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## IRAN CSW leads appeal on behalf of imprisoned Christians

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), and Mansour Borji, pastor of the Iranian Church in London, attended the European Parliament's Iran Delegation meeting on Tuesday, February 1, to present the dire situation of the evangelical church in Iran.

During the meeting chaired by German MEP Barbara Lochbihler, MEPs also heard presentations from the Sufi and the Baha'i communities. Mrs Lochbihler has taken a lead role in European Union (EU) – Iran relations, and has on many occasions appealed for clemency for Iranians sentenced to death.

Between June 2010 and January 2011, at least 202 Christians were arrested and detained across the country. On January 4th, when announcing the arrests of Christians, the Governor-General of Tehran, Morteza Tamadon called the evangelical movement "false, deviant and corrupt sects," and stated, "Our final blow towards them is imminent." He further added, "They (the evangelical churches), just like the Taliban and Wahhabis, have placed themselves within the religion of Islam like a parasite and under the cover of Christianity..."

Pastor Borji shared his experience of Iran, and detailed the appalling conditions in which 26 Christians are currently held on account of their faith, despite Iran being signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief. The evidence presented to the EU demonstrated that Iran is in clear breach of these undertakings.

CSW's latest report on Iran was shared with MEPs, and the EU was asked to endorse its formal recommendations, which include the need for an investigation into the Iranian Government's use of the death penalty and charges of apostasy against converts from Islam; and ensuring that Iran upholds its obligations under international law.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "It is heartening to know that the rights of religious minorities in Iran are taken seriously by the EU, and by people such as Mrs Lochbilder. As part of its work in the region, CSW along with partners such as the Iranian Church, will continue to advocate for the rights of Christians and other religious minorities there. We will do all in our power to see the end of unjust arrests and imprisonment on the basis of religious belief, and we will continue to work together with all those who share this goal."

### **Notes to Editors:**

1. Article 18 of the ICCPR states, "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

"No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice."

"Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others."

"The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."

2. A copy of CSW's Briefing on Iran can be obtained from the press office.