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Anniversary of Mahsa Zhina Amini's killing: USCIRF publishes a new FORB Report

[USCIRF](#) (15.09.2023) - - The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom ([USCIRF](#)) marks the one-year anniversary of Iranian security forces' killing of [Mahsa Zhina Amini](#) for wearing "improper hijab." Amini's death on September 16, 2022 sparked nationwide protests in Iran against mandatory hijab laws and a host of other religious freedom abuses. Iran's government, in response to these protests, has relentlessly targeted minority communities including Baha'is, Christians, and Sunni Muslims. It has also cracked down on women and girls who peacefully dissent from the government's enforcement of its interpretation of Islam.

“On this solemn anniversary, the U.S. government must recommit to supporting Iranians risking their lives to demand freedom of religion or belief,” said USCIRF Commissioner [Susie Gelman](#). *“The U.S. Department of Treasury should continue to issue general licenses; clarify sanctions compliance laws through FAQs; and identify safe, legal, and effective avenues of support for Iranian defenders of religious freedom. In addition, the U.S. Congress should reauthorize the bipartisan Lautenberg Amendment, a family reunification program providing a legal path for resettlement for Iranian religious minorities fleeing government persecution.”*

Iran’s government has [responded](#) to peaceful protests with brutal violence, including against minors. Iranian security officials have beaten to death girls as young as 16, and [sexually assaulted](#) boys of similar age. The government has intimidated Christians, telling leaders of the Assyrian Christian community not to support protests. It has arrested scores of Sunni religious leaders including those calling explicitly for a peaceful dialogue between protestors and the government. Iranian officials have also [escalated](#) a campaign of arrests of Baha’is, including four of the seven members of the former Yaran-e-Iran, leaders of the Baha’i community who each previously served a decade in prison.

“Iran’s arrests of religious leaders, particularly the re-arrests of Baha’i leaders, is gravely concerning,” said USCIRF Commissioner [Eric Ueland](#). *“The Biden administration must lead further multilateral sanctions efforts to hold Iran’s leaders accountable for these contemptible and inexcusable violations of religious freedom. It also should support a United Nations Security Council resolution to refer the matter of Iran to the International Criminal Court.”*

Earlier this week, USCIRF released a [report](#) detailing religious freedom conditions since the protests. In its 2023 [Annual Report](#), USCIRF recommended the U.S. Department of State redesignate Iran a “Country of Particular Concern” for systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations. In January 2023, USCIRF convened a hearing on [Religious Freedom and Women’s Rights in Iran](#). USCIRF’s [Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief Victims List](#) includes nearly 200 victims currently detained in Iran.

Religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest August

Christians

Top cleric decries Iran’s discrimination against Sunnis

Iran international (01.09.2023) - Iran's leading Sunni cleric has criticized the regime for persecuting the religious minority, stating that the President failed to fulfill his campaign promises.

During his Friday prayer sermon, Mowlavi Abdolhamid criticized the regime for following a set of 'unwritten policies' that discriminate against the Sunni population in political and social spheres.

Sunnis make up at least 10 percent of Iran's 88 million population, and Zahedan, where thousands attend Abdolhamid’s Friday prayers every week, is one of the few Sunni-majority cities in a predominantly Shiite country.

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Renewed crackdown on Christians in Iran underway

Catholic Herald (17.08.2023) - Britain is an increasingly impoverished society: spiritually and financially. Still, anyone born here has won the historic lottery relatively speaking. It is easy for us to forget that harsh persecution, especially of a religious type, is the global norm, not the exception.

Nowhere better demonstrates this than Iran. Once a western-allied kingdom with an increasing respect for free thought and religious minorities, many of which predate the arrival of Islam- since its 1979 Islamic Revolution it has been under the tight grip of a succession of Ayatollahs and crackpot presidents.

Article 18, a British charity that aims to defend and promote religious freedom in Iran, reported that a renewed crackdown on Christianity was underway, with 69 Christians arrested in recent weeks.

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At least 10 still detained as numbers of arrests and affected cities rise

Article 18 (10.08.2023) - A clearer picture is beginning to emerge of the dozens of arrests of Christians that took place over a seven-week period in June and July, across as many as 11 Iranian cities.

Article18 previously reported that over 50 Christians had been arrested in the space of seven days in mid-July, across five different cities. The number of confirmed arrests now stands at at least 69, across 11 cities, and with at least 10 of those arrested – four men and six women – still in detention.

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Baha'is

Tehran Revolutionary Court sentences Baha'i citizen Nazila Haghar to five years in prison

Iran Press Watch (30.08.2023) - **Nazila Haghar**, a Baha'i citizen, has received a five-year prison sentence from the Tehran Revolutionary Court, a verdict that was subsequently affirmed on appeal on August 20, 2023.

In a trial in absentia, Haghar was handed down a five-year sentence for "membership in an illegal group aimed at undermining national security."

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Two more Baha'is arrested in ongoing persecutions

Iran Press Watch (23.08.2023) - Security forces of the Islamic Republic in the city of Semnan violently arrested two members of the persecuted Baha'i religious minority on Monday, IranWire reports.

The first arrest took place at the home of **Anisa Fanaian Iqani**. Agents entered the home without a warrant and for three hours searched the premises, seizing Baha'i books and photographs, mobile phones, laptops, money and gold.

Fanaian Iqani was taken into custody after her house was searched and transported her to an undisclosed location.

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Baha'i Citizen Susan Badavam sentenced to over four years in prison

Iran Press Watch (23.08.2023) - The Rasht Revolutionary Court has handed down a verdict against **Susan Badavam** (Farhangi), a Baha'i citizen, sentencing her to a total of four years and 47 days of imprisonment, coupled with additional social restrictions.

The court's ruling, delivered to Badavam on Monday, August 21st, includes a sentence of three years, six months, and one day for her alleged "educational activities associated with religious sects and groups contrary to Islamic Sharia," alongside an additional seven months and 16 days for purportedly "disseminating propaganda against the regime." Additionally, she has been deprived of some civil rights for a duration of ten years.

If the verdict is upheld on appeal, three years and six months for the first count will be enforceable to her.

Badavam's arrest dates back to December 19, 2022, when she was apprehended by intelligence agents from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Gilan Province.

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Appeal Court confirms six-year sentence for Baha'i Citizen Hooshidar Zarei

Iran Press Watch (17.08.2023) - The Court of Appeals of Fars province has upheld a six-year sentence against Baha'i Citizen **Hooshidar Zarei**. He has also been sentenced to a two-year travel ban, a fine, and other social restrictions.

Zarei has been found guilty of multiple charges including "propaganda against the regime" and "sectarian propaganda in favor of anti-regime groups."

Zarei will serve five years of his sentence as per Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code.

Zarei was arrested on April 29, 2023, by security forces in Shiraz and was released after 22 days of detention on a 1.2 billion Tomans bail from Adelabad Prison. Zarei, who is approximately 43 years old, is a Judo Coach and a resident of Shiraz.

Iran arrests 9 members of Baha'i faith on charges of smuggling medicine and financial wrongdoing

Apnews (14.08.2023) - Iran's intelligence ministry arrested nine members of the Baha'i faith on charges of smuggling medicine and financial wrongdoing, state media reported on Monday.

State IRAN newspaper said the arrested people, mostly members of one family, had roles in smuggling medicine through a network of dozens of pharmacies. It said they bribed medics to send clients to the pharmacies and were involved in money laundering and tax evasion.

