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## IRAN Nadarkhani verdict expected in mid-December but may be delayed until Christmas

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Sources close to the Yousef Nadarkhani apostasy case have informed Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) that Pastor Nadarkhani's lawyers have been told to expect a decision from the Supreme Leader in mid-December, occasioning fears that it may be issued to coincide with the Christmas season in order to avoid an international outcry. The court in Rasht has sent two letters regarding the case to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, but is still awaiting a response.

Other members of Pastor Nadarkhani's denomination are also facing difficulties. CSW has been informed that the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz has asked three Church of Iran members, to surrender themselves to the authorities to begin prison sentences. Pastor Behrouz Sadegh-Khanjani, Mr. Mohammad Beliad and his wife Nazly Beliad were part of a larger a group that is due to serve one year sentences for 'crimes against the order' following an unsuccessful appeal earlier this year. Pastor Khanjani is also known to have been tortured during a previous imprisonment in Shiraz. Their lawyer has advised them not to present themselves until a written request has been issued.

Pastor Benham Irani of the Church of Iran is currently serving a five year sentence, whilst Farshid Fathi Malayeri, who belongs to a different denomination, remains detained without charge nearly eleven months after his arrest. Church leader Noorollah Ghabitizadeh, who was arrested on Christmas Eve in 2010, is still being held in Ahwaz and, according to Mohabat News, has been verbally informed he may receive a death sentence. Like Pastor Nadarkhani, he too has been asked to recant his faith.

CSW's Team Leader for Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, Dr Khataza Gondwe, said, "It is worrying that the Supreme Leader has delayed a decision on Pastor Nadarkhani's case, leaving the pastor and his family in a distressing state of limbo. We continue to urge a swift decision, and to call for a full acquittal and release, since the verdict is in violation of Iranian law, and of the spirit of article 23 of the Iranian constitution. The Supreme Leader now has an opportunity to demonstrate Iran's commitment to work within its own civil law code, where apostasy is not a codified crime, and its obligations as a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which allows for freedom of religion and belief. The international community must remain vigilant in order to ensure that the Iranian authorities cannot use a hiatus to issue a negative ruling. Iran must also be urged to cease the detention of individuals without charge, and to uphold the rights and freedoms of members of minority faiths."