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## IRAN | Second Appeal Hearing for Three Iranian Clergymen

Pastors Behnam Irani, Matthias Haghnejad and Deacon Silas Rabbani attended a second court session on Dec. 9 as part of their appeal against six-year sentences on trumped-up political charges, which had been handed down in October.

The three men were represented by their lawyer Moshkani Farahani, who had previously argued against the charges faced by each of his clients at the last court session of this trial on Nov. 24.

During the previous session, Farahani argued that it was inconceivable that Irani could have been guilty of the political crimes given he was already imprisoned. Farahani went on to state that Haghnejad should be released on the basis that he had previously been acquitted of charges by a tribunal in Bandar-Anzali.

Farahani also contended that people cannot be sentenced on political charges for simply belonging to a religious fellowship, in this case, a Christian community. "It is normal for members of minorities to be in touch with each other; Jews are in touch with each other, Zoroastrians are in touch with each other, it is the same for Assyrians, Orthodoxes and Evangelicals. Such connections cannot be perceived as a penal crime...," he said.

In other news, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) was informed that another Christian, Ebrahim Hosseinzadeh, was arrested by agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security last month during a raid on his apartment in which Christian books and his laptop were confiscated.

Although the exact date of Hosseinzadeh's arrest is unclear, reports received by CSW indicate it was between Nov. 18-20. The 32-year-old Hosseinzadeh converted to Christianity in 2009 and is a church house leader in Shiraz.

After he was taken into custody, Hosseinzadeh was transferred to 'Pelak 100', a detention center in Shiraz under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence. Sources close to CSW believe he is still detained.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The charges faced by Pastors Behnam Irani, Matthias Haghnejad and Deacon Silas Rabbani are clearly unjust, as Mr. Farahani has argued in court. We continue to call on the authorities to release these clergymen along with Ebrahim Hosseinzadeh, unconditionally and without delay. Their only 'crime' is to exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief, as guaranteed in the International Covenant of Civil and

Political Rights, to which Iran is signatory. We urge the Iranian government to uphold this right for religious minorities in Iran, in line with its obligations under international law and the provisions upholding the rights of religious minorities in its own constitution.”