

Iran Holds 5 Christians With Exorbitant Bail Demands

Five members of the Church of Iran denomination appeared before a judge at the 14th Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz, Fars Province on March 10 and were handed exorbitant bail terms.

Mohammad Roghangir, Surush Saraie, Eskandar Rezaie, Shahin Lahooti and Massoud Rezaie are charged with disturbing public order, evangelizing, action against national security and an internet activity against the system.

Their trial was expected to commence on March 10; however, during their court appearance, Judge Sadati set bail for Mohammed Roghangir at US\$ 200,000, while the others were asked for US\$ 80,000 each. No date was set for the continuation of the trial.

The five men were among seven people arrested on October 12, 2012 during an evening raid by the security services on a house in Shiraz where a prayer service led by Mr. Roghangir was underway. They were initially held in Plaque 100, the Intelligence Ministry's notorious detention centre, before being transferred to Adel-Abad Prison, where they are held separately from other prisoners.

"CSW is concerned that the Iranian authorities continue to characterize legitimate religious activities as crimes against the state," said Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide. "In addition to our concern at these charges, we also deplore the exorbitant bail demands, which are increasingly common and appear to be designed to economically cripple families and congregations.

"We continue to call for the release of all prisoners of conscience, without recourse to extortionate payments, and in

line with Iran's undertakings under Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights."

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