

Influential Pastor's Son Sentenced to 4 Months Behind Bars

The son of an influential pastor silenced by the Iranian government has been handed a four-month jail sentence for his involvement with illegal house churches, World Watch Monitor has learnt.

Ramil Bet Tamraz's lawyers were informed of the sentence for "acting against national security" on 8 July. One of the friends with whom he was arrested also received a four-month sentence.

Ramil, a Christian from an ethnic Assyrian background, was arrested in August 2016 with a group of Christian friends during a picnic in the Alborz mountains, north-east of Tehran. The other four had all converted from Islam.

The five men were held and interrogated in the notorious Evin Prison, and released one by one. Ramil and one other were released after posting bail equivalent to U.S. \$33,000 each.

Because Mr. Tamraz was released in October 2016, he has already served more than half of his 4-month sentence, but the verdict leaves him with a criminal record.

Mr. Tamraz is appealing against the verdict. If the sentence is upheld by the appeal court, he may have to return to serve some or all of the remainder of the prison sentence.

His lawyers were asked to make a handwritten copy of the judge's verdict, World Watch Monitor understands. Mr. Tamraz was not allowed to be present at the court to hear the verdict against him.

He has been living at home in Tehran, where both his parents

are serving lengthy suspended sentences for church-related activities. His father, pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, led the Tehran Pentecostal Assyrian Church until the government ordered its closure in 2009.

Mansour Borji, of the religious advocacy charity Article 18, told World Watch Monitor that he thought the government may have sentenced Mr. Tamraz in order to antagonize his father. "Putting pressure on family members of active Christians is a theme I've noticed emerging from my years of monitoring the Iranian government's treatment of evangelical Christians," he told World Watch Monitor.

He added that a number of Iran's revolutionary courts had begun not issuing defendants with written copies of the verdicts passed against them, which he said was unlawful and may aim to enable judges to leave no paper trail behind judgements that might not stand up to external scrutiny. {eo}

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