

Iran Imprisons Christian Converts, Violates International Human Rights

Five additional Muslim-background believers in Jesus were imprisoned in Iran, according to an international report last Friday.

One Christian convert, Hamid Afzali, was handed down a 10-year jail sentence from the regime, while three others – Nasrollah Mousavi, Bijan Gholizadeh and Iman Salehi – were given five years and Zohrab Shahbazi nine months, totaling 25 years and nine months.

The five arrests are the most recent in a string of human rights abuses against Christians in Iran, despite the theoretical recognition of religious minorities, according to the Hengaw Organization for Human Rights. Hengaw reported that there was no information relating to any specific charges against the five converts.

Not only has the judiciary ignored its own religious minorities but the systematic imprisonment and torture of Christians contravenes Article 18 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights established by the General Assembly, according to which: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”

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The Iranian regime's disregard for international human rights as set out by the United Nations is not unusual given its history. However, notably, they were awarded two influential positions within the UN last year.

Iranian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Ali Bahreini was appointed to chair the 2023 United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Social Forum.

In the same year, Iran's envoy Heidar-Ali Balouji was made rapporteur for the UN First Committee with a focus on disarmament and international security issues. He also became one of 21 General Assembly vice presidents.

The legitimacy of these appointments has been questioned in the European Parliament and by the United States.

The Hengaw report added that another Christian convert in Iran, Yasin Mousavi, was recently sentenced to 15 years in prison for charges including, "membership in groups or associations aimed at disrupting security" and "propaganda against the government through promoting Christianity."

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While authorities downplay the number of believers in the regime, the church has grown from a few hundred before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 to approximately a million today.

Andrew Boyd from Release International, a UK-based organization that serves the persecuted church in some 30 nations around the world, affirmed the claim.

"We don't know what the actual figures are, but the Iranian Church is often held up as a model of the fastest growing church in the world."

He added: "If you take a cherry pit between your thumb and

your finger and you give it a squeeze, it's going to shoot out. And that's what persecution does and has always done. Wherever there's persecution, under the hand of God, who always looks to redeem every bad situation and turn it to good, and who always will, He always will, you find that persecution actually doesn't extinguish the Church, it spreads the Church."

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