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## IRAN | Three Christians Face Six Year Sentences

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) learned Pastors Behnam Irani and Matthias Haghnejad, and Deacon Silas Rabbani, who previously had capital charges against them dropped, have each been given six-year sentences by an Iranian court.

The verdict, issued by Judge Asef al-Hosseini, ordered Pastor Irani to serve his sentence in a prison in the northern city of Zabol, while Pastor Haghnejad and Deacon Rabbani will be transferred to a prison in Minab, an island in the Persian Gulf. All three are appealing their sentences.

The cities of Zabol and Minab are infamous for their extremely hot climates. Moreover, the prisoners' families will be forced to travel long distances in order to visit them, which will prove to be challenging, both financially and physically.

The additional six-year sentence handed to Pastor Irani means he will serve a total of 12 years in prison. He was initially arrested in December 2006 and sentenced in 2011 to six years imprisonment for "action against the state" and "action against the order."

These fresh sentences are indicative of the surge in repression under the Rouhani presidency targeting religious and ethnic minorities. This has occurred despite his earlier promise to uphold the rights of religious minorities during the run up to elections last year.

CSW's Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, "We are deeply concerned by the six-year sentences given to Pastors Irani and Haghnejad and Deacon Silas Rabbani, and the fact that they will serve these sentences so far from their families and home towns. We are particularly appalled by the extra six years given to Pastor Irani, who has already endured ill-treatment whilst in prison and now faces nearly a decade in prison on trumped-up charges. We urge the Iranian government to release without delay every person who is imprisoned for their faith. Their incarceration contravenes international covenants guaranteeing freedom of religion or belief, to which Iran is party."