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## IRAN | Pastor Irani Still in Need of Medical Assistance

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that Pastor Benham Irani, currently held in Ghezal Hesar prison in Iran, is now unable to walk and that medical assistance continues to be withheld despite his deteriorating health.

Pastor Irani has been losing weight for several months and has been unable to walk for the last week due to acute back pain. The pastor has trouble with his vision and last year suffered severe bleeding due to stomach ulcers and complications with his colon, which caused him to lose consciousness at one point. He was given tablets to stop the bleeding but was denied further medical attention.

There are concerns that given his critical condition, the pastor may die unless he receives appropriate medical treatment.

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.”

Increasingly, the official charges brought against Iranian Christians are couched in political language, when in reality they are being arrested on account of their religion. As a prisoner convicted of political charges, Pastor Irani has no access to medical furlough or cultural activities, is subjected to regular inspections, and can only see his family once a fortnight.

During the first few months of his imprisonment in Ghezal Hesar Prison, Pastor Irani 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 a crowded, filthy cell, which he currently shares with 40 criminals, many of whom are violent. He has been subjected to physical and psychological pressure and has sustained regular beatings from his cell mates and prison authorities, as well as death threats.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “CSW remains deeply concerned at reports of Pastor Irani’s declining health and we reiterate our call for the Iranian authorities to allow Pastor Irani to access appropriate medical treatment without further delay. CSW also urges the Iranian government to honor its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political

Rights and facilitate Pastor Irani's unconditional release, along with all others currently detained or facing execution on account of their faith following flawed judicial processes."