

2025 Annual Report

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

Documented Rights
Violations Against
Christians in
Iran



OpenDoors



CSW everyone
free to believe

Christian Solidarity Worldwide



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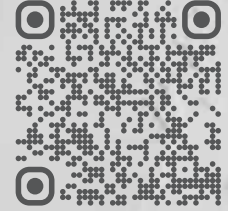
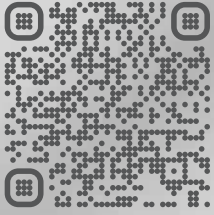
Executive Summary



The rights violations documented in this report represent only a fraction of the violations committed against Christians in Iran, as many cases go unreported. This was illustrated in 2024 with the **leaking** of over 3 million case files of the Tehran judiciary between 2008 and 2023, including the cases of over 300 Christians who faced charges related to their faith or religious activities. That these cases represented only the tip of the iceberg was demonstrated firstly by the fact that they related only to the Tehran region; secondly because the report authors documented a further 37 cases in Tehran over that 15-year period that were not included, involving

at least 96 individuals; and thirdly because 58% of cases had gone unreported and were not previously known to the report authors. A detailed analysis of the leaked files, including 10 key insights regarding the systematic repression of Christian activities in Iran, can be found in Section G of this report. The leaked documents reveal clearly the coordinated effort by security and judicial authorities in Iran to distinguish between the recognised Christians of Armenian and Assyrian descent, and those whom the government disapproves of – particularly those who exercise their fundamental rights by converting to Christianity and actively sharing their faith with others.





Our 2024 annual report was entitled **'Faceless Victims'**, owing to the increasing trend of arrested Christians or their families choosing not to publicise their cases for fear of further repercussions. This trend continued in 2024; however, some who experienced violations chose to publicise their cases in the hope it would help not only them, but others also, by ensuring these violations were brought to light.

At least 139 Christians were arrested in Iran in 2024 on account of their religious beliefs or activities, 80 were detained and 77 were charged. At the end of 2024, at least 18 Christians were still serving sentences related to their faith. There were also reports of detained Christians being physically tortured.

In the latter half of 2024, a new trend emerged involving the financial transactions of Christians and that of their lawyers being scrutinised by agents of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to uncover any funds received from friends, family members or Christians abroad. Over a two-month period, Christians in at least five cities were arrested or summoned for prolonged questioning by IRGC

agents on suspicion of having received funds from abroad, for which they were threatened with charges under the **amended** Article 500 of the Islamic Penal Code (IPC), which allows for 10 years' imprisonment for those found to have engaged in "propaganda contrary to the holy religion of Islam" while also receiving financial or organisational support from outside the country. Over 70% of the charges against Christians in 2024 were filed under the amended Article 500.

Heavy sentencing was another trend in 2024, with 96 Christians sentenced to a combined 263 years in prison, 37 years of internal exile, and nearly \$800,000 in fines.

Confiscation of Christian properties was another trend, as well as the intensification of the vilification of Narcotics Anonymous by state-supported media, in an attempt to discredit the group for its Christian principles and to portray them as a front for Christian conspiracies to convert Muslims.

The effectiveness of advocacy was also highlighted in the cases of **Yasser Akbari** and **Anooshavan Avedian**, who were released early from 10-year prison sentences following years of advocacy by the reporting organisations. However, in the same month that the two Christians were released, others were being detained, illustrating that any hopes of a substantive change of approach under the new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, may be unfounded.

2024

Timeline



The following cases have all been reported publicly. However, many more cases go unreported, either because no-one raises awareness – arresting authorities frequently issue threats against publicity – or because those involved request confidentiality.

**JAN
2024**

On **3 January**, Mina Khajavi, a 60-year-old convert to Christianity, was **summoned** to begin her six-year prison sentence in Evin Prison in Tehran for “acting against national security by promoting Zionist Christianity” through leadership of a house-church. Ms Khajavi began serving her sentence on **8 January**. She had been **arrested** in 2020 and **sentenced** in 2022 alongside fellow convert Malihe Nazari, who also received a six-year sentence, and Iranian-Armenian church leader Joseph Shahbazian, who received a 10-year sentence. However, while Pastor Shahbazian and Ms Nazari **began** serving their sentences a few months later, Ms Khajavi was considered unfit to begin her sentence as she had been run over by a car and her ankle badly broken. Metal plates had to be fitted and she continues to walk with a limp and has developed arthritis. In **April**, it was **reported** that she was struggling with pain and unable to access the medical care she required. Ms Khajavi had reportedly only been given painkillers occasionally, and no other treatment. She was said to find it particularly difficult climbing up to the second level of a bunk-bed in her cell to sleep at night.



