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## IRAN | Pastor Nadarkhani released, acquitted of apostasy

CSW has been informed that Yousef Nadarkhani, the Church of Iran pastor sentenced to death for apostasy, has been released and is at home with his family.

According to reliable sources, during court proceedings that took place today, Pastor Nadarkhani was acquitted of apostasy, but found guilty of evangelizing Muslims. He was sentenced to three years imprisonment for the latter charge, but released because he had already served this time.

Pastor Nadarkhani was arrested in his home city of Rasht in 2009 soon after questioning the Muslim monopoly of religious instruction for children, which he felt was unconstitutional. He was sentenced to death for apostasy in 2010, a decision that was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2011. Although the Iranian penal code did not specify death for apostasy, a constitutional loophole allowed judges to refer to Shari'a law and authoritative fatwas to justify such a sentence. Today the pastor had been expected to face new charges for unspecified crimes, but was instead released.

CSW's Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is delighted to learn of Pastor Nadarkhani's release after a long incarceration. We commend the Iranian judiciary for this step, which is a triumph for justice and the rule of law. While we rejoice at this wonderful news, we do not forget hundreds of others who are harassed or unjustly detained on account of their faith, and CSW is committed to continue campaigning until all of Iran's religious minorities are able to enjoy religious freedom as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is party."