CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE USA
VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

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IRAN | Christian Converts Charged with Capital Offenses

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) received reports that two more Iranian Christians from the Church of Iran denomination have been charged with “Mofsed-e-filarz”, translated as “spreading corruption on earth”.

Pastor Matthias Haghnejad, who was recently charged with “Moharebeh”, or “enmity against God”, was charged with the more serious crime of “Mofsed-e-filarz”. Another Christian, Silas Rabbani was charged with this crime. As CSW reported earlier this week, Pastor Behnam Irani had been handed this new charge as part of 18 new charges against him. Sources claim all three men, who are being held separately in Ghezal Hesar Prison in Karaj, have been pressured into confessing they are “spies”.

There is particular concern about the safety of Pastor Haghnejad, who is believed to be in a “dangerous situation”, as the authorities appear to be targeting him actively.

The new charges against Pastor Matthias, Mr. Rabbani and Pastor Irani are part of an escalation in Iran’s campaign against converts to Christianity, who have previously been charged with “action against the state”, “action against the order” or other national security crimes. Although the new Islamic Penal Code, which came into effect in 2013, prohibits capital punishment for “Moharebeh” in cases not involving the use of a weapon, the charge is regularly levelled against political activists from ethnic minority communities.

An ongoing spike in executions under the Rouhani presidency has seen eight men executed for “Moharebeh” this year, including Ahwazi Arab poet and cultural rights activist Hashem Shaabani and his colleague Hadi Rashedi. Those accused of this crime generally complain of having been tortured to elicit false confessions, of the denial of access to legal assistance, and of unfair trials conducted in the absence of witnesses.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “The new charges against Pastors Haghnejad and Irani and Mr Rabbani are tantamount to an indictment of Christianity itself and CSW is growing increasingly alarmed by what is a clear escalation in Iran's campaign against Persian Christians under the Rouhani presidency and by what is effectively an attempt to gain an apostasy conviction by other means. We call on the government to drop the unwarranted charges against Pastors Haghnejad and Irani, and Rabbani, who have been unjustly detained on account of their faith and in contravention of international covenants to which Iran is party, that guarantee freedom of religion or belief. It is vital that the ongoing human rights crisis in the country is not neglected as members of the international community increasingly partner with Iran to counter the threat posed by ISIS.”