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## IRAN Blasphemy trial of Christians postponed

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The blasphemy trial of members of the Church of Iran, which was adjourned on April 5 to give the prosecution more time to gather evidence, has been adjourned once more, in order to allow prosecutors to seek the assistance of Iran's traditional churches in determining their guilt.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that in addition to Behrouz Sadegh-Khandjani, Mehdi Furutan, Mohammad Beliad, Parviz Khalaj, and Nazly Beliad, a sixth Iranian Christian, Amin Afsharmanesh, is also standing trial on blasphemy charges.

In an earlier trial at the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz, the six members of the evangelical Church of Iran denomination were handed a one-year sentence for Crimes against the Islamic Order, which their legal team believes will be withdrawn on appeal.

There has been a recent increase in official rhetoric against evangelical Christians. On January 4, Morteza Tamadon, the governor of Tehran, called the evangelical movement "a false, deviant and corrupt sect... placing themselves within the religion of Islam like a parasite and under the cover of Christianity".

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "It is time for the Iranian authorities to end their stalling tactics and acquit these people, who are clearly innocent. CSW also urges the traditional churches of Iran to support these Christians. Any unbiased examination of the doctrines of the Church of Iran would show that they are not a sect or cult, despite not belonging to traditionally recognized or older denominations. The Iranian government must ensure that members of the Church of Iran, and especially Pastor Nadarkhani who still faces a death sentence for apostasy, receive due process, and are acquitted of all charges that have no legal bearing under the law."

### Notes to Editors:

1. The officially sanctioned churches are the Armenian Apostolic Church the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Chaldean Catholic Church
2. The doctrine of the Church of Iran can be found at: [http://www.eqlisediran.org/?page\\_id=8](http://www.eqlisediran.org/?page_id=8)
3. The six Christians were initially arrested in June 2010 on charges of apostasy, political meetings, blasphemy and crimes against the Islamic Order. They spent eight months in jail before being successively released on bail from February 15. Their lawyer has appealed the one-year prison sentence for crimes against the Islamic Order and a decision is pending.
4. Pastor Nadarkhani was arrested on October 13, 2009 while attempting to register his church. He had earlier questioned the Muslim monopoly on the religious instruction of children in Iran, which contravenes the Iranian Constitution. He was reportedly tried and informed orally in late September 2010 that he was to receive the death penalty for apostasy, although the written sentence was not issued until November 13.