

Seven Christians Arrested During Prayer Meeting in Iran

Iran security officials raided a **prayer** meeting on Friday and are detaining seven Christians from the Church of Iran denomination in Plaque 100, the Intelligence Ministry's notorious detention center.

According to sources close to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), older people who had attended the **prayer** gathering were threatened, but allowed to go free. The detentions are part of a marked upsurge in a campaign of harassment of Christians of all denominations, with reports of a significant increase in arrests during recent weeks.

"CSW is deeply concerned at news of yet another increase in the harassment of Iranian Christians," says CSW CEO Mervyn Thomas. "We particularly deplore the nature of the charges that are currently being levelled against Christians and other religious minorities. There appears to be an increasing tendency by the Iranian authorities to characterize legitimate religious activities as crimes against the state."

In other developments, on Wednesday, Mohabat News Agency reported that five Christian converts detained in Adel-Abad prison eight months ago following a raid on a house church in Shiraz were scheduled for trial on Monday.

Since their arrests, the five have reportedly been confined in cells housing dangerous criminals and are charged with "creating illegal groups," "participating in a **house church** service," "propagation against the Islamic regime" and "defaming Islamic holy figures through Christian evangelizing." And last week, seven Christians who were jailed in Rasht six years ago received suspended five year sentences for "action against the national security."

Thomas says the reality is that Christians are being harassed merely on account of their faith. But, he adds, the ongoing harassment and imprisonment of Christians, Baha'is and other religious minorities contravenes international covenants to which Iran is a signatory, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of religion.

“By arresting Christians who have peaceably gathered to **pray** or worship, Iran is violating their right to manifest their religious belief,” Thomas says. “We urge the Iranian government to end the harassment of religious minorities within its borders, to respect their right to freedom of religion, and to release all who have been held on account of their faith immediately and unconditionally.”