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IRAN Government detains more Christians in another wave of arrests

On the evening of Sunday, February 13th, an estimated 45 Christians were temporarily detained overnight by the Iranian authorities in various towns and cities, including at least five people who were held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison.

At least one woman was detained in Mashad, while two men were detained in Ahwaz, and other men in Karaj, Robat Karim and Dezful. One man and his pregnant wife were released after being informed that they must return for questioning once their child is born.

The wave of arrests and temporary detentions by the Iranian government appear to be part of the government's wider tactic of repression and intimidation of the Christian community.

Similar tactics have been deployed against Iran's Baha'i community. Concern is mounting for seven Baha'i leaders detained since early 2008 after it was revealed that two of them, Mrs Fariba Kamalabadi and Mrs Mahvash Sabet, have been transferred to the brutal 'Section 200' of Gohardasht prison on February 12th. The Baha'i International Community reports that Mrs Fariba Kamalabadi has been physically threatened by inmates, and that both women were told prior to the move that the inmates of Section 200 had been 'warned' about them. The five male Baha'i leaders were transferred in late January to Section 4 of the prison, which is more crowded and where they are now suffering severe physical privations.

Encouragingly, several Christians who were detained in the wave of arrests that began on December 26, 2010 have also been released on bail. Those released include six who were held in Tehran and four who were held in Isfahan, including Assemblies of God pastor Leonard Keshishian. Some of the Christians have reported that whilst detained they were kept in solitary confinement for lengthy periods and were subjected to harsh interrogation. However, more than 30 Christians remain in prison in various cities across Iran.

On February 15th, Pastor Behrouz Sadegh-Khanjani, a second generation Christian detained in Shiraz since June 2010 and charged with crimes against the Islamic Order, political meetings and blasphemy, was released on bail along with four other Christians from Muslim backgrounds after a court failed to reach a verdict. Pastor Khanjani now awaits a further hearing, which is expected to take place in April. There has been no update on the appeal against a death sentence for apostasy by Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, who was arrested in October 2009 and received written confirmation of this sentence in November 2010.

CSW's National Director Stuart Windsor said, "CSW deplores the systematic targeting of religious minorities by the Iranian government. As a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran is legally obligated to uphold international standards of religious freedom for all its citizens."

Notes to Editors:

1. For a copy of CSW's briefing on Iran, please contact the Press Office.