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IRAN | Bail Recalled, Christians Serve Prison Terms

Iranian Christians, Bijan Farokhpour Haghighi and Eskandar Rezaie, were recalled from bail to serve prison sentences they received in 2013.

The two men were originally sentenced in July 2013 for security-related charges. Bijan Farokhpour Haghighi was sentenced to three years in prison, while Eskandar Rezaie was sentenced to one year. Sources close to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) state that Eskandar Rezaie was imprisoned at Adelabad Prison, while Bijan Farokhpour Haghighi is likely to be imprisoned soon.

The men were part of a group arrested in Shiraz on Oct. 12, 2012, when security forces raided a prayer meeting. On July 16, 2013, the group was charged with “action against national security” and “propaganda against the order of the system.” Despite an appeal, the sentences were upheld in a decision issued March 29, 2014.

At the time of the group’s arrest, the National Council of the Church of Iran said, “In accordance with the Gospel, the Church is apolitical. While individual Christians are entitled to hold political opinions, the Church does not. These charges are entirely without foundation. However, as loyal citizens we will continue to pray for our leaders and for peace and reconciliation in our nation.”

In other news, CSW has been informed that, in June, Fatemeh Torkkajouri was sentenced to imprisonment in absentia for “action against national security.” Despite living in self-imposed exile abroad, she was sentenced to five years imprisonment.

Fatemouh Torkkajouri was arrested July 18, 2010 and imprisoned for two months. Her family was unaware of her whereabouts for the first two weeks. Her arrest and subsequent imprisonment occurred during a period when her husband, Behrouz Kanjani, was incarcerated for the second time, leaving their young daughter without her parents. CSW was informed that Iranian authorities also confiscated the family’s property and finances.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “It is both disappointing and deplorable that the Iranian regime persists in sentencing and imprisoning religious minorities on security-related charges. These Christians do not constitute a threat to the state and we call for their unconditional release. We urge the government to end the practice of characterizing legitimate religious activities as national security crimes, and to uphold the right of all religious minorities to freedom of religion or belief, as articulated in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. On this same basis, we also call for the false

charges against Fatemeh Torkkajouri to be dropped, and for her sentence to be revoked without precondition.”