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## IRAN | Eight Members of Church of Iran Sentenced to Jail

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that eight members of the Church of Iran in Shiraz were sentenced to jail on July 16 after being found guilty of “action against the national security” and “propaganda against the order of the system.”

Mohammad Roghangir was sentenced to six years, Massoud Rezaie to five years, Mehdi Ameruni and Bijan Farokhpour Haghighi to three years, Shahin Lahooti and Soroush Saraie to two and half years each. Eskandar Rezaie and Roxana Forughi were both sentenced to one year in prison.

Seven of them were arrested on Oct. 12, 2012 during an evening raid by the security services on a house in Shiraz where a prayer service, led by Roghangir, was underway. Massoud Rezaie was arrested six days later.

They were all subsequently released on bail after paying substantial amounts. The group is expected to appeal their convictions.

In a statement, the National Council of the Church of Iran said, “In accordance with the Gospel, the Church is apolitical. While individual Christians are entitled to hold political opinions, the Church does not. These charges are entirely without foundation. However, as loyal citizens we will continue to pray for our leaders and for peace and reconciliation in our nation.”

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “It is both disappointing and deplorable that the Iranian regime persists in detaining religious minorities on political charges as has occurred, once again, in this case. These Christians in no way constitute a threat to the state. We call for their unconditional release and urge the government to end the practice of characterizing legitimate religious activities as national security crimes and to uphold the right of all religious minorities to freedom of religion and belief, as contained in Article 18 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is signatory. We also call on the incoming presidency to bring an end the harassment of religious minorities and to ensure that every

Iranian citizen is able to enjoy the rights and freedoms to which they are entitled under national and international law, including the right to freedom of religion or belief.”