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Sentences of 20 years upheld for two Baha'i women

Iran Press Watch (11.08.2023) - The Tehran Court of Appeal has maintained the original rulings against Baha'i citizens, **Mahvash Sabet** (Shahriari) and **Fariba Kamalabadi**, confirming their 20-year prison terms. Initially, both women were sentenced to ten

years, along with additional penalties by the Tehran Revolutionary Court on charges of “forming and leading groups to act against national security.”

A source close to Sabet’s family revealed to HRANA that Sabet, aged 70, is battling multiple illnesses that have been aggravated by her prolonged imprisonment. Over the past few months, she has faced several hospitalizations.

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Baha’i Citizen Sanaz Tafazoli receives lengthy prison sentence

Iran Press watch (08.08.2023) - The Mashhad Revolutionary Court has handed down a lengthy sentence of ten years and nine months to Sanaz Tafazoli, a Baha’i citizen currently held in Vakilabad prison.

Presiding Judge Hadi Mansouri issued the sentence, comprising six years and six months for “forming a group to act against national security,” three years and seven months for “assembly and collusion against national security,” and eight months for “educational/promotional activities against Sharia.”

During the trial, the presentation of “books and works related to the Baha’i faith” and the establishment of “educational groups for Baha’i children” were cited as evidence for the aforementioned charges.

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Nine Baha’i Citizens begin serving prison sentences in Karaj

Iran Press Watch (08.08.2023) - On Saturday, August 5, 2023, nine Baha’i individuals were incarcerated in Kachooie Prison and the Central Prison of Karaj to commence their prison terms.

According to a reliable source who spoke to HRANA, **Mahsa Tirgar Bahnemiri, Rameleh Tirgarnejad, Elham Shareghi Arani, Nakisa Sadeghi, Sadaf Sheikhzadeh, Shahrzad Mastouri, and Negin Rezaie** were transferred to Kachooie prison, while **Kamyar Habibi** and Saman Ostovar were imprisoned in the Central Prison of Karaj.

In mid-June, the Appellate Court of Alborz province upheld a combined 40-year, seven-month sentence against these Baha’is along with four others. They have also received additional punishments as part of their conviction.

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Top cleric decries Iran’s discrimination against Sunnis

[IranIntl](#) (01.09.2023) - Iran's leading Sunni cleric has criticized the regime for persecuting the religious minority, stating that the President failed to fulfill his campaign promises.

During his Friday prayer sermon, Mowlavi Abdolhamid criticized the regime for following a set of 'unwritten policies' that discriminate against the Sunni population in political and social spheres.

Sunnis make up at least 10 percent of Iran's 88 million population, and Zahedan, where thousands attend Abdolhamid's Friday prayers every week, is one of the few Sunni-majority cities in a predominantly Shiite country.

He asserted that the authorities of the Islamic Republic intend to entrust the management of Sunni religious schools to Shia Muslims, a policy that has led to the imprisonment of several Sunni individuals who resisted this decision. Mowlavi Fat'hi-Mohammad Naghshbandi, the Friday prayer leader of the city of Rask, was arrested in August, sparking several days of demonstrations and a heavy security presence by regime agents in Sistan-Baluchestan province.

"The government can oversee religious school operations, but management should remain in the hands of Sunnis," he insisted. In areas where the government has imposed its favored Friday Prayer leaders, "the people no longer attend those mosques because they consider them state-owned."

"Sunnis have been demanding justice and equality for the past 44 years, yet their demands have gone unmet," Abdolhamid emphasized, noting that "during the Pahlavi era, Sunnis held senior positions in the army and the police, and the region was under the control of its people."

"However, during the Islamic Republic, there hasn't been a single Sunni minister in the government," he lamented, adding that Sunnis are excluded from managerial positions even in Sistan-Baluchestan province. "Meritocracy is absent in the Iranian government," he asserted.

Criticizing inequalities in regions with substantial Sunni populations, he insisted, "In the appointment of managers in provinces such as Kordestan and Sistan-Baluchestan, there should be a balance between Sunnis and Shiites."

Abdolhamid also criticized the regime for turning every problem into a security issue, urging the authorities to allow minorities to practice their religion without fear of persecution. "Don't close Sunni mosques. Do not close places of worship for Jews, Christians, and other non-Islamic religions."

He also mentioned his meetings with President Ebrahim Raisi, stating that "Among the issues I raised were establishing relations with neighboring and Islamic countries, resolving livelihood and economic problems, and addressing the concerns of Sunnis and Iranian ethnic minorities."

Iran's top Sunni leader added that the current administration has failed to fulfill any of its promises to the Sunnis made during the election campaigns, such as appointing Sunnis as governors, deputy ministers, or envoys to other countries. "You have approximately 180 ambassadors. If you let ten of them be Sunnis, nothing would happen. Sunnis are also an integral part of this land and your fellow citizens."

"Our most crucial demand is that the government does not differentiate between Shiites and Sunnis," he emphasized, stressing that the rights of all Iranian ethnic and religious minorities should be respected.

While Abdolhamid was delivering his sermon, the regime had shut down the internet in Zahedan and several other cities in the province, disrupting the live streaming of his speech on social media platforms.

After the Friday prayers, the people of Zahedan took to the streets in protest, chanting slogans demanding the release of detained Sunni Friday Prayer Leader Mowlavi Fat'hi-Mohammad Naghshbandi, along with other political prisoners.

These protests marked the forty-eighth consecutive weekly demonstrations in the province, occurring regularly since Bloody Friday on September 30, 2022, when security forces killed over 80 people, including women and children.

Religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest July

Christians

Over 50 Christians in five cities arrested in new crackdown

Article 18 (18.07.2023) - More than 50 Christian converts have been arrested in a rash of new incidents across five Iranian cities over the past seven days, with fears the number could rise much higher as fresh reports keep coming in.

At least 51 of those arrested at their homes or house-churches – in the cities of Tehran, Karaj, Rasht, Orumiyeh and Aligoudarz – remain in detention on unknown charges, while others have been released on bail.

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Pastor transferred to prison 1,000 miles from home and family

Article 18 (10.07.2023) - An Iranian pastor who has spent most of the past four years behind bars has now been transferred to another prison on the other side of the country, 1,000 miles from his home and family.

Abdolreza Ali-Haghnejad, who is known as Matthias, was flown yesterday morning from Rasht, northern Iran, to the remote southern city of Minab, where he has been told he must serve the remainder of his six-year prison sentence for “propagating Christianity”.

Matthias had been serving this particular sentence in his home city of Anzali, near Rasht, since January 2022, when he was detained just two weeks after being released following his acquittal from a separate five-year sentence for “promoting Zionist Christianity”.

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Baha'is

Fariba Kamalabadi and Mahvash Sabet: A year in detention and counting

Iran Press Watch (31.07.2023) - In a coordinated and organized operation on July 31, 2022, agents of the Intelligence Ministry raided the homes of tens of Baha'is in cities across Iran and arrested a number of Baha'is including **Mahvash Sabet** and **Fariba Kamalabadi**, two women who had already spend a decade in jail.

In a statement issued the day after the arrests, the Intelligence Ministry claimed that it had arrested "members of the central cadre of the Baha'i espionage party" and accused them, among other things, of "participating in groups to act against national security through teaching and preaching the Baha'i faith to children in kindergartens, [and] agitating against Islamic Sharia through holding coaching courses."

