

Youcef Nadarkhani Released After Christmas Imprisonment

Pastor **Youcef Nadarkhani**, who was imprisoned on Christmas Day, was released on Jan. 7. He is now back home with his family.

“We are pleased to learn of Pastor Nadarkhani’s release,” says Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) CEO Mervyn Thomas. “While we welcome this news, we remain concerned that like so many other Christians who have been unjustly detained, there is always a risk of re-arrest.”

In September 2012, Nadarkhani was acquitted of **apostasy** but received a three-year sentence for evangelizing Muslims. Since Nadarkhani had already spent close to three years in Lakan Prison in Rasht, the pastor was released after posting bail.

At the time of Nadarkhani’s first release, the court had said the last 45 days of his sentence could be served as probation. However, in a highly irregular move, he was returned to jail on Christmas Day on the orders of prison authorities who claimed he had been released too early due to the insistence of his lawyer, Mohammed Ali Dadkhah.

According to ASSIST News Service, Dadkhah, a prominent human rights lawyer, was subsequently jailed for 10 years and disbarred in Sept. 2012 for “actions and propaganda against the Islamic regime” and keeping banned books in his home. He was also banned from practicing or teaching law for 10 years.

CSW says Dadkhah is currently held in Tehran’s notorious Evin Prison. Concerns have been expressed for his well-being following reports that he is suffering from memory loss, denied proper dental work, has deteriorating health, and is under pressure to make a televised confession of guilt.

CSW’s Thomas says, “We are...concerned to learn of Mr. Dadkhah’s

condition and hold the regime responsible for the deterioration in his health. Moreover, official attempts to justify his imprisonment by attempting to coerce an 'on air' confession are not only reprehensible, but are also clear indications that the charges leveled against him were spurious.

"CSW calls for the immediate release of Mr. Dadkhah and for an end to the campaign of harassment of civil society. We also continue to call on the Iranian government to uphold the rule of law and allow the country's religious minorities to enjoy religious freedom as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is party."