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IRAN | Christian Prisoners Beaten, Tortured

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) was informed that Iranian Christian Silas Rabbani reported being tortured while in Gohardasht prison, while Amin Khaki, also a Christian, has attested to being violently beaten in Ahwaz Prison.

Silas Rabbani, a deacon of the Church of Iran in Karaj, was arrested on May 5 by VEVAK intelligence agents who informed him of their plan to arrest other Christians. He was subsequently transferred to Section 8 of Gohardasht Prison, which is under control of the Revolutionary Guards.

Amin Khaki was part of a group of eight Christians who were detained and interrogated following a group picnic on March 5. Although most of them were later released, Amin Khaki, Hossein Baraunzadeh (Daniel) and Rahman Bahman (Zia) were arrested. Amin Khaki was transferred to the Interim Ward of Ahwaz Prison on May 7, while Hossein Baraunzadeh and Rahman Bahma were transferred from Ahwaz Prison to a prison in the city of Dezful.

In other news, since May 1, Revolutionary Guards have continued to excavate a historic Baha'i cemetery in Shiraz, despite lacking an appropriate permit from municipal authorities. This is the second Baha'i cemetery to be desecrated by authorities since President Rohuani came to power. Reports indicate the site is being destroyed to make way for a business center and car park.

Commenting on the destruction of the cemetery, Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations, said, "Given the historic character of this ground, where some 950 Baha'is are buried, including 10 women who were hanged in 1983 for their refusal to recant their Baha'i belief, this continuing action is not only illegal but morally outrageous."

Despite promises by President Rouhani to ensure equality for all Iranians, the situation for Baha'is and other religious minorities has not improved. The year 2013 saw the first religiously-motivated murder of a Baha'i in 15 years, which followed a speech by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei a week earlier that had denigrated the community. On Feb. 3, three members of a well-known Baha'i family sustained knife injuries when they were attacked in their Tehran home by a masked assailant.

April 2014 marked the sixth year in detention of seven Baha'i leaders who were initially detained in 2008 and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in 2010 for 'forming an illegal cult'.

CSW Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are extremely concerned by recent reports of Iranian prison authorities using excessive violence against prisoners. We urge the Iranian

authorities to refrain from any form of torture or violence, which violates their obligations under article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which prohibits torture, and cruel inhuman and degrading treatment, and article 10, which states that prisoners should be treated with humanity and with respect for their inherent human dignity. We also call for an immediate halt to the illegal demolition of the Bahia cemetery. This lamentable act not only violates the right to freedom of religion and belief, but is a reprehensible destruction of cultural heritage. CSW calls on the Iranian government to intervene in this case as a matter of urgency in order to ensure the preservation of this historic site.”