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IRAN | Nadarkhani execution fears; long-awaited trial for church leader

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has been informed that Pastor Nadarkhani's lawyer is trying to confirm reports that the Iranian authorities have decided to execute the pastor. There are grave concerns that the death sentence could be carried out at any time without prior notification and that the authorities will merely announce it later, a practice that is not uncommon in Iran.

Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani is facing a death sentence for apostasy, and has been awaiting a final decision on the verdict for several months. On at least four occasions he has been offered freedom in exchange for renouncing his faith, but has consistently refused to do so.

CSW has also received reports that the long-awaited trial of Farshid Fathi Malayeri, an evangelical church leader who has been held in prison since December 2010, took place on 5 February in a Revolutionary Court based in Evin Prison. The court is expected to deliver its verdict in three months time. Mohabat News reports that the trial had been postponed several times.

The father-of-two was arrested by the authorities on 26 December 2010 during raids which targeted a large number of Christian citizens and house church members, many of whom were later released after exorbitant bail payments.

Farshid Fathi Malayeri was kept in solitary confinement for a large part of his incarceration, and interrogated by agents working for the Ministry of Intelligence about his church activities and contacts abroad. The equivalent of \$250,000 was demanded as bail for his release, but when his family eventually managed to raise the money, the authorities refused to release him.

Fathi is now reportedly being held in the general ward of the prison. He is believed to be in good health and his family has been allowed to visit him.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is deeply concerned at the very real possibility that Pastor Nadarkhani's death sentence could be carried out at any time, despite the fact that there is no legal basis for this sentence. We urge the international community to press the Iranian government to release Pastor Nadarkhani, Farshid Fathi Malayeri and others who are unjustly imprisoned or facing execution following flawed judicial processes. It is unacceptable that Farshid Fathi Malayeri had to endure over a year of incarceration while awaiting his trial date, including a lengthy time in solitary confinement. CSW also remains deeply concerned at the ongoing harassment and imprisonment of Christians, Baha'is and other minorities, actions which contravene 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 Iranian authorities to follow due process, and ensure respect for the right to freedom of religion."