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IRAN | Pastor Nadarkhani Charged with National Security Crimes

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) learned that Yousef Nadarkhani, the Church of Iran pastor acquitted of apostasy in 2012, was charged with “acting against national security.”

According to CSW’s sources, Pastor Nadarkhani was summoned to the 13th Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Rasht on July 24, where he was charged and released, but was given a week to raise \$ 33,000 in bail or face arrest. He was also accused of being Zionist and informed that he had no right to evangelize.

On May 13, the pastor and his wife, Tina Pasandide Nadarkhani, were arrested after Iranian Security Service (VEVAK) officers raided their home in Rasht as part of a series of raids targeting approximately 10 Christian households. While they were released immediately, three members of their congregation, Mohammadreza Omid (Youhan), Yasser Mossayebzadeh and Saheb Fadaie, were detained in Lakan Prison near Rasht and released after posting bail amounting to \$33,000. The three men are yet to be informed of the charges levelled against them.

Pastor Nardarkhani was initially arrested in 2009 after going to his children’s school to question the Muslim monopoly of religious education for children, which he felt was unconstitutional. He was charged with apostasy and sentenced to death in 2010, a decision that was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2011. On Sept. 8, 2012, he was released from prison following his acquittal on apostasy charges, but was found guilty on charges of evangelizing. The pastor was recalled to prison on Dec. 25, 2012 to complete the remainder of his three year sentence, and was released once again Dec. 7, 2013.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “It is deeply troubling to hear of the renewed harassment of Pastor Nardarkhani. The national security charges levelled against him are spurious and an indication that the authorities persist in criminalizing the Christian community for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. We urge the Iranian government to dismiss the charges against him and to cancel any pending charges against Mohammadreza Omid, Yasser Mossayebzadeh and Saheb Fadaie. The international community must press the

Government of Iran to uphold its obligations to respect the right of its citizens to freedom of religion or belief, as outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which it is signatory, and in Iran's own constitution.”