

White House Condemns Youcef Nadarkhani's Execution Order

Iranian Pastor **Youcef Nadarkhani** has received a final verdict and may be executed for false charges of apostasy. The White House has condemned the ruling.

Authorities arrested Nadarkhani in his home city of Rasht in October 2009 on charges that he questioned obligatory religion classes in Iranian schools. After finding him guilty of apostasy, the court of appeals in Rasht in November 2010 issued a written confirmation of his charges and death sentence.

"The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms reports that Iranian authorities' reaffirmed a death sentence for Iranian Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani for the sole reason of his refusal to recant his Christian faith. This action is yet another shocking breach of Iran's international obligations, its own constitution, and stated religious values," the White House press secretary said in a statement.

"The United States stands in solidarity with Pastor Nadarkhani, his family, and all those who seek to practice their religion without fear of persecution—a fundamental and universal human right. The trial and sentencing process for Pastor Nadarkhani demonstrates the Iranian government's total disregard for **religious freedom**, and further demonstrates Iran's continuing violation of the universal rights of its citizens."

The White House called on the Iranian authorities to immediately lift the sentence, release Nadarkhani and demonstrate a commitment to basic, universal human rights, including freedom of religion. The White House also renewed its calls for people of conscience and governments around the

world to reach out to Iranian authorities and demand Pastor Nadarkhani's immediate release.

Mark Toner, a deputy spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State, offered a similar statement. He said the United States is deeply concerned by reports that a provincial court has renewed the execution order for Iranian Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani:

"Mr. Nadarkhani is facing a death sentence on **charges of apostasy** and has refused to **recant his Christian faith**. Such government persecution for simply following one's faith is common in Iran, where followers of many religious traditions face harsh treatment and severe violations of their religious freedom. We have also witnessed a dramatic increase in the arrest of adherents to the Baha'i Faith recently, as well as an increase in repression of freedom of expression in all forms. We stand with religious and political leaders from around the world in condemning Youcef Nadarkhani's conviction and call for his immediate release."