

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.