On the same day Ms Khajavi began her prison sentence, another convert to Christianity, Hossein Sha'bani, was summoned by Ministry of Intelligence agents in Karaj and interrogated for three hours about his house-church. On **16 January** he was told to present himself before the Karaj prosecutor to answer **charges** of “teaching activities that educate in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam, through making false religious claims”, under the amended Article 500 of the IPC, which the UN Human Rights Committee **said** in 2023 should be



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2024

“repealed or amended”. The charges were officially pronounced at the prosecutor’s office on **20 February**, and he was released on bail of 300 million tomans (\$3,500). Several other families associated with the same house-church were summoned and interrogated regarding their faith and religious activities. Fellow house-church members Alireza and Amir Nourmohammadi, who had been arrested in December 2023, were also **charged** under Article 500 with engaging in “deviant educational or propaganda activities contrary to the holy Islamic law by making false claims in religious fields”. They were released on bail equivalent to \$3,000 on **10 January**, and later sentenced, though the details have not been made public.



Laleh Saati

On **13 February**, Laleh Saati, a Christian convert who had returned to Iran after spending several years seeking asylum in Malaysia, was arrested at her father’s home in Ekbatan Town, a suburb of Tehran, and taken to Ward 209 of Evin Prison, which is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Intelligence. Ms Saati was interrogated for around three weeks, during which time photographs and videos of her Christian activities and baptism in Malaysia were shown to her as evidence of her supposed crime, and was subsequently transferred to the women’s ward of the prison. On **16 March**, she was **sentenced** to two years in prison for “acting against national security by connecting with Zionist Christian organisations”. Her sentence was pronounced by the notorious judge of Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, Iman Afshari, who has been **sanctioned** by the UK government for “serious human rights violations”, and who reportedly asked her why she had risked returning to Iran “given that you have done such things [Christian activities] outside of Iran”. Ms Saati’s two-year sentence included a two-year travel ban following her release. Ms Saati had returned to Iran in 2017, having grown frustrated at the time it was taking for her asylum claim in Malaysia to be processed, and also out of a desire to be reunited with her elderly parents. The NGO **Human Rights in Iran** said she had previously been summoned and interrogated by intelligence agents on numerous occasions. In **May**, Ms Saati’s mother **said** her daughter was struggling with the pressure she had been placed under and needed psychological support, and in **July** both Ms Saati and her mother were **threatened** with additional charges due to the publicity Ms Saati’s case had received. In **September**, it was **reported** that Ms Saati had been refused parole or release with an electronic tag because she had refused to publicly refute the reports about her case and to record a forced confession.



Hakop Gochumyan

On **18 February**, Hakop Gochumyan, an Armenian Christian detained in Evin Prison since his arrest in August 2023, was **sentenced** to 10 years in prison for “engaging in deviant proselytising activity that contradicts the sacred law of Islam” through alleged membership and leadership of “a network of evangelical Christianity”. Mr Gochumyan’s court hearing was initially **scheduled** for **7 January**, but was postponed. His conviction was reportedly based exclusively on his possession of seven Persian-language New Testaments and having visited two Armenian churches and a Persian-language house-church while on holiday in Tehran. Article 160 of the IPC allows for judges to use their “personal

FEB
2024

intuition” when evidence is lacking, and Mr Gochumyan’s lawyer argued that the judge had been forced to use this provision, having found no other evidence against his client. Mr Gochumyan’s sentence was pronounced by Judge Afshari at Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, in a case that involved nine other Christians. Four, including Mr Gochumyan, received 10-year sentences; one received a two-year sentence; five were banned from leaving Iran and from living in Tehran and its neighbouring provinces for two years; and all 10 were fined a total of 500 million tomans (around \$8,000) and deprived of rights such as membership of political or social groups. Many personal belongings were also confiscated, including cash, digital devices and even, unusually, some properties. In **June**, Mr Gochumyan was told his appeal had failed.

On **20 February**, Christian convert Ebrahim Firouzi, 37, who spent **years in prison and exile** on account of his faith and Christian activities, was **found dead**, on the very same day that another Christian convert, Sasan Khosravi, completed his own two-year term in **exile**. Mr Firouzi’s family told mourners at his burial on **22 February** that he died of a heart attack. For 11 years, following his initial arrest in January 2011, Mr Firouzi had been forced to deal with the trauma of his arrest, rearrest, imprisonment and exile.



Ebrahim Firouzi

On **29 February**, four Christian converts, including **Siroos Khosravi** and Afghan refugee **Teymour Hosseini**, who had been arrested in Shahriar, west of Tehran, in December 2023, were released on bail. On **26 May**, Mr Hosseini and the two unnamed converts, as well as another convert who had been arrested separately, were summoned to court to face charges of “establishing and membership of a group, society, or branch inside the country to disrupt the security of the country”. They were sentenced in **June**, though the details were not made public, and at the end of 2024 they were still awaiting the result of their appeals.