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Baha'i citizen Rouya Malakooti arrested, eight others summoned in Mashhad

Iran Press Watch (31.07.2023) - On July 29, nine Baha'i women were separately summoned to appear at Mashhad Courthouse, with one among them, **Roya Malakouti**, ending up arrested after hours of interrogation.

The other eight citizens, Roya Ghaneh-Ezabadi, Shohreh Salekian, Golnoosh Nasiri, Azita Foroughi, Nooshin Mesbah, Soheila Ahmadi, Fardieh Moradi, and Nasim Sabeti, have had the addressing of their legal cases postponed until further notice.

The specific allegations against these individuals remain undisclosed, leaving uncertainty surrounding the reasons behind the summoning and the subsequent arrest. According to a reliable source who spoke to HRANA, the Prosecutor's office investigator issued a one-month detention order for Roya Malakouti, and she was subsequently transferred to Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad.

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Baha'is in July: 123 years in prison and over \$111,000 in fines

Iran Press Watch (24.07.2023) - Late June to late July of this year has been one of the more difficult months for the Baha'is in Iran. And even since March, in an escalating situation with a Ministry of Intelligence official, Baha'is in Tehran have been denied of the right to bury their dead in a Baha'i-owned cemetery in the city. After days and sometimes after weeks of being left in the morgue of the larger Behesht Zahra Cemetery, in the south of Tehran, the Baha'i dead have been buried in the mass graves of the victims of the 1980s mass executions without informing the families and without Baha'i religious rites and ceremonies.

The Baha'i International Community has condemned this situation in repeated statements as not only a violation of the rights of the Baha'i families in Iran – but also as a deep disrespect to those other Iranians buried in these mass graves. And earlier in July, Mehdi Khazali, a publisher close to the Iranian authorities, was filmed spreading disinformation about the Tehran Baha'i cemetery.

[Continue reading...](#)

Two Baha'i citizens arrested in Rasht

Iran Press Watch (24.07.2023) - Reliable sources disclosed to HRANA that the Ministry of Intelligence was responsible for their arrests. Both were apprehended at their respective residences, with the agents conducting searches and confiscating some of their belongings.

While Samimi managed to call her family and inform them of her detention at Lakan Prison, Kashani-Nejad has not yet been granted the opportunity to contact her family, leaving her loved ones anxious about her whereabouts.

According to another source, Samimi is facing charges of "propaganda against the regime."

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Baha'i citizen Keyvan Rahimian arrested in Tehran

Iran Press Watch (19.07.2023) - On July 18, 2023, security forces arrested Baha'i Citizen **Keyvan Rahimian** in Tehran and transferred him to Evin Prison.

A reliable source close to Rahimian's family, who spoke to HRANA, revealed that he informed his family about his transfer to Evin Prison during a phone call following his arrest.

The grounds for this arrest and the allegation against him are unknown.

The specific reasons behind his arrest and the allegations against him remain unknown at this time.

Rahimian has a history of previous arrests and convictions related to his activism. Notably, he also serves as a lecturer at an online university affiliated with the Baha'i community. It is important to mention that Baha'is face exclusion from tertiary education in Iran.

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Baha'i Citizen Payam Vali face new charge while imprisoned

Iran Press Watch (15.07.2023) - Payam Vali, a Baha'i citizen currently serving his sentence in Qezel Hesar Prison, Karaj, is confronted with a fresh legal case.

The Karaj Revolutionary Court has accused Vali of "spreading falsehood on the Internet through the dissemination of unlawful content." This case has been transferred from the court to a branch of the prosecutor's office in Karaj, as it reportedly exceeds the jurisdiction of the Revolutionary Court.

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Five Baha'i citizens arrested in Kerman

Iran Press watch (13.07.2023) - On July 12, 2023, in a concerning development, security forces in Kerman apprehended and detained five Baha'i citizens.

The detainees, identified as **Foad Shaker, Shahram Fallah, Yekta Fallah, Behnam Pour-Ahmadi, and Paridokht Shojaei**, were subsequently transferred to an undisclosed location. During the arrest, agents conducted a search of the house and their vehicles and seized some of their personal belongings.

The exact reasons behind the arrests and the specific location of their detention remain unknown, deepening concerns about potential human rights violations. One reliable source, who spoke to HRANA revealed that these individuals were apprehended at the residence of Shahram Fallah, where they were guests.

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Fourteen Bahai citizens sentenced to a total of 31 years in prison

Iran Press Watch (05.07.2023) - In a concerning development, the Ghaemshahr Revolutionary Court has handed down a collective prison sentence of 31 years to 14 Bahai citizens.

The individuals affected by this ruling are Mani Gholinejad, Bita Haghighi, Sanaz Hekmat Shoar, Negar Darabi, Sam Samimi, Mahsa Fathi, Samieh Gholinejad, Majir Samimi, Anis Senaei, Afnaneh Nematian, Basir Samimi, Hengameh Alipour, Gulben Fallah, and Nazanin Goli.

Bitag Haghighi and Sanaz Hekmat Shoar have received three years and paying a fine. The rest have been sentenced to two years and one month. All their confiscated belongings during the arrest have also been seized.

The charges against these Bahai individuals revolve around allegations of engaging in "educational activities and propaganda at variance and against Islamic Sharia law."

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Religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest June

Christians

Three Christian women held incommunicado for 40 days face court hearing on unknown charges

Article 18 (30.06.2023) - Three Iranian women converts to Christianity arrested last month and held incommunicado in Tehran's Evin Prison for 40 days face a court hearing on Sunday on unknown charges, according to a US-based Christian organisation.

Shilan Oraminejad, Razieh (Maral) Kohzady, and Zahra (Yalda) Heidary were arrested in their homes early in the morning of 9 May by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence, who claimed to have search warrants and confiscated personal belongings including mobile phones, laptops, books, and pamphlets "without any explanation", according to Mehr Ministries.

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Convert flogged for second time, now faces exile

Article 18 (27.06.2023) - A house-church leader who has already spent nearly five years in prison, and was once flogged for drinking Communion wine, has been flogged a second time and now faces two years in exile.

Zaman Fadaie, who is known as Saheb, was flogged again on Sunday, 25 June, having travelled from his home in Rasht, northern Iran, to Tehran in the hope of securing the release of a property deed submitted long ago for his bail.

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'I didn't know worshipping and praying in Jesus' name was illegal'

Article 18 (12.06.2023) - When he was arrested, **Vahid Hakani** told his interrogator he hadn't known until that day "that gathering and worshipping and praying in the name of Christ is not legal in Iran".

His interrogator wanted him to confess that he was part of a "deviant Christian sect", and pledge to no longer have any more interactions with other house-church members.

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'is

Baha'i Citizen Hooshidar Zarei sentenced to six years imprisonment

Iran Press Watch (30.06.2023) - The Shiraz Revolutionary Court has sentenced Baha'i citizen **Hooshidar Zarei** to six years in prison, along with additional penalties, including a two-year travel ban, a fine, and other social restrictions. If the verdict is upheld on appeal, Zarei will serve five years of his sentence under house arrest, monitored by an electronic tag.

Zarei received a one-year sentence for "propaganda against the regime" and five years for "sectarian propaganda in favor of anti-regime groups." He will serve his sentence at his residence, with the limitation of movement within a one-kilometer radius from his house.

