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## IRAN Christians to stand trial for “activities against the order”

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learnt that eleven members of the Church of Iran are to stand trial in the Revolutionary Tribunal of Bandar-Anzali for “activities against the Order”, and for drinking alcohol. The charges relate to their involvement in a house church, and to taking communion wine.

The Christians on trial include Pastor Abdolreza Ali-Haghejad and his wife Anahita Khademi, Mahmoud Khosh-Hal and his wife Hava Saadetmend, Fatemah Modir-Nouri, Mehrdad Habibzade, Milad Radef and Behzad Taalipas, and Amir Goldoust, his sister Mina Goldoust, and his grandmother Zainab Bahremend.

There has been an increase in official rhetoric against evangelical Christians, which has been accompanied by a wave of arrests. 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”. So far the arrests of 254 Christians in 33 cities from June 2010 and February 2011 have been confirmed. However, the actual number of arrests is thought to be far higher.

The blasphemy trial of six other members of the Church of Iran was adjourned on April 5 to allow prosecutors more time to gather evidence, and postponed again on April 13 in order to allow prosecutors to seek the assistance of Iran’s traditional churches in determining their guilt. Their legal team is optimistic that all charges relating the blasphemy trial, and to a one-year sentence for Crimes Against the Islamic Order handed down at an earlier trial, will be overturned on appeal.

CSW’s National Director Stuart Windsor said, “The harassment and targeting of religious minorities is incompatible with Iran’s responsibilities under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, whereby countries pledge to respect the right of citizens to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. The charges against the eleven Church of Iran members constitute a severe infringement on Christian tradition, as they effectively criminalize the taking of Communion, which is a biblical injunction. CSW urges the international community to encourage Iran to meet its obligations on religious freedom under the Covenant by ensuring that all members of the Church of Iran, including Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, who still faces a death sentence for apostasy, receive due process, and are acquitted of all charges that have no legal bearing.”

### 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 13 November.