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IRAN | Seven Christians detained following raid on prayer meeting

Seven Christians from the Church of Iran denomination were detained today following a raid by members of the security services on a house in the city of Shiraz in Fars Province.

Mohammad (Vahid) Roghangir, Soroush Saraie, Roxana Forughi, Eskandar Rezaie, Bijan Haghighi, Mehdi Ameruni and Shahin Lahooti are currently being held in Plaque 100, the Intelligence Ministry's notorious detention centre. They were detained at around 6pm, after security forces raided a house where a prayer meeting was underway.

According to sources close to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), older people who had attended the prayer gathering were threatened, but were not taken into custody. The detentions are part of a marked upsurge in a campaign of harassment of Christians of all denominations, with reports of a significant increase in arrests during recent weeks.

In other developments, on Wednesday, Mohabat News Agency reported that five Christian converts detained in Adel-Abad prison eight months ago following a raid on a house church in Shiraz have been informed they will face trial on 15 October. Since their arrests, the five have reportedly been confined in cells housing dangerous criminals and are charged with "creating illegal groups", "participating in a house church service," "propagation against the Islamic regime," and "defaming Islamic holy figures through Christian evangelizing". Yesterday, seven Christians who were jailed in Rasht six years ago received suspended five year sentences for "action against the national security."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is deeply concerned at news of yet another increase in the harassment of Iranian Christians. We particularly deplore the nature of the charges that are currently being leveled against Christians and other religious minorities. There appears to be an increasing tendency by the Iranian authorities to characterize legitimate religious activities as crimes against the state. In reality, people are being harassed merely on account of their faith. The ongoing harassment and imprisonment of Christians, Baha'is and other religious minorities contravenes international covenants to which Iran is a signatory, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees the right to freedom of religion. By arresting Christians who have peaceably gathered to pray or worship, Iran is violating their right to manifest their religious belief. We urge the Iranian government to end the harassment of religious minorities within its borders, to respect their right to freedom of religion, and to release all who have been held on account of their faith immediately and unconditionally."