



8.6.2012

## IRAN Pastor Irani develops blood infection as health deteriorates sharply

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that Pastor Benham Irani, currently held in Ghezel Hesar prison in Iran, has developed a blood infection as a result of an ongoing intestinal complication. As his health continues to deteriorate sharply, he is reportedly barely able to speak.

Sources close to CSW report that Pastor Irani may be sent to a hospital for surgery to remove the part of his intestine which is the source of the infection. However, his family has not been informed about possible surgery or whether or not he has been sent to hospital.

Benham Irani pastors the Church of Iran congregation in Karaj. He was arrested in December 2006, and sentenced to six years imprisonment on charges of "action against the state" and "action against the order." The verdict against him includes text that describes Pastor Irani as an apostate and reiterates that apostates "can be killed". Furthermore, prison authorities and fellow prisoners have informed him on various occasions that he will not leave the prison "alive".

Pastor Irani has so far been denied hospital treatment for severe bleeding due to stomach ulcers and complications with his colon, which caused him to lose consciousness at one point. Without adequate medical care, his condition has continued to worsen, prompting concerns that he may have only weeks or months to live.

During the first few months of his imprisonment in Ghezel Hesar Prison, 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, where he sustained regular beatings from his cell mates and prison authorities. As a result of injuries sustained during these assaults, he has difficulty walking. The pastor also has trouble with his vision and has received death threats from fellow prisoners.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW is deeply concerned for Pastor Irani's welfare. We continue to urge the Iranian authorities to allow Pastor Irani access to appropriate medical treatment. Reports of his possible hospital admission, if true, are welcome and long overdue, as the delay in his treatment has undoubtedly caused his health to deteriorate sharply. It is also vital that Pastor Irani is protected from fellow prisoners who have threatened his life. CSW continues to call on the Iranian government to honor its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and facilitate the unconditional release of Pastor Irani, Pastor Nadarkhani, Pastor Farshid Fathi Malayeri and all others currently detained or facing execution on account of their faith following flawed judicial processes."