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IRAN Christian released from solitary confinement following exorbitant bail payment

Mr. Masoud Delijani, an Iranian Christian, was temporarily released from jail on July 9, after 114 days in solitary confinement, following the payment of a bail amount equivalent to \$100,000, according to Iranian news agency Mohabat News.

Mr. Delijani, from Kermanshah in western Iran, was reportedly charged with crimes related to his Christian faith, including hosting house-church meetings, and is said to be in poor physical health. A date for his court case has not been set.

Mr. Delijani was arrested by the Iranian Intelligence Ministry on March 17, 2011, along with nine other house-church members who were gathered in a private home. During the raid on the house, the security forces also confiscated a Christian painting, Bibles, DVDs and personal identity documents. The group was taken to an unknown location where they were subjected to harsh interrogations. Seven members of the group were released the following day, after they had been photographed and finger-printed, and had signed a statement declaring that they would refrain from attending any Christian gatherings in the future.

Mr. Delijani, his wife Mrs. Nahid Shirazi, and Mr. Meghdad Babakarami, all remained in custody. However, in mid-April Mrs. Shirazi and Mr. Babakarami were released after large bail payments of around \$20,000 and \$40,000 respectively were made on their behalves.

There is an increasing tendency on the part of Iranian judiciary to demand extortionate bail money for the temporary release of Christian detainees, and such payments place great strain on their families, friends and churches. In addition to the mass arrests of house-church members, which have intensified over the past year, leading to greater fear and insecurity in the Christian community, this tactic appears to be designed to curb the economic capability of the Iranian Christian community. Most Christians who have been released on bail and are awaiting trial have had to make payments of between \$15,000 and \$65,000 prior to their release. However, others continue to be held without formal charges despite raising the required funds. Elam Ministries reports that the equivalent of \$200,000 was demanded as bail for Farshid Fathi, a Christian from Tehran who was arrested in December 2010 and held in Evin prison. In March 2011 his family raised the bail money, but the authorities refused to release him. Mr. Fathi remains in prison, but has still not been formally charged.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "We welcome the news that Mr. Delijani is now reunited with his family. He and his family remain in our prayers as he recovers from the physical, psychological and emotional deprivations he suffered while in prison. CSW deplores the exorbitant payments being demanded for the temporary release of detainees who have committed no crime, but are being held solely on account of their faith, and calls on the authorities to cease this practice. Many families have been forced to hand over the title-deeds of their home to meet bail, leaving them in a vulnerable financial position. Moreover, holding detainees for lengthy periods without charge or trial is in violation of legal obligations under article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). All long term prisoners who, like Farshid Fathi, are being held without charge or trial must be released immediately, and without recourse to extortionate payments. In addition, those held solely on the basis of their faith must also be released in line with Iran's undertakings under Article 18 of the ICCPR to uphold freedom of religion or belief."