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## IRAN | Pastor Irani's Home Among Four Raided

Security forces raided the homes of four Christians in Karaj, Iran on Dec. 15, including that of Kristina Irani, the wife of imprisoned Church of Iran pastor Behnam Irani.

According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide's (CSW) sources, the homes of Silas Rabbani, Amin Khaki and an unnamed Christian were raided by members of the security forces, who confiscated bibles, even though none of these homes are house churches. The three men were subsequently informed they would be receiving a summons for a court hearing.

The fourth raid involved the home of Kristina Irani, the wife of Pastor Behnam Irani, who is currently detained in Ghezal Hesar Prison. During the raid, her laptop and some Christian materials were confiscated. She was shouted at and intimidated by the security forces, which frightened her two children. It is not yet clear whether Mrs. Irani will also be summoned to court.

CSW has also been informed, that on Dec. 11 Pastor Irani was told he was no longer allowed to walk around the yard of Ghezal Hesar Prison or to communicate with other prisoners. These orders were reportedly issued by a man known as "Farhadi", who is the official responsible for religious minorities in Alborz Province.

Behnam Irani, who pastors the Church of Iran congregation in Karaj, was first arrested in December 2006, and in 2011 was 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 the pastor as an apostate and reiterates that apostates "can be killed".

Despite suffering from severe medical complications, Pastor Irani has not received adequate medical attention. As a political prisoner, he is denied cultural activities, is subject to regular inspections, and can only see his family once a fortnight.

During the first few months of his imprisonment in Ghezal Hesar, Pastor Irani was held incommunicado in a small cell where guards repeatedly woke him from sleep as a form of psychological torture. He was moved to 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 suffered regular beatings from cell mates and prison authorities, as well as death threats.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "These raids amount to nothing less than the harassment of innocent citizens. They have suffered arbitrary interference with their privacy and homes, which is expressly prohibited under article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is party. The Rouhani presidency initially gave rise to cautious

optimism for an improvement in human rights in the near future, however, as Christmas approaches, the authorities are showing no signs changing what has become an annual and insensitive ritual of arresting Christians at this time of year. We urge the Iranian authorities not to initiate charges against these people and to ensure that they are able to fully enjoy the rights and freedoms to which they are entitled under national and international law, including the right to freedom of religion or belief.”