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## IRAN | Charges Dropped Against Church of Iran Clergy

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) was informed that the six-year sentences handed down to three members of the Church of Iran denomination have been revoked following an appeal hearing Dec. 9.

Pastors Behnam Irani, Matthias Haghnejad and Deacon Silas Rabbani were informed Dec. 15 that charges against them were dropped. Pastor Haghnejad and Deacon Rabbani were subsequently released. Pastor Irani remains in Ghezal Hesar Prison in Karaj, where he is serving a one-year sentence for action against the state and a five-year sentence for “action against national security.”

The three clergymen were initially charged with Mofsed-e-filarz, or spreading corruption on earth, while the two pastors faced the charge of Moharebeh, enmity against God, both of which are capital offenses. Those charges were later dropped, and they were tried for “action against national security” and “creating a network to overthrow the system,” and each sentenced to six-year imprisonment.

In other news, Hossein (Daniel) Baraunzadeh and Rahman (Zia) Bahman have been released from prison. The two men were part of a group of Christians that were arrested at a picnic in May. Although most of them were released following interrogation, the two men, along with Amin Khaki, were imprisoned. While Hossein Baraunzadeh and Rahman Bahman have been released, Amin Khaki remains imprisoned.

CSW’s Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas, said, “We are extremely pleased to learn of the release of Pastor Matthias Haghnejad, Deacon Silas Rabbani, Hossein Baraunzadeh and Rahman Bahman. While we welcome this news, we remain concerned at the continued detention of Amin Khaki and long-term prisoners like Behnam Irani and Farshi Fathi – all of whom who have been unjustly detained. Despite President Rouhani’s promise to uphold the rights of religious minorities, the repression against religious and ethnic minorities in Iran continues. We continue to call on the Iranian government to uphold the rule of law and allow the country’s religious minorities to enjoy freedom of religion or belief as guaranteed under Iran’s own constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which it is party.”