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'i Citizen Sara Sabet Rasekh receives eight-year prison sentence

Iran Press Watch (30.06.2023) - The Court of Appeals in Isfahan Province has handed down a verdict, sentencing Baha'i citizen **Sara Sabet Rasekh** to eight years in prison. Since February 7, 2023, Sabet has been serving her previous one-year sentence outside of prison with curfew tags.

The recent ruling states that Sabet will serve five years for charges of "blasphemy," two years for "insulting the former and current Supreme Leader of Iran," and one year for "propaganda against the regime." Pursuant to Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, she will serve five years in prison for the first charge.

Sabet was arrested in November-December 2021 by security forces at his residence and released on bail after about one month.

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'i sentenced to six years in prison and assets seized

Iran Press Watch (22.06.2023) - **Hami Bahadori**, a 26-year-old Baha'i citizen, was transferred to Branch 15 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court on Wednesday, 21 June, without the knowledge of his lawyer and family and sentenced to six years in prison, IranWire reports.

The court session concluded with an immediate announcement of the verdict. Bahadori was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of "gathering and collusion," with an additional one-year prison term for spreading "propaganda against the Islamic Republic under the guise of preaching for Baha'is."

[Continue reading...](#)

Who were the perpetrators of the mass execution of 10 Baha'i women in Shiraz?

Iran Press Watch (21.06.2023) - When the news came of the mass execution of 10 Baha'i women in June 1983 in Shiraz, it was widely understood that a number of individuals were involved in various levels as "perpetrators" of this heinous act. From the Shiraz Revolutionary Guards Corps to the various officials involved, whether in an official capacity such as prosecutors of arrested individuals or through engagement in propaganda, or through the complicity of silence.

The Shiraz Revolutionary Guards Corps, a military-security organization, was intricately involved in all stages of the arrests, interrogation, torture and execution of these women who they detained as part of a government-fueled campaign against the Baha'i community, and certainly should be held accountable.

But the three individuals who stand out as the "main perpetrators" of these executions are Ruhollah Khomeini (former Supreme Leader of Iran); Hujjat al-Islam Ghazaie (Sharia Ruler and President of Shiraz Revolutionary Court); and Zia Miremadi (prosecutor of Shiraz).

[Continue reading...](#)

Detention of followers of the minority Baha'i faith

ohchr.org (09.06.2023) - The detention by the de facto authorities in Sana'a (a.k.a Huthis or Ansar Allah) of a group of followers of the minority Baha'i faith and a subsequent sermon by Shamseddin Sharafeddin, the Mufti in Sana'a, inciting hatred against the Baha'is and other religious groups are matters of serious concern.

Our Office urges the immediate release of the 16 people still being held incommunicado, and we condemn the use of any language that incites discrimination and violence, particularly against minorities, and often leads to forced exile and displacement.

[Continue reading...](#)

Jailed Baha'is endure coercion and await verdicts

Iran Press watch (06.06.2023) Four imprisoned members of the Baha'i religious minority in Iran have been subjected to coercive measures by interrogators, pressuring them to make confessions on camera, IranWire reports.

The actions occurred during the trial of the four citizens on May 31 at Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court. Judge Iman Afshari presided over the proceedings, and the defendants are currently awaiting the court's verdict.

Shadi Shahidzadeh, Valiullah Ghadamian, Mansour Amini and Ataullah Zafar were transferred to Tehran Revolutionary Court after two weeks of detention in Ward 209 of Evin Prison.

Ghadamian, Amini and Zafar are known assisting other Baha'is in Tehran with the burial of deceased loved ones in the city's Baha'i cemetery. But they were arrested in recent weeks as part of an ongoing effort by a Ministry of Intelligence agent to hinder the Baha'is from using their own cemetery.

From [HRWF Database of Baha'i prisoners in Iran](#)

All in all, over one thousand Baha'is are either behind bars, or in custody, or under house arrest, or waiting for a hearing or to be summoned by a court.

HRWF database only contains cases of prisoners who had started serving their sentence after a final court decision and who have not been released since then.

[ALAVI, Farid](#)
[BAHADORI, Hami](#)
[BAHRAMI, Shaghayegh](#)
[BAKHT, Nima Mahin](#)
[BASIRI, Bardia](#)
[DARABI, Negar](#)
[ESLAMI, Shafiqh](#)
[GHODRAT, Mona](#)
[GHOLAMI, Shayan](#)
[GHOLINEJAD, Samiyeh](#)
[GORJI, Matin](#)
[HAGHIGHI, Bita](#)
[HAJIPOUR, Nakisa](#)
[HASHEMI, Hanan](#)
[IGHANI, Negar](#)
[KHANEH-ZARIN, Shaghayegh](#)
[KHANJANI, Shahdokht](#)
[KHANLORI, Homayoun](#)
[MANAVIPOUR, Mishak](#)
[MOMTAZI, Vesal](#)
[NAEIMI, Afif](#)
[NASRABADI, Zhila Sharafi](#)
[PAKZAD, Ghazal](#)
[PAKZAD, Reyhaneh](#)
[SABETI, Saha](#)
[SARAF, Pooya](#)
[SHADPOUR, Nematollah](#)
[SHADPOUR, Nima](#)
[SHAHIDI, Nahaleh](#)
[SHARIFI, Amin](#)
[TAFAZOLI, Sanaz](#)
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[ZABIHI, Sirous](#)
[ZAMANI, Arash](#)

See the details of each case of Baha'i, Christian and Muslim prisoners [HERE](#) on our website.

More important: Think of them, remember them, read their stories and speak about them.

Religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest May

Christians

'We use money that could feed hungry Muslims to restore Christian churches' – tourism minister

Article 18 (26.05.2023) - In the week of the 10th anniversary of the forced closure of the largest Persian-speaking church in Iran, the Islamic Republic's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism has had the temerity to claim that "the people of the world should know" that despite economic problems, the Iranian government still takes money that could be used to feed its hungry Muslim citizens to pay for the restoration of Christian churches.

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Bishop Guli calls for safe legal route for Iranians fleeing persecution for faith

Article 18 (23.05.2023) - British-Iranian bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani has called on the UK government to consider offering a "safe-route scheme" for Iranians fleeing persecution on account of their faith.

In an oral question at the UK House of Lords this afternoon, Bishop Guli cited Article 18's annual report as she referenced the "increasing involvement" of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) "in the crackdown against peaceful Christian activities in Iran".

[Continue reading...](#)

Parkinson's sufferer and wife acquitted, released from prison

Article 18 (10.05.2023) - A 64-year-old Christian convert with advanced Parkinson's disease and his wife have been acquitted and released from their combined 10-year prison sentence.

Homayoun Zhavah, whose health has deteriorated while in prison, and his wife Sara Ahmadi had been detained in the respective men's and women's wings of Tehran's Evin Prison since August last year, serving sentences of two and eight years in prison, respectively, for their involvement in a house-church.

[Continue reading...](#)

Christians among minority groups targeted with spyware

Article 18 (05.05.2023) - Intelligence officers belonging to the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or FARAJA, are using spyware to monitor members of minority groups, including Christians, according to new research.

Since March 2020, at least 487 devices have been infected with “BouldSpy”, which has the capability to extract data including photographs, screenshots of conversations, and recordings of video calls from applications including WhatsApp and Telegram, according to researchers at US-based Lookout Threat Intelligence.

