



1.29.14

IRAN | Davoud Alijani Released Early From Prison

Davoud Alijani, a leader in the Assemblies of God (AoG) church in Ahwaz, was released from Karoon Prison on Jan. 13, 20 days before his sentence was due to be completed.

Speaking about his time in prison, Alijani said, “The mental anguish affects you physically, even if you are not mistreated physically. When my family came to visit me they said they could see the anguish written on my face.... Each time I was sick, I would go to the prison pharmacy which was run by inmates and only really provided painkillers.... The guards regularly tried to get me to reconvert.”

Alijani was initially arrested on Dec. 23, 2011 after Iranian authorities raided a Christmas service at the AoG church in Ahwaz and detained everyone in attendance, including children. Although most of the group was released several hours later, Alijani was transferred to a detention center for interrogation along with the church’s pastor, Farhad Sabokrouh, the pastor’s wife, Shahnaz Jayzan, and Naser Zamen-Dezfuli, another church leader.

Alijani, Pastor Sabokrouh and Naser Zamen-Dezfuli were held until February 2012, when they were released on temporary bail. Following his release, Pastor Sabokrouh was told not to hold any church services and was forbidden from visiting other Christians in Ahwaz. In addition, he was banned from living in Ahwaz, his hometown, and was forced to move to Tehran.

In October 2012, the four Christians were each sentenced to one year in prison on charges of converting to Christianity and propagating against the Islamic Republic through evangelism. They were summoned to court in May 2013, where they were arrested and sent to prison to serve their sentences.

On Dec. 4, 2013, Pastor Sabokrouh and Naser Zamen-Dezfuli were released from Sepidar Prison where they had almost completed their sentences, and Shahnaz Jayzan was reportedly released on Jan. 28. However, the church no longer holds services, despite being legally registered.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “While we welcome these releases, we remind the Iranian authorities that these people were arrested and convicted for nothing other than celebrating Christmas in their legally registered church. Such activity does not merit the political charges on which they were convicted. Denying religious minorities the freedom to manifest their faith in worship and in communion with others contravenes article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is party. Moreover, the effective criminalization of conversion infringes on the right to adopt a religion or

belief of one's choice. We urge the Iranian regime end this practice, and to release all prisoners of conscience imprisoned under false political charges.”