian and as an Assyrian by the other students.

After the Shahrara Assyrian Church of my father was closed in 2009, I was arrested many times to be interrogated about the activities of the members of our church. I was kept in custody with no legal permit, with no female officer present but just in male surroundings, which is stressing for a teenager. I was threatened of being raped.

I now feel safe in Switzerland but when Iranian Ministry of Intelligence officers published an article on social media with my pictures and home address – encouraging Iranian men living in Switzerland to 'pay me a visit' – I had to move to another house. Even outside Iran, we remain under threat for our life if we reveal the human rights violations of the regime."

For many years, Dabrina's father, **Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz**, and her mother, **Shamiran Issavi Khabizeh** were sharing their faith with Farsi-speaking Muslims, which is forbidden in Iran, and were training converts.

Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz was officially recognised as a minister by the Iranian government and led the Shahrara Assyrian Pentecostal Church in Tehran for many years until the Interior Ministry closed it down in March 2009 for holding services in Farsi – it was then the last church in Iran to hold services in the language of the Iranian Muslims. The church was later allowed to reopen under a new leadership, with services conducted in Assyrian only. Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz and his wife then moved into house church ministry, hosting meetings in their home.

Dabrina's parents were arrested in 2014 but were released on bail. In 2016, they were sentenced to ten years in prison. Their appeal hearing was postponed several times until

2020. When it was obvious that the prison term would be maintained, they decided to leave Iran. They now live with their daughter who had fled to Switzerland in 2010.

In the meantime, she had studied Evangelical theology in the UK and she is now a pastor in a German-speaking church in Switzerland. Her campaign for religious freedom in Iran has taken her to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, to the second annual Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington DC and to a UN General Assembly, apart from many other events.

At the European Parliament in Brussels, she called on the Iranian authorities to

"order the immediate and unconditional release of Christians detained on spurious charges related to the practice of their faith and religious activities; and uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief for every citizen, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic group, including converts from other religions."

She asked the international community, including the European Union, to hold Iran accountable for its mistreatment of religious minorities. She urged the Iranian authorities to uphold their obligation to ensure freedom of religion and belief for all their citizens in conformity with the international instruments they have signed and ratified.

MEP Miriam Lexmann, from Slovakia, a former Communist country, pointed at the anti-religious nature of the Marxist ideology imposed on her country for decades after WWII. She made a vibrant plea for freedom of conscience and belief, saying

"Freedom of religion or belief is the corner stone of all human rights. When religious freedom is attacked, all human rights are under threat. Fighting for religious freedom is fighting for all human rights and for democracy. A number of countries such as China, another Communist country, have developed some very sophisticated methods to amputate parts of the religious freedom of their populations. I try to share my concerns with my colleagues of other political groups in the Parliament but for various reasons it is difficult to open their minds."

MEP Nicola Beer, from Germany, stressed that religious communities play a major role in our democratic countries, contribute to the stability of our societies and provide assistance to the most vulnerable persons through their caritative organizations.

"Fighting for freedom of religion or belief contributes to the defence of all human rights but quite often my colleagues at the Parliament forget religious freedom when they prioritize the human rights that should be defended," she said. *"The situation is getting worse and worse around the globe and it is important that people like Dabrina Bet-Tamraz testify about this deterioration. We have the privilege to freely decide and choose which religious or non-religious beliefs we want to adhere to. It is a privilege and a treasure that we should fully appreciate because in many countries thinking differently is perceived as a threat."*

During the debate with the numerous audience, **MEP Peter Van Dalen** was challenged about the efficiency of sanctions taken by the European Union. His answer was very convincing:

"Last year in April, the lawyer of a Christian couple in Pakistan called me for help because they had been on the death row for years on so-called blasphemy charges and they might be sentenced to death. It was decided to table an emergency resolution about their situation. The motion got a huge support and two weeks later, they were released,

officially 'for lack of evidence'. It shows that resolutions of the European Parliament do not remain unnoticed and can be very effective. Those two Christians could leave Pakistan and now live in a Western democratic country. Based on this success, I have just taken the initiative to send a letter to the EEAS and to Josep Borrell signed by eight MEPs to question the legitimacy of the commercial advantages attached to the GSP+ status, too generously granted to Pakistan and maintained despite the recurrent violations of religious freedom and human rights in Pakistan. Indeed, on 17 January, the National Assembly of Pakistan increased the punishment of insulting pious personalities of Islam, specifically family members of the prophet Muhammad, from three to ten years imprisonment.