[Continue reading ...](#)

USCIRF report focuses on ‘sharply deteriorated religious freedom’ in Iran

The “sharply deteriorated religious-freedom conditions” in Iran are the focus of the cover and introduction to the latest annual report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.

The cover of the report, which was published yesterday, features a photograph of **Mahsa Amini**, alongside the names of scores of Iranians imprisoned on account of their religious beliefs, including a dozen Christians.

[Continue reading...](#)

US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2023 annual report

Article 18 (02.05.2023) - The “sharply deteriorated religious-freedom conditions” in Iran are the focus of the cover and introduction to the latest annual report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.

The cover of the report, which was published yesterday, features a photograph of Mahsa Amini, alongside the names of scores of Iranians imprisoned on account of their religious beliefs, including a dozen Christians.

[Continue reading...](#)

Religious Freedom Commission calls out violations in Iran, China, elsewhere

Real clear politics (02.05.2023) - It’s an image of contrasts, courage, and confrontation: A faceless Iranian woman protester holds Catholic rosary beads against the backdrop of a

poster featuring Mahsa Amini, a young woman who died last year while being held by the country's morality police. Her alleged crime: standing up to the country's theocratic regime by violating laws requiring women to wear head coverings in public.

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'is

Authorities must end the persecution of Mahvash Sabet and ensure access to adequate medical care pending her release

Iran Press Watch (25.05.2023) - PEN International and the undersigned PEN Centres are outraged to learn that writer and poet **Mahvash Sabet** was brutally tortured during her interrogation in August 2022 at Evin prison, resulting in both her kneecaps being broken. PEN International and the undersigned PEN Centres are gravely concerned about Mahvash Sabet's health and well-being and strongly condemn the persistent and deliberate medical negligence against writers and other prisoners of conscience in Iran.

[Continue reading...](#)

Jailed Baha'i condemns injustice from behind bars

Iran Press Watch (26.04.2023) - In a chilling audio message obtained by IranWire, **Payam Vali**, a Baha'i citizen currently imprisoned in Ghezelhasar, has exposed new details on the severe oppression and discrimination faced by Baha'i citizens in Iran.

The audio file includes Vali's condemnation of the recent verdict by Branch 12 of the Alborz Province Court of Appeal, which sentenced him to six years in prison, demonstrating the discrimination and injustice faced by Baha'is and their families.

During the audio message, Vali questions the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, discusses the Ministry of Intelligence's alarming practice of publishing "baseless allegations of Baha'i espionage without providing any evidence or justification for the suppression of Baha'i citizens."

[Continue reading...](#)

Does Iran persecute Bahá'ís? See for yourself.

Iran Press Watch (23.05.2023) - I first learned of it last week, right here on FāVS News. Cassy Benefield wrote, "Religious Persecution Explained in New Report about Countries with Worst Religious Freedoms." That report was published May 1 by the U.S.

Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). It defines religious freedom clearly: "Freedom of religion or belief ensures individual autonomy to have, change, reject, interpret, and manifest religion or belief according to one's own conscience, which is at the core of other interconnected human rights."

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'i Enayatollah Naeimi receives 15-year prison sentence

Hrana.org (15.05.2023) - **Enayatollah Naeimi**, a Baha'i citizen, has been sentenced to 15 years in prison, with 10 years to be enforced, by the Isfahan Revolutionary Court. He was also fined and subjected to social deprivation.

The verdict was issued by Judge Morteza Barai, who found Naeimi guilty of "forming groups to act against national security" for which he received 10 years, and "propaganda against the regime," for which he received five years. The evidence presented for these charges included Naeimi's involvement with the Baha'i group "Yaran e Iran" or "Friends of Iran," as well as his association with Baha'i communities in Israel

[Continue reading...](#)

The Arrest of Milad Mastouri, a Baha'i Citizen of Kerman

Iran Press watch (10.05.2023) - On the morning of Sunday, April 30, 2023, **Milad Mastouri**, a Baha'i citizen living in Kerman was taken into custody when answering a summons to appear at the Intelligence Agency.

Mr. Mastouri was subjected to three hours of interrogation prior to his formal arrest.

Previously, on April 11, 2023, Kerman Security Agents had performed a search of Milad Mastouri's house in Kerman.

From prison to prison; the story of Ardeshir Fanaian, a Baha'i Citizen

Iran Press watch (05.05.2023) - From prison to prison is the story of the abuses endured by Ardeshir Fanaian, a Baha'i citizen who was born in prison, is currently in prison, and while in prison his father died, and his only child was born.

Ardeshir Fanaian, a 35-year-old Baha'i citizen, is a husband and a young father whose life is tied to words such as "prison" and "imprisonment". Ardeshir was born in Semnan prison in 1988, and 31 years later, in May 2019, he was arrested and imprisoned in the same city. Despite being granted amnesty, he is still incarcerated behind bars, away from his family, due to the obstruction of the city's Intelligence Department.

[Continue reading...](#)

Religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest April

Christians

Christian convert whose son has leukaemia released from prison

Article 18 (28.04.2023) - A 50-year-old Christian convert whose son has been battling leukaemia for five years was released from prison on Monday, two days before his 25th birthday.

Malihe Nazari, who was serving a six-year prison sentence in Tehran's Evin Prison for "acting against national security by promoting 'Zionist' Christianity", had been in prison since August 2022.

Her son, Mohammad-Hossein, turns 25 today.

Article18 has not yet been able to independently verify the details of Malihe's release, but Mohabat News reported that the Supreme Court ruled in her favour due to her son's condition.

[Continue reading...](#)

Malihe Nazari, Joseph Shahbazian and Mina Khajavi

Article 18 (24.04.2023) - Iranian-Armenian **Christian Joseph Shahbazian** and Christian converts **Mina Khajavi** and **Malihe Nazari** were sentenced to a combined total of 22 years in prison solely for practising their Christian faith, including through attending and organising house-churches.

Joseph, Mina and Malihe were among at least 35 Christians arrested or interrogated by intelligence agents belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard in a coordinated operation over two days and across three cities in the summer of 2020.

The arrests took place on the evening of 30 June and the morning of 1 July in Tehran, its sister city Karaj, and Malayer, 400km southwest of Tehran.

Dozens more Christians were ordered to provide their contact details and told they would soon be summoned for questioning.

The first arrests took place at around 8pm on the evening of 30 June, in western Tehran's Yaftabad district.

[Continue reading...](#)

Supreme Court orders retrial of Christian couple serving combined 10-year sentence

Article 18 (11.04.2023) - An Iranian Christian couple serving a combined 10 years in prison for belonging to a house-church have had their third application for a retrial accepted.

Sara Ahmadi, who will turn 45 on Friday, and **Homayoun Zhaveh**, who is 64 and has advanced Parkinson's disease, were informed of the decision on Easter Day.

The ruling was made by Branch 9 of the Supreme Court, the same branch that agreed last month to a retrial in the case of an Iranian-Armenian pastor, Joseph Shahbazian, serving a 10-year sentence for holding church services in his home.

Sara and Homayoun's case will be reviewed by Branch 34 of Tehran's appeal court on 9 May.

[Continue reading...](#)

Iranian Christian rights activist wins German prize

Ucanews (24.04.2023) - A German foundation that supports persecuted Christians honored an Iranian Christian civil rights activist with a prestigious prize for her brave and relentless campaign for human rights despite state oppression.

