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IRAN | Christians Returned to Jail After High Court Upholds Sentence

An Iranian Assemblies of God (AOG) pastor, his wife and two church workers have been returned to jail after their one year sentences for converting to Christianity and “propagation against the Islamic regime through evangelism” were upheld by a High Court on May 1.

Pastor Farhad Sabokrooh, his wife Shahnaz Jayzan and church workers Naser Zaman-Dezfuli and Davoud Alijani were initially arrested in December 2011, after authorities in the southern town of Ahwaz raided their church’s Christmas celebrations and detained everyone in the building, including children attending Sunday school.

According to Iranian agency Mohabat News, all four were charged with “converting to Christianity and propagating against the Islamic Republic through evangelism”, and were each sentenced to one year in prison by the Revolutionary Court in Ahwaz. They were temporarily released but were summoned to court on May 1 and re-arrested. Mr. Alijani was transferred to Ahwaz’s Karoon Prison to complete his sentence, while Pastor Sabokrooh, Shahnaz Jayzan and Mr. Zaman-Dezfuli were taken to Sepidar Prison.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has also been informed that Mostafa Bordbar, a Christian arrested in Tehran in December 2012 and whose case details were obscure, is now confirmed to be detained in Ward 350 of Evin Prison, along with Church of Iran member Alireza Seyyedian and AOG Pastors Farshid Fathi and Saeed Abedini. Pastor Abedini, who had been placed in solitary confinement for taking part in a peaceful protest against prison conditions, has now been returned to Ward 350 after being taken to a hospital this week following further deterioration in his health.

Mohabat News reports that a Christian prisoner in Adel-Abad Prison in Shiraz is in urgent need of medical attention. Vahid Hakkani, who was arrested in February 2012 along with eight others during a raid on a prayer meeting, is reported to be suffering from internal bleeding and has been informed by prison doctors that he needs surgery urgently

CSW has also learned that in April 2013, Ebrahim Firoozi, who was arrested for a second time in March 2013 and charged with launching and administering a Christian missionary website, distributing Bibles, cooperating with student activists and involvement in actions against national security, was temporarily released from Ward 350 of Evin Prison after 53 days in jail, following a bail payment of approximately \$20,000.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Pastor Sabokrooh and others have been jailed for exercising their right to change their religion and to manifest their new faith both privately and in communion with others. This right is protected by Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which as a signatory, Iran is obliged uphold. We continue to call on Iran to fulfill its legal obligations by guaranteeing freedom of religion or belief for all of its citizens. We also urge the authorities to ensure that as occurred in the case of Pastor Abdedini, every prisoner in urgent need of medical attention is given access to medical facilities and appropriate treatment."