Photo 1: Panel of the conference the 25 January 2023, at the European Parliament Brussels

Photo 2: Ms Dabrina Bet-Tamraz

Photo 3: MEP Miriam Lexmann – Photo credit: European Parliament

Photo 4: Nicola Beer | Source: European Parliament Audiovisual

Photo 5: MEP Peter Van Dalen at the European Parliament

Unbelievable Injustice: Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi sentenced to a second decade in prison

Two Baha'i women, Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, regarded as symbols of resilience in Iran after spending 10 years in prison, have been sentenced to a second cruel 10-year imprisonment.

Persian translation [here](#)

BIC (11.01.2013) – In the midst of increasingly violent and repressive actions by the Iranian authorities against their own citizens, two Baha'i women, Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, regarded as symbols of resilience in Iran after spending 10 years in prison, have been sentenced to a second cruel 10-year imprisonment.

The two Iranian Baha'i women were arrested on 31 July – for the second time – at the start of a fresh crackdown against Iran's Baha'is.

More than 320 Baha'is have been affected by individual acts of persecution since the arrest of Mahvash and Fariba. [Dozens were arrested](#) at [various points](#) in Shiraz, across Mazandaran province, and elsewhere throughout the country. Homes owned by Baha'is in the village of Roshankouh were [demolished](#). Government plans to [tar the Baha'is](#) through [hate speech and propaganda](#) were also exposed. And at least 90 Baha'is are currently in prison or subject to degrading ankle-band monitoring.

The latest jail sentence was handed down after a one-hour trial on 21 November – an hour which was mostly spent with the judge insulting and humiliating the defendants. This trial came almost four months after their arrest. Judge Iman Afshari, presiding over

the Revolutionary Court's Branch 26 in Tehran, rebuked the two women for "not having learned their lesson" from their previous imprisonment.

Dr. Shirin Ebadi, the Nobel laureate and defence lawyer for Mahvash and Fariba during their first trial, said in 2008 that "not a shred of evidence" was offered to prove the national security charges or other allegations. Nor was any new evidence forthcoming at this latest trial.

"It is profoundly distressing to learn that these two Baha'i women who have both already and unjustly lost a decade of their lives to prison for their beliefs, are once again being incarcerated for another 10 years on the same ludicrous charges," said Simin Fahandej, Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations. "Mahvash and Fariba are wives, mothers and grandmothers to families who have already been forced to endure their absence for 10 brutal years. Instead of expressing regret to these families for the unjust imprisonment they have already suffered, the Iranian government is unbelievably and inexplicably repeating the same cruelty for a second time. This ridiculous sentence, handed down without any basis in evidence, makes an absolute mockery of the Iranian judicial system where judges preside as prosecutor, judge and jury all in one. Words fail to describe this absurd and cruel injustice."

Supporters of the two women have called them symbols of resilience, confidants of other oppressed and jailed individuals, and mothers to all Iranian women.

Mahvash Sabet rose to international prominence after a volume of poems she had written in prison was published in English under the title *Prison Poems*. Mahvash was recognized by PEN International as its 2017 [International Writer of Courage](#)(link is external).

Several other prominent Iranian women were jailed at the same time as Mahvash and Fariba during their first imprisonment. Faezeh Hashemi, daughter of former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who herself is back in prison for supporting the demands of women in Iran, made headlines when she visited Fariba during furloughs and after her release. And Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi, who shared a cell with Mahvash and Fariba, said that the two Baha'is became sources of comfort and hope to their fellow inmates.

"As Time Magazine names Iranian women as "Heroes of the Year", the international community has rightly recognized the bravery and heroism of all Iranians, especially women as they sacrificially stand firm in demanding justice and equality in the face of the violent and brutal repression of their rights," Ms. Fahandej added. "Mahvash and Fariba are two such women, who for many years have upheld and promoted the equality of women and men, called for justice and truth, and who, as a result, have already paid a heavy price for upholding these principles. Let all stand with them now, and with all Iranian women, to tell Iran's government that it must revoke this sentence, free Mahvash and Fariba and all other prisoners of conscience, and to dismantle every part of its machinery of repression that systematically violates the human rights of its peoples."

Background

Mahvash, aged 69, and Fariba, aged 60, were first arrested in 2008 as members of an informal group that tended to the basic pastoral needs of the Baha'i community with the full knowledge of the Iranian government. All members of this group, including five men and two women, were sentenced to 10 years in prison for their beliefs. Mahvash, Fariba and the others were finally released in 2018.