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## IRAN | Pastor Irani Returned to Prison

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned Pastor Behnam Irani, the Church of Iran leader who was assaulted and transferred to a previously unknown location on June 7, has been returned to Ghezal Hesar Prison.

Pastor Irani was assaulted in prison by VEVAK officers during the early hours of June 7 after objecting to an irregular summons from Judge Mohammad Yari of the Sixth Branch of the Revolutionary Tribunal. He was subsequently brought before Judge Yari, and charged with communicating with the media.

The pastor was then transferred to a VEVAK detention center, where he was kept in solitary confinement and interrogated on five occasions for four hours each time. He was warned if he does not obey VEVAK, he will receive a further sentence and remain in prison for a longer time.

Two weeks prior to the assault, the authorities confiscated Pastor Irani's Bible and other Christian literature.

Pastor Irani was initially arrested in December 2006 and sentenced in 2011 to six years imprisonment for "action against the state" and "action against the order."

During his first few months in Ghezal Hesar Prison, 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. He shares the cell 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.

In February 2014, Pastor Irani successfully underwent surgery to treat stomach and colon complications.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "While we are pleased to hear that Pastor Irani's whereabouts are now known, CSW is appalled by his treatment by VEVAK officers during his enforced disappearance, and at the additional charge that is clearly aimed at extending his prison term. The political charges against him are without basis, as in reality he is being detained on account of his choice of faith. We renew our calls for his unconditional release, and that he is allowed to practice his religion in peace, which is his right under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is party. We also urge the Iranian authorities to end assaults on prisoners, which violate the nation's obligations under article 10 of the ICCPR, and to ensure that the officers responsible for the mistreatment of prisoners like Pastor Irani face disciplinary action."

