

Persecution Against Christians in Iran Heats Up With Re-arrest of Nadarkhani

Iran is putting more pressure on Christians. In recent days, the government demanded personal details from members of a Tehran church.

“People thought maybe a hundred or so would come forward, and over 700 came forward, gave their names and addresses and said, ‘Here we are. Here’s where we stand,’” an Operation Mobilization worker focused on Iran told us at Urbana 12.

The Islamic republic of Iran ranks No. 5 on Open Doors USA’s World Watch List, a compilation of countries most resistant to Christianity. Under Iran’s harsh apostasy law, anyone from a Muslim background who becomes a Christ-follower faces the death penalty.

The OM worker said for “Muslims who follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, there are often huge obstacles and problems ... they’ll lose their jobs, their bank accounts are frozen, and in general, life becomes very difficult.”

Take Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, for example.

In 2009, Nadarkhani was arrested for protesting the Islamic indoctrination in his sons’ school system. He served nearly three years in prison, refusing the multiple opportunities to recant his faith. Despite an execution order signed in February, the pastor was acquitted of apostasy and released seven months later.

Nadarkhani was taken into custody again on Christmas Day. Officials claimed that he must finish the remainder of his sentence, approximately 45 days. In September, the courts had

stated that Nadarkhani could finish his remaining time in probation.

“There’s not been freedom of religion [in Iran],” the OM worker explained. “There has not been basic recognition of human rights, freedom of conscience, and freedom to practice your faith, especially if you’re a Muslim who decides that you want to believe in Jesus Christ.”

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reports that December marks a traditional crackdown on Christians by the Iranian regime. Following Nadarkhani’s arrest on Christmas Day, nearly 50 believers were arrested at a Tehran home two days later. CSW says most were released after surrendering mobile phones, full contact details, and passwords to emails and social networking sites.

Despite myriad challenges, believers are standing firm.

There’s a resiliency among Iranians who want to follow Christ, said the worker, “sort of like the story of the man who sold everything in order to get that treasure buried under the ground.

“They value the precious treasure they’ve found; they’re willing to lose everything for...the sake of finding Christ.”

What can you do to help them?

“Simply praying for the church is one of the most significant ways that we can stand with them,” the OM worker said.

“The other way we can help is through advocacy. Write to the Iranian embassy, write to the government; Iranian Christians should worship, practice their faith, without fear of persecution.”