

After Escaping Apostasy Sentence, Nadarkhani Charged With New Crimes

An Iranian Christian leader once sentenced to death for apostasy, Youcef Nadarkhani, was charged on July 24 with acting against national security.

Nadarkhani, who belongs to the non-Trinitarian Church of Iran, was released on July 24 on the condition of raising 100 million Toman bail (US\$ 33,000) within a week, or face arrest.

He was also accused of being Zionist and informed that he had no right to evangelize.

Nadarkhani was initially arrested in 2009 and charged with apostasy after questioning why his children's school only taught Islam in their religious education, which he said was unconstitutional.

His wife and he were also arrested on May 13—and released the same day—as part of a clampdown in the northern city of Rasht that saw raids on 10 Christian families (see below).

Meanwhile Christian Maryam Naghash Zargarani, serving four years in prison for the same charge as Nadarkhani, has had her request for unconditional release (on health grounds) turned down by an Iranian court; Mohabat News reports that this is because the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence says it does not want her freed.

Zargarani is 20 days into a hunger strike. She is seeking release in view of the inadequate treatment of her health issues that have left her with very low blood pressure, pain and numb feet. Prison medical staff say her condition is

serious.

Zargaran has been released twice for medical treatment—in October 2015 and in June—and both times was forced to return to prison before the treatment was complete.

Original Report (June 1):

An Iranian Christian serving a four-year jail term for “acting against national security” has gone on a hunger strike to protest against the prison’s refusal to allow her to receive treatment for long-standing health issues. Maryam Naghash Zargaran, a convert from Islam, is nearly three years into her sentence at Tehran’s Evin prison. She was originally arrested in January 2013, in connection with her work at an orphanage alongside Saeed Abedini, who was also imprisoned, but eventually released in January this year.

A member of the Zargaran family told Mohabat News: “Maryam hasn’t left her bed in four days. She is burning with fever and has been on hunger strike to raise her protest against prison authorities’ indifference toward her health. She is suffering from serious health issues. Before going on hunger strike, she had lost 25 kg and her health issues had intensified. Authorities do not show the slightest concern over Maryam’s health. In addition, she is suffering from depression and takes medication for it.”

Middle East Concern (MEC) reported that a number of her fellow prisoners decided to forgo family visits on May 29 to show support.

On May 31, MEC reported that she was briefly taken to hospital on May 30, after which, on her return to prison, she started to drink water.

Zargaran has a history of heart problems and has recently reported pain in her ears and head. In October 2015 she was allowed to receive a few days’ treatment outside the prison,

but forced to return before it was completed.

Rasht Christians Bailed, but Many Still Detained

Meanwhile, in the northern city of Rasht, two Christians have been released on bail after nearly three weeks in jail.

Yasser Mossayebzadeh and Saheb Fadaie were arrested on May 13, alongside Youcef Nadarkhani, an Iranian pastor once sentenced to death for apostasy, and his wife, Tina. The couple were released later that day, but Mossayebzadeh, Fadaie and another Christian, Mohammad Reza Omid, were detained.

MEC reports that Mossayebzadeh and Fadaie were each forced to pay the equivalent of \$33,000 for bail. Omid was not given that option, though it is not yet clear why. **UPDATE June 7: Omid also granted bail.**

Since 2015, more than 150 Christians have been detained by the Iranian authorities. Many are in jail, while others, including Mossayebzadeh and Fadaie, have been released conditionally, pending sentencing or an appeal.

MEC's Rob Duncan said the current pressure being placed on Christians in Iran is "not as much through open violence and arrests, as through fear and intimidation."

"There are fewer raids on house churches, but instead people are summoned to security for interrogation," he said. "There is a lot of pressure on people to leave the country as a result. Also, when people are arrested and charged, bail demands are high and can financially cripple a family." {eo}

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