The Stephanus Foundation for Persecuted Christians conferred the Stephanus Prize 2023 on Mary Fatima Mohammadi for her "outstanding courage" and "extraordinary selflessness" at a ceremony in Bonn on April 21, said a press release from the group.

"The 24-year-old has not only claimed the right to change one's faith for herself in Iran, where turning away from Islam is considered a crime. She has also compiled and published information on the totalitarian dictatorship's persecution of dissidents, including the inhumane treatment of inmates in Qarchak and Fashafoye prisons," the release said.

[Continue reading ...](#)

Defending the freedom to worship—Iranian Christian pastor released from prison

Afinternational (13.04.2023) - **Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani**, an Iranian Christian-convert and leader of a 400-member house church, has been released from prison in Iran. Pastor Nadarkhani was arrested on charges of acting against national security and promoting "Zionist Christianity" in 2018. Prior to his arrest in 2018, he was sentenced to death in 2010 on charges of apostasy and evangelism, although the sentence and charges were later dropped.

"No person should be punished, much less imprisoned, for sharing their beliefs," said Kelsey Zorzi, Director of Advocacy for Global Religious Freedom for ADF International. ADF International has been advocating for Pastor Nadarkhani's release since 2019.

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'is

B.C. man worries for cousin, a Bahá'í woman Jailed in Iran's Evin Prison

Iran Press watch (25.04.2023) - Coquitlam resident Vesal Amini is making a plea for the release of his cousin, **Samin Ehsani**, who is behind bars in Iran's notorious Evin prison. She has been sentenced to five years in connection with her religious beliefs as a Bahai – Iran's largest minority religion, and for her role as a children's rights activist. "It's not fair," Amini told Global News, "to be imprisoned for her belief, doing good things and being a good person."

Amini said she was active in running courses for Afghan children who are denied the right to an education in Iran. He says his cousin is a mother to a five-year-old girl named Nila and the two of them miss each other terribly. "She is missing her daughter and her daughter is missing her mother," he said.

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'i collapses after agents search home

Iran Press Watch (15.04.2023) - A Baha'i resident of Kerman, Poursan Zand, went into a state of shock and lost consciousness after agents from the Intelligence Department entered her home on Tuesday morning. The family had to call an ambulance.

According to IranWire sources, the agents presented a warrant and proceeded to search the house, confiscating various items including mobile phones, movies, CDs and books. Zand's daughter protested at the officers' conduct. They responded by searching her personal belongings as well, but without a warrant, and threatening to record all her conversations.

The inappropriate behaviour of the agents' during the search has raised concerns about the treatment of citizens by law enforcement agencies.

The agents later left the Zand home before the arrival of the ambulance.

[Continue reading...](#)

Wave of home searches against Kerman Baha'is

IranPress Watch (15.04.2023) - Iranian intelligence forces have launched a wave of house searches against Baha'is in the southern city of Kerman in an apparent escalation of recent crackdowns by the authorities on the Baha'i community.

Kerman Intelligence Department agents searched the homes of Nasrin Dowlat and Hedayat Hakimian on Thursday, seizing their electronic devices, including mobile phones, laptops, and tablets, without accusing the Baha'i citizens of any specific charges. Hakimian blindfolded and handcuffed, though later released, and the homes of several other Baha'is in Kerman, including Poursan Zand, Soroush Kholosi, Haydeh Fatahi and Milad Misturi have also been searched.

IranWire reported yesterday that Poursan Zand went into a state of shock and lost consciousness during the search of her home. The agents had presented a warrant to search the house, confiscating various items including mobile phones, movies, CDs and books.

[Continue reading...](#)

Jailed Baha'i denied prison leave for mother's funeral

Iran Press Watch (08.04.2023) - A jailed member of Iran's persecuted Baha'i religious minority, **Payam Vali**, has been denied short-term leave to attend his mother's funeral. Despite three days of entreaties to the authorities, Judge Asif Al-Husseini, head of the Karaj Revolutionary Court, refused Vali's request.

Vali's mother, Farangis Foroughi, passed away on April 2. He had tried to speak to his mother on the phone from prison, before her death, but he was unable to hear her voice due to her worsening condition.

Vali was arrested on September 24, after police raided his home and workplace in Karaj, near Tehran. He was severely beaten by the officers after resisting arrest.

[Continue reading...](#)

Back to Evin: Baha'i children's activist prison leave ends

Iran Press watch (04.04.2023) - Children's rights activist and Baha'i citizen Samin Ehsani, 37, is returning to Tehran's notorious Evin Prison after five days of leave during the Nowruz new year holiday period. Ehsani has been in prison since June of last year.

Ehsani will return with her a picture of Nila, her five years old daughter and, according to her husband Keyzad, "a lot of sadness, longing, infinite hope, and trust."

Ehsani works as a translator and is also a member of the Children's Book Council. She grew up in northern Gorgan and faced discrimination for her religious beliefs during her primary and secondary school years.

Despite being an excellent student, she was banned from continuing her education at Iranian universities due to her religious affiliation. Ehsani, like many Baha'is, attended the "underground" Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, where she received a degree in computer science, a bachelor's degree in chemistry, and a master's degree in public health.

[Continue reading...](#)

Open Letter by a Baha'i prisoner in Tehran: "officials told me that the law does not apply to Baha'is"

Iran Press watch (04.04.2023) - Hami Bahadori, a Baha'i citizen imprisoned in Tehran's Fashafouyeh prison (officially, The Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary), is still in an uncertain condition after six months of temporary detention. In an English-language audio recording from the prison, he spoke about what has happened to him during this time, including physical and mental torture, deprivation of legal rights, and forced confessions. Bahadori also spoke about the sufferings of being a Baha'i in the Islamic Republic and asked everyone to "be his voice." He said he wanted to stop being a "victim."

Hami Bahadori was arrested by security forces at his home in September 2022 and initially transferred to Evin Prison, but after three months, he was transferred to Tehran's Fashafouyeh prison without notice.

[Continue reading...](#)

Oppressed in life and persecuted in death: Baha'is prevented from dignified burials in their own cemetery

bic.org (03.04.2023) - A brazen and barbaric act by the Iranian authorities has emerged in recent days in Tehran. A deceased Baha'i was buried on 30 March at Khavaran cemetery near Tehran by an agent of the Ministry of Intelligence without notifying the family of the deceased and violating Baha'i burial practices.

[Continue reading...](#)

Oppressed in life and persecuted in death: Baha'is prevented from dignified burials in their own cemetery

[Bahá'í International Community](#) (03.04.2023) - A brazen and barbaric act by the Iranian authorities has emerged in recent days in Tehran. A deceased Baha'i was buried on 30 March at Khavaran cemetery near Tehran by an agent of the Ministry of Intelligence without notifying the family of the deceased and violating Baha'i burial practices.

The agent had demanded that the family pay an exorbitant fee for burial within plots already owned and previously managed by the Baha'i community. He threatened the family that failure to meet his demands would result in the burial taking place in a site adjacent to the Baha'i cemetery previously used by the government to bury executed political prisoners.

And in a further development over the weekend, the same intelligence agent threatened to bury another Baha'i under the same circumstance if the family of the deceased also refused to yield to his demands.

"What threat do the dead pose that justifies this ruthless treatment by the Iranian government," said Simin Fahandej, a Representative of the Baha'i International Community (BIC) to the United Nations, "that they extend the persecution of Baha'is

even after their death, following a lifetime of oppression imposed on them in every aspect of their living moments?"

