

Christian Pastor Faces Death in Iran

The Supreme

Court of Iran has upheld a lower court's conviction in an apostasy case against

Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani. Nadarkhani was sentenced to death for his faith in Jesus Christ.

The

International Campaign for Human Rights is calling for the reversal of the

conviction and sentence, as well as the release of pastor Behrouz

Sadegh-Khanjani, who is under legal fire on similar charges in Iran.

The argument to

free Nadarkhani points to Iran's law, which does not contain articles relating

to apostasy. The judge said he exercised his right to make a decision based on

texts penned by Iran's religious scholars.

"It is the low

point of any judicial system to sentence a person to death outside of its own

legal framework," said Aaron Rhodes, a spokesperson for the Campaign. "To execute someone based on the religion they choose to

practice or not practice is the ultimate form of religious discrimination and

disregard for the freedom of conscience and belief."

The 32-year-old

Nadarkhani was born into a Muslim family, but came to faith in

Christ at age

19. When interrogated, Nadarkhani offered a written confession stating he left

Islam for Christianity. During his trial, however, he testified that he was pressured to make the statement.

"I am not an

apostate ... prior to 19 years old I did not accept any religion," Nadarkhani

said at trial. "My interrogator coaxed me [into thinking] that a person who is

born to Muslim parents, and does not accept a religion other than Islam before

reaching the religious maturity age, is automatically a Muslim."

Nadarkhani's

lawyer filed an objection on Dec. 5. The lawyer contends that the constitution

of the Islamic Republic clearly grants Christians the right to worship and

congregate. The constitution also mandates Iran to offer equal human rights to

Christians.