

PRESS RELEASE

THE IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION CENTER IS CONCERNED ABOUT PASTOR YOUSEF NADARKHANI

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT – The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) is very disturbed by the June 12 ruling by the Islamic Republic’s Supreme Court on Christian Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani’s appeal of his death sentence. The Islamic Republic of Iran is obligated under Article 18 of the International Covenant and Civil and Political Rights to protect the right to freedom of religion of all Iranian citizens, regardless of their chosen religion.

Pastor Nadarkhani was arrested in Rasht in October 2009. In September 2010, a trial court in Gilan Province convicted him of apostasy and sentenced him to death by hanging. It found that he had participated in Christian worship and organized home church services, had been baptized and baptized others, and had converted Muslims to Christianity. He was accused of breaking Islamic Law on the grounds that from age 15 until the age of 19, he was raised a Muslim in a Muslim home. The verdict and sentence were based on three fatwas issued by former-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, the current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi.

Nadarkhani, through his lawyer, appealed. In a show of intimidation, earlier this month, a court in Tehran convicted his lawyer, Mohammed Ali Dadkhah, of promoting a soft revolution and anti-regime propaganda. It sentenced him to nine years’ imprisonment and lashes, and barred him from practicing law or teaching at the university for 10 years.

In its June 12 ruling that was only recently released, the Supreme Court (Judges Morteza Fazeli and Azizollah Razaghi) remanded the case back to the trial court with instructions to further investigate whether from age 15 to 19 Pastor Nadarkhani was not a Muslim according to his acquaintances, relatives, local elders and Muslims that knew him. It further instructed that, if that is the case, he must repent his Christian faith. It noted that if it can be proven that he was a practicing Muslim as an adult, and has not repented, “the execution will be carried out.”

The Islamic Republic of Iran uses a broad definition of “apostate” that includes Muslims who renounce Islam (natural apostasy), and those born into non-Muslim households who accept Islam after the age of maturity but later leave the religion (national apostasy). Since the 1980s, those labeled natural apostates have been subject to execution in Iran. In 1990, a Christian chaplain, Hossein Soudmand, was hung in Mashhad for apostasy.

IHRDC is a nonprofit organization based in New Haven, Connecticut that was founded in 2004 by a group of human rights scholars, activists, and historians. Its staff of human rights lawyers and researchers publish comprehensive and detailed reports on the human rights situation in Iran since the 1979 revolution. The Center has reported on the Iranian government's persecution of Baha'is, another religious minority in Iran. The Center's goal is to encourage an informed dialogue among scholars and the general public in both Iran and abroad. The human rights reports and an archive of documents are available to the public for research and educational purposes at www.iranhrdc.org.