The previous Tehran Baha'i cemetery, a beautifully cultivated site of about 80,000 square meters built before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, was confiscated in 1980. A smaller barren plot of land adjacent to a mass grave site was then [transferred to the community](#) by Tehran's Deputy Mayor.

Now the Baha'is are being asked for high fees to bury their dead in their own cemetery land and prevented from doing so according to Baha'i burial practices. Baha'i cemetery staff have been imprisoned and even bereaved family members threatened with imprisonment.

Numerous other Baha'i cemeteries around Iran have also been confiscated or desecrated over the past 40 years.

"Baha'is have faced burial issues for over four decades. But now, adding to the burden of grief of both those Baha'is whose family members are being buried without formal burial rites, as well as those families whose loved ones are already buried in a previously used plot of land, is beyond cruel," Ms. Fahandej added.

Two years ago, as part of a systematic 43-year campaign to persecute the Baha'is, the Iranian authorities began to block the community from [using their part of the Khavaran cemetery](#) and demanded that Baha'is use an adjacent site which was previously used as a mass grave.

The Baha'is refused out of respect for the dead and their bereaved families.

Earlier this week, when the Baha'is wished to bury a prominent member of the community, Mr. Behzad Majidi, the Ministry of Intelligence agent Masoud Momeni attempted to charge the Baha'is an exorbitant sum to allow the burial within the Baha'i-owned cemetery plot. The Baha'is refused this on principle, as other minority communities with plots in the same larger complex do not face such fees. The action meant that the Baha'is were barred from using their own cemetery.

Mr. Momeni, who in April 2021 wrested management control of the Baha'i cemetery from the community, and whose Ministry of Intelligence affiliation was revealed by Tehran municipality staff, then buried Mr. Majidi atop the mass grave site without respecting Baha'i funeral practices or informing his loved ones, depriving them of the opportunity to be present.

His action was an obvious retaliation against the Baha'is and a violation of their property rights and funeral practices. Mr. Momeni has also instructed cemetery workers to remove the barrier dividers between the Baha'i cemetery and the mass grave—in a further attempt to erase the ownership and identity of the Baha'i cemetery.

"The inhumane actions of the Iranian government have no limits, not even in death," said Ms. Fahandej, "Now the authorities are trying to persecute many at the same time, both out of disrespect for the burial rights of the Baha'is, and by the desecration of the resting place of thousands of others. Baha'is do not accept these efforts on principle."

The latest persecution of the Iranian Baha'i community—which targeted individuals even as they grieved the loss of loved ones—comes as hundreds of families across Iran are mourning a widespread loss of life.

Background

- Before the Revolution the Baha'i community in Tehran owned a beautifully landscaped and befitting cemetery land of about 80,000 square meters. In 1980,

this central Baha'i cemetery in Tehran was confiscated. The government then leveled the grounds, the site of more than 15,000 burials, removing gravestones and selling off those of value. In the 1990s, the grounds were further desecrated when the bodies of the Baha'is were exhumed and ignominiously loaded onto trucks. Bulldozers were then used to clear the grounds for the construction of the "Khavaran Cultural Center".

- The executive director of the Behesht-e Zahra Organization (the agency that manages Tehran's large Khavaran cemetery) later announced that a parcel of barren land of 27,000 square meters with no facilities was legally transferred to the Baha'i community in replacement, to which the community have sacrificially developed open green space, a mortuary, a surrounding wall, and entrance and exit gates on the Khavaran Road. Other minority communities also have separate cemeteries within the same larger complex. The new Baha'i cemetery was next to the Armenian cemetery, within the same larger complex, and adjacent to a mass grave of political victims.
- Tehran's Khavaran cemetery is the final resting place for thousands of political victims executed in the 1980s by the new Islamic Republic and placed in a mass grave
- Attempting to charge bereaved Baha'is exorbitant sums to use the Baha'i-owned cemetery in Tehran, and then burying the deceased atop the 1980s mass grave when they refuse on principle, is an attempt to both erase the memory of thousands of political victims while inflicting further harm on the persecuted Iranian Baha'i community.
- Iran's government has hindered and even blocked the ability of the Baha'is to bury their dead ever since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.
- Baha'i burial and funeral practices call for the deceased to be treated with dignity and respect and for a specific prayer to be read – neither of which was observed for Mr. Majidi.
- Since 1979, the Baha'is have been systematically persecuted in Iran by being arbitrarily detained, sentenced to jail on baseless charges, denied educations and livelihoods, their homes are confiscated and destroyed, they are smeared by hate speech, and their graves are desecrated, as part of a campaign to destroy Iran's Baha'i community.

Photo: bic.org

Religious persecution and issues – Monthly digest March

Christians

Annual report presentation at UK parliament

Article 18 (28.03.2023) - The UN's Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Nazila Ghanea, joined Article18's director, Mansour Borji, and two Iranian Christian

survivors of persecution, Mojtaba Hosseini and Sara Fooladi, for the UK parliament presentation of our joint annual report last week.

The 22 March event was hosted by Fiona Bruce, the UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for FoRB and chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA).

[Continue reading...](#)

Supreme Court agrees to retrial of Iranian-Armenian pastor serving 10-year sentence

Article 18 (15.03.2023) - Iran's Supreme Court has agreed that an ethnic Armenian pastor serving a 10-year prison sentence for holding church services in his home should be afforded a retrial.

The ruling by the ninth branch of the Supreme Court, dated 25 February, was communicated to **Joseph Shahbazian's** lawyer on Monday, 13 March.

In their short explanation, the judges, Ghasem Mezyani and Majid Hosseini-Nik, say that having considered his case, the maximum sentence of 10 years was "not appropriate" as both the Revolutionary and appeal courts failed to "offer any evidence" to prove he was the leader of the group.

[Continue reading...](#)

Church Haik Hovsepian founded set to be sold by Iranian state

Article 18 (14.03.2023) - A church of huge significance for Iranian Christians is set to be sold by an organisation headed by Iran's Supreme Leader.

The Assemblies of God church in Gorgan, northeast Iran, has over the years been led by some of the most well-known Iranian pastors, including three who were killed for their faith.

[Continue reading...](#)

'I have to bring back the child who became a Christian,' says Shia cleric

Article 18 (10.03.2023) - A prominent Shia cleric has bemoaned how the younger generation of Iranians are leaving Shia Islam for other faiths, including Christianity, and said he views it as his responsibility to "bring them back".

Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Javad Alavi Borujerdi, whose grandfather was one of the teachers of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, made the comments as part of a public address to Shia students in the religious city of Qom yesterday.

[Continue reading ...](#)

'I felt very sick every time the jailer searched our bodies with her hands'

Article 18 (08.03.2023) - **Shadi Noveiri** was strip-searched multiple times during her 40 days in detention, an experience she describes as "absolutely humiliating and I believe illegal".

The Christian convert, who turned 25 during her incarceration, was subjected to the search each time she was taken from the Ministry of Intelligence detention centre in Rasht, where she was interrogated, back to Lakan Prison, which she calls "one of the worst and most unsanitary prisons in Iran".

"The other prisoners told me: 'When they want to punish a prisoner, or send them into exile, they send them to Lakan Prison.'"

[Continue reading...](#)

Fifth convert released amid mass pardoning of political prisoners

Article 18 (06.03.2023) - A fifth convert has been released as part of the mass pardoning of political prisoners, while there are reports two more may also have been freed, perhaps taking the total to as many as seven within the past month.

