



12.22.2011

IRAN CSW highlights pastors imprisoned over Christmas

As Christmas approaches, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) remains concerned about the plight of three pastors who are imprisoned in Iran.

Farshid Fathi-Malayeri, an evangelical church leader and father of two young children, has been detained without charge since December 26, 2010, but has yet to appear in court. He has been kept in solitary confinement for a large part of his incarceration. The equivalent of \$250,000 was demanded as bail for his release. His family eventually managed to raise the bail, yet the authorities refused to release him.

Pastor Behnam Irani is currently serving a five year sentence in Ghezel Hesar prison in Karaj for "action against national security". The verdict against him includes text that describes Pastor Irani as an apostate and reiterates that apostates "can be killed". According to CSW sources, Pastor Irani is currently sharing a cell with criminals who regularly beat him, and as a result of injuries sustained during these assaults, he is now having difficulty walking. CSW was also informed that during the first few months of his imprisonment, the pastor was held incommunicado in a small cell, where guards would repeatedly wake him from sleep as a form of psychological torture. He was moved into a cramped room where inmates could not lie down to sleep, before being transferred to his current cell.

Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani continues to face a death sentence for apostasy. The Supreme Leader of Iran has yet to issue a decision in his case despite two referrals from the lower court. CSW has received unconfirmed reports indicating that execution may be delayed for up to a year to allow time to convince the pastor to renounce his faith.

Elam Ministries has reported the acquittal and release of Shahla Rahmati from Evin Prison. The Christian and the director of a successful electronics company was freed on 20 December, after 287 days of incarceration. Following her arrest on 9 March 2011, she spent three months in Section 209 of Tehran's Evin Prison, where she was interrogated and held in solitary confinement for six weeks.. Shahla Rahmati was later moved to an overcrowded cell which she shared with around 80 hardened criminals and drug addicts. Her health deteriorated, and she is currently seeking medical treatment.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "These men are representative of many other Iranian Christians held on spurious charges or without any charges in prisons throughout the country. CSW is deeply concerned for their wellbeing and at reports that vulnerable prisoners are being forced to share overcrowded cells with dangerous criminals. We call on the Iranian government to ensure that the pastors and other prisoners receive the necessary medical attention and are treated in accordance with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, as defined by the UN. The continuing harassment and imprisonment of Christians, Baha'is and other minorities is unacceptable and contravenes international covenants to which Iran is signatory, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees freedom of religion. We urge the international community to continue to press Iran for the release of Pastor Nadarkhani and others who are unjustly imprisoned or facing execution due to flawed judicial processes."