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## IRAN | Pastor Irani Recovering Following Operation

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that Pastor Behnam Irani underwent surgery on Feb. 22 and is now recovering in Shahid Madani Hospital in Karaj.

The pastor was suffering from severe bleeding due to stomach ulcers and colon complications, which at one point caused him to lose consciousness. According to CSW's sources, the operation was successful, and Pastor Irani will be returned to Ghezal Hesar Prison on Feb. 25.

Pastor Irani is the leader of the Church of Iran congregation in Karaj. He was initially arrested in December 2006, and was sentenced in 2011 to six years imprisonment on charges of "action against the state" and "action against the order."

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 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.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of CSW, said, "While we are pleased to hear that Pastor Irani is recovering well in hospital, it is unacceptable that his condition was allowed to deteriorate to such an extent before he was given appropriate treatment. We continue to call for his release from prison. Although he was convicted on political charges, in reality he is in prison on account of his faith and in contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is party."