Milad Goodarzi, who was nearly halfway through a three-year sentence – reduced from five – for "engaging in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam", was released from Karaj's Central Prison on Saturday morning.

[Continue reading...](#)

A letter from Yousef Nadarkhani on the day he was released from prison

Article 18 - (03.03.2023) - **Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani**, who was released on Sunday after nearly five years' arbitrary detention in Tehran's Evin Prison, has shared with Article18 a letter he wrote on the day of his release "as a testimony and to express my gratitude".

In the letter, a full translation of which can be read below, the pastor says that although he has been "locked up many times because of His name" – he previously spent three years in prison after he was sentenced to death for apostasy – he considers everything he has endured as his "small part in sharing in the labour and suffering of Christ".

[Continue reading...](#)

Arbitrarily detained pastor released from prison but faces flogging and exile

Article 18 (01.03.2023) - An Iranian pastor once sentenced to death for his "apostasy" has been "pardoned" and released after nearly five years in Tehran's Evin Prison, but told he still faces flogging and two years' exile 2,000km from his home.

Yousef Nadarkhani, whose death sentence was overturned back in 2011, was sentenced again in July 2017, alongside three other converts, to 10 years in prison and two years' exile for "acting against national security by propagating house-churches and promoting 'Zionist' Christianity".

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'is

Baha'i Citizen Nahaleh Shahidi Yazdi arrested

Hrana (29.03.2023) - According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, on March 28, 2023, Baha'i **Nahaleh Shahidi Yazdi** was arrested by security forces. An informed source told HRANA, "Shahidi was arrested on her way from Karaj to Kerman."

The reasons for her arrest and the detained location are still unknown.

Shahidi was arrested in March 2011 and then sentenced to two years in prison and one year of suspended imprisonment for her civil and children's rights activities, such as holding literacy courses for children left out of schools after the Bam earthquake.

[Continue reading...](#)

Baha'i Citizen Parva Behdad sentenced to imprisonment and additional punishments

Iran Press Watch (16.03.2023) - The Isfahan Revolutionary Court recently sentenced Baha'i citizen **Parva Behdad** to three years in prison, a ban from leaving the country for two years and other punishments.

According to HRANA, the news agency of Human Rights Activists, Baha'i citizen Parva Behdad was sentenced to three years in prison, a ban from leaving the country for two years, paying a fine and participating in a religion course for indoctrination.

[Continue reading...](#)

A Baha'i grandmother starts her second decade in prison

Iran Press Watch (15.03.2023) - **Mahvash Shahriari Sabet**, a 70-year-old Baha'i teacher and poet, mother and grandmother, is perhaps even more renowned among people outside Iran than in her own country.

She spent 10 years of her life in Iranian prisons, from 2008 to 2017, solely based on her religious beliefs, before her latest arrest on July 31, 2022.

Most of her poems were written during this time. Her books Free, Love Story, and You Remember Me have been published abroad since her works are prohibited in Iran.

Selections of her poetry titled Prison Poems have been translated into English and have been well-received by people worldwide.

[Continue reading...](#)

Sepehr Ziaie, Baha'i prisoner, excluded from Khamenei's Amnesty

IranPress Watch (09.03.2023) - **Sepehr Ziaie** is one of the Baha'is detained in recent weeks, during the new round of protests in Iran. While the authorities of the Islamic Republic have launched a show of public amnesty, Mr. Ziaie is one of the hundreds of prisoners who have not been released from prison.

[Continue reading...](#)

Continued detention and uncertainty in case of Baha'i citizen Sanaz Tafzali

Iran Press Watch (08.03.2023) - **Ms. Sanaz Tafzali** (Ruhi), a 45-year-old Baha'i citizen, married mother of two, has been detained in Mashhad's Vakil Abad prison for three months without specific charges.

As of March 2, 2023, Ms. Tafzali had been detained for 90 days. Two months ago the court agreed to her bail. However, after posting one of the heaviest property bonds in past years, equivalent to ten billion tomans, Ms. Tafzali remains in custody and authorities have refused to release her. The bail documents remain in the custody of the court.

[Continue reading...](#)

The extension of the detention order of Pouya Saraf, a Baha'i citizen in Shiraz

Iran Press watch (06.03.2023) - The detention order for **Pouya Saraf**, a Baha'i citizen living in Karaj, has been extended. Mr. Saraf had already been detained for 100 days at the time the order was extended.

According to HRANA news agency, the news arm of the Human Rights Activists in Iran, Pouya Saraf, a Baha'i citizen living in Karaj, is still in detention and his status is in limbo.

[Continue reading...](#)

Jailed Iranian rights activists ready to testify against FM claims

Iran Press Watch (05.03.2023) - In response to Iran's foreign minister's denials of rape in prisons, an imprisoned female activist announced she is ready to testify against the government.

In a letter sent to Radio Farda, the Persian Service of Radio Free Europe in Prague, Narges Mohammadi wrote: "In the past few months, detainees have been brought to the

women's ward of Evin prison, and ... subjected to sexual assault and physical torture. We have witnessed the traces left on their bodies."

[Continue reading...](#)

Article 18 Annual Report 2023 on persecution of Christians

[Article 18](#) (26.03.2023) - 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.

And while it is no longer common for Iranian Christians to be killed for their faith, the report shows clearly that, contrary to the claims of the Islamic Republic, there is still no religious freedom in Iran today.

Instead, religious minorities including Christians – both the "recognised" Christians of Armenian and Assyrian descent, and unrecognised converts – are systematically deprived of their right to freely practise a faith of their choosing, in violation of Iran's obligations as a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In the year of the death of Mahsa Amini, when Iranians poured onto the streets to demand justice, the joint report argues that, "at their core, the ongoing protests are a cry for freedom: the freedom of the Iranian people to live in a way that corresponds with their beliefs".

And while the Iranian regime has consistently sought to play down the uprising – including by using Armenian and Assyrian leaders as their [mouthpieces](#) – both [Armenian](#) and [Assyrian](#) Christians, as well as converts, have been among those arrested for participating.

Aside from the protests, 2022 was another year in which Christians continued to face harassment, arrest and imprisonment only due to the peaceful practice of their faith.

At least 30 Christians endured imprisonment or exile in 2022 – the same number as 2021 – while there were more than double the number of arrests: 134 in 2022 compared to 59 in 2021.

There was also a marked increase in the number of Christians detained – 61 in 2022, compared to 34 in 2021.

At the end of 2022, at least 17 Christians remained in prison, serving sentences of up to 10 years on charges such as "acting against national security" and "propaganda against the regime".

For, as the report outlines, to practise a belief other than Shia Islam in the Islamic Republic of Iran is "considered a threat to the Islamic Republic and its values".

This is why, for example, two Iranian-Armenian Christians were [sentenced](#) in 2022 to 10 years in prison for holding church services in their homes.

Or why a 64-year-old convert to Christianity with advanced Parkinson's disease, and his wife, are now [serving](#) a combined 10 years in prison.

These examples, and many more, are detailed in the report, a copy of which can be downloaded [here](#).

Photo: articleeighteen.com

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading ...](#)

#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’.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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=4I844XHYfeU>

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 Ahmadis 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/3I9qUlz> - 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.'***

Photo: csw.org.uk

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading ...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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.

[Continue reading...](#)

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 Haghightajo, 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 Haghightajo'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.
