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IRAN British MPs highlight Nadarkhani case and Iran's "appalling" religious freedom violations

In a 90-minute debate on human rights in Iran, Members of Parliament yesterday highlighted the worrying situation of Iranian Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani and discussed the regime's systematic denial of the Iranian people's right to freedom of religion or belief.

The severe persecution faced by Christians, Baha'is, Jews and other religious minorities in Iran was highlighted as a key area of concern by various MPs, within the wider discussion on the extensive and broad-ranging human rights violations committed by the Iranian government.

Stewart Jackson MP drew heavily on Christian Solidarity Worldwide's (CSW) research to describe the problems faced by Christians, including the worrying uncertainty surrounding the Nadarkhani case, and the plight of other detainees such as Farshid Fathi and Pastor Benham Irani. "Torture is used to pressure individuals to make confessions and to provide information on others. As I mentioned, exorbitant bail postings secure the release of individuals, along with illegal documents that religious detainees are forced to sign. Such documents demand an end to participation in Christian activities, the renunciation of faith, and compliance with further questioning when summoned. Laptops and mobile phones are often confiscated during raids on private Christian homes and are used to obtain information on the activities and identities of other Christians."

Louise Ellman MP, who tabled the debate, began the proceedings by raising the plight of the severely-targeted Baha'i religious minority: "The repression takes a number of forms in an ongoing and systematic persecution. It means arbitrary arrest and imprisonment and the denial of access to higher education and areas of employment. The homes and businesses of Baha'is have been subject to arson attacks, cemeteries have been destroyed, and children have been harassed."

MPs pressed the British Government to make representations to Iran on the issue of the Islamic Penal Bill, which is due to be passed by the Iranian parliament later this year and which may still include a clause stipulating the death penalty for male apostates, despite Iranian claims to the contrary.

Replying to the debate, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Alistair Burt MP said, "We will press at the [UN Human Rights] Council in March, as we do at every Council, for Iran to deal with the record against it that colleagues have spoken about. There is no doubt that the issues raised here will continue to be raised by colleagues, but they may rest assured that their concerns are echoed by the Government. We will continue to stand up for the rights of those who are oppressed in Iran."

CSW was commended for its work by a number of Parliamentarians, and a reference was made to CSW's engagement with a debate on human rights in North Korea, which also took place yesterday prior to the Iran debate.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW welcomes the remarks made by Members of Parliament and the response of the government during yesterday's debate on the human rights situation in Iran, and is encouraged by the robust coverage of the widespread abuses of freedom of religion or belief in that nation. Given the appalling violations that religious minorities face in Iran, it is of utmost importance that the

international community both stands and acts in solidarity with them, something that was well articulated in yesterday's debate. CSW is committed to continuing to raise religious freedom issues in Iran with key policy shapers and decision makers until the human rights situation there is positively and irrevocably changed."

Notes to Editors:

1. View the debate online [here](#)
2. A full transcript of the debate is available in [Hansard](#)