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IRAN | Two Church of Iran Members Released; One Still in Custody

Church of Iran members, Yasser Mossayebzadeh and Saheb Fadaie, who were arrested May 13 in Rasht, Iran, were released on bail. However, Mohammadreza Omidi (Youhan), who was arrested on the same day, remains in custody after the authorities refused to accept his bail money.

The men were arrested in a series of raids targeting the homes of church members by Iranian intelligence (VEVAK) officers who seized computers, mobile telephones and bibles.

Mossayebzadeh was arrested during a raid on the home of Yousef Nadarkhani, the Church of Iran pastor acquitted of apostasy in 2012. The pastor and his wife, Tina Pasandide Nadarkhani, were also detained, but were released shortly afterward. Saheb Fadaie and Mohammadreza Omidi (Youhan) were summoned to VEVAK offices by telephone prior to raids on their homes.

The men were held in Lakan Prison near Rasht pending payment of approximately \$33,000 bail each. Following payment, Mossayebzadeh was released May 28, while Fadaie was released May 29. Although Omidi was first to post bail, the judges refused to accept it, stating that because VEVAK had brought additional charges against Omidi, he could not be released. None of the men were told the reason for their arrests or the charges they are facing.

In other news, the Iranian religious freedom organization Article 18 reports that Maryam (Nasim) Naghash Zargaran, who was jailed for four years in July 2013 for "propagating against the regime" and "collusion intended to harm national security," was taken to a hospital May 30, four days into a hunger strike for greater access to medical attention. According to Article 18, family members who were allowed to see her briefly found her in a semi-conscious state. Reports indicate Naghash Zargaran, who has longstanding health challenges, may have been returned to Tehran's Evin Prison without receiving treatment.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "Although nearly three

weeks have passed since Yasser Mossayebzadeh, Saheb Fadaie and Mohammadreza Omid were arrested, they still have not been informed of the reasons for their arrests. This is both unacceptable and unjust. Mr. Omid's continued detention on further unknown charges compounds this injustice, and we reiterate our call for his release. As Christians in Iran continue to be harassed judicially, we urge the international community to press Iran to uphold and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief, as articulated in its constitution and international treaties to which it is signatory. We also urge the international community to hold Iran to account for the wellbeing of Ms. Naghash Zargaran and of other prisoners of conscience, who are being denied access to timely and adequate medical care. "