

PRESS RELEASE

THE IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION CENTER CONDEMNS MASS ARRESTS OF SEVERAL IRANIAN CHRISTIANS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT – The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) condemns Iran’s recent unjustified arrests of Iranian Christians, and urges that the Islamic Republic release all detainees immediately and unconditionally, and that it stop the authorities from continuing with the planned arrests. 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.

According to reports, in the early morning hours of December 26, 2010, (the day after Christmas) a group of armed, plain-clothes, special security agents broke into the homes of Christian converts, harassed them, searched their homes, and confiscated their computers and other personal belongs. In a coordinated effort, at least twenty-five Christian converts were handcuffed and transferred to unknown locations. Agents sought to arrest another sixteen Christians, but they were not home. Their family members were instructed to tell their loved ones to turn themselves in. Most of the arrests took place in Tehran.

Some of the detainees were released the day of their arrest. A few were able to place short phone calls to their families. Others remain in detention where they have not had access to legal representation. Some of the detainees’ names are as follows: Javar and Anahita Zare, Leila Akhavan, Sara Akhavan, Mehdi Forootan, Fakhreedin Shefaati, Ladan Nouri, Farshid Fathi, Nasrin Hosseininia, Rasoul Abdollahi, Mohammad Zardouz. Since then, it has been reported that more than 60 Christians have been arrested throughout Iran and that more arrests are planned.

The government has not provided an official reason for the arrests. However, on January 4, Morteza Tamadoon, Governor of Tehran, confirmed the arrests and announced that there are more widespread arrests to come. He justified the arrests on the grounds that the Christians are cultural enemies of Iran. He called Christian evangelicalism a “corrupt and deviant movement” that spreads its ideas through centers based in the United Kingdom. He likened Christians to the Taliban, claiming that they are expanding their activities in Iran with financing from the British government.

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.