



11.9.15

IRAN | Christians Arrested Near Tehran

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) was informed that 13 Christians were arrested in the city of Varamin, south east of Tehran.

Zari Shah Khasti (Poorkaveh), Simmin, Bahram, Amin, Leyla, Zahra, Mehdi and Farzaneh, Shayan, Sara, Nazanin, Elnaz and Mohammad Shah Khasti were arrested by agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence following a raid on a house church. Most of the group was previously part of the Emmanuel Protestant Church in Tehran, which was forced to close by Iranian authorities in 2012 and to end its Farsi (Persian) language services.

Another member of the church who was not at the gathering was arrested at his home in Tehran during the early hours of Nov. 2. Since their arrests, the group's whereabouts are unknown and family members are concerned about their safety.

There has been no improvement in human rights under Rouhani's presidency, despite his reputation as a moderate. Instead, Iran has witnessed deterioration in the human rights climate since his election to office. Political opponents, journalists, activists and members of religious minorities continue to be imprisoned, with converts to Christianity and members of the Baha'i faith being targeted.

There has also been a spike in executions since the advent of the Rouhani government, with Iran executing more people per capita than any other country. Since 2014, more than 1,000 people have been executed; including women, political activists and religious minorities, marking a 12-year high in the number of executions.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are extremely concerned at the arrests of these 14 Christians and the fact that their whereabouts remain unknown, which gives rise to concerns regarding their well-being. These people had merely gathered peacefully and had not partaken in any illegal activities. It is unacceptable that the Iranian authorities continue to harass the Christian community without cause. We urge the Iranian government to ensure that these people are released without delay and we reiterate our call for Iran to uphold its human rights obligations as a signatory to several international covenants, including Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of religion or belief."