Siroos Khosravi



Shahab Shahi

In **March**, **Middle East Concern** reported that Christian convert Shahab Shahi, who had been arrested alongside the Nourmohammadi brothers in December 2023 and who belonged to the same house-church as them and Hossein Sha'bani, was charged with "propaganda against the state" at the 6th Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Karaj, and later sentenced, though the details have not been made public.



Matthias Ali-Haghnejad

In **April**, Abdolreza (Matthias) Ali-Haghnejad, a church leader serving a six-year sentence for "propagating Christianity" in a prison 1,000 miles from his wife and daughter, was **told** he would no longer be permitted to return home to visit them each month. Pastor Ali-Haghnejad had been in prison since his acquittal was **overturned** in January 2022. Initially, he was held in the prison in his home city of Anzali, in north Iran, but in July 2023 he was **transferred** without prior notice to a prison in Minab, in the far south. In November 2023, the pastor was permitted the chance to fly home for the first time for a **short visit** and in **January 2024** he was told he would be allowed monthly visits to his family for the remainder of his sentence. But in April, after only a few days of his home visit, he was called unexpectedly and ordered to return to the prison, whereupon he was informed that his so-called open sentence would no longer apply. On **14 December**, Pastor Ali-Haghnejad was **released** from prison, but another court case against him and his wife and daughter remains open, related to their **arrest** at a Christmas celebration in December 2022, when the pastor was on a short furlough from prison.



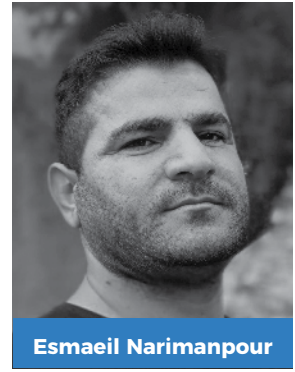
Yasin Mousavi

On **20 April**, Yasin Mousavi, another Christian convert arrested in December 2023, was released on bail of 2 billion tomans (around \$30,000). Mr Mousavi had been held in solitary confinement for 20 days at the Ministry of Intelligence detention centre, before being transferred to Shibani Prison in Ahvaz. He was one of eight Christians **sentenced** on **27 May** by Revolutionary Court judge Mehdi Fathinia to a combined total of almost 45 years in prison. Mr Mousavi was given a 15-year sentence – 10 years for "membership of a group intent on disrupting national security" and five years for "propaganda against the regime through the promotion of Zionist Christianity" – while Hamid Afzali was given a 10-year sentence, Nasrullah Mousavi, Bijan Gholizadeh and Iman Salehi received five-year sentences, two unnamed individuals received two years, and Zohrab Shahbazi was given nine months. Mr Mousavi had been arrested on three previous occasions, including during the protests of 2022. The indictment against him alleged he had "played an active role in the protests" and had been "one of the leaders" of an evangelical Christian organisation in the region. On **24 August**, one of the Christians sentenced alongside him, Bijan Gholizadeh, **died** in an accident while driving his truck on the Borujen Road south of Isfahan, having only recently been released on bail after nearly six months in detention, including 20 days in solitary confinement.

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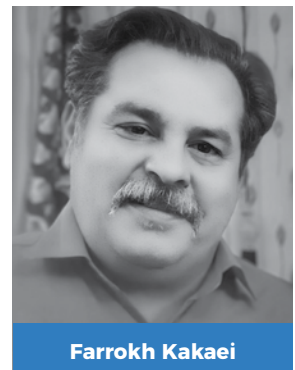
MAY
2024

On **28 May**, the day after the sentencing of the eight Christians, the same Revolutionary Court judge **sentenced** another Christian convert, Esmail Narimanpour, to five years in prison. Mr Narimanpour was **arrested** in December 2023 and released on bail of 700 million tomans (\$10,000) on **30 April**, after being charged with “acting against national security by communicating with Christian Zionist organisations”. **Mohabat News** reported that Mr Narimanpour spent most of his detention in Shiban Prison.



On **22 May**, a hospital founded by American missionaries in the early 1900s and confiscated following the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 was **demolished** after a long-running dispute. Masih (“Messiah”) Hospital, in the western city of Kermanshah had been **saved** from demolition in 2020 after regaining its nationally-registered status, but the dispute rumbled on. The owner argued that the building, which had not been used in 20 years, was no longer worth preserving, given that it had been badly damaged in a fire and had allegedly become the dwelling place for rough sleepers and drug addicts. However, a spokesperson for the local cultural heritage organisation said the demolition had not been authorised.

On **26 May**, Christian convert Farrokh Kakaie was **arrested** at his home in Karaj by four plainclothes officers of the Ministry of Intelligence, and taken to an unknown location. The arresting agents confiscated a framed image of Jesus, along with Mr Kakaie’s laptop, mobile phone, and computer hard-drive. In **June**, his wife and two daughters expressed their increasing concern for his well-being, saying they did not know where he was being held, or on what charges.



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📍 Masih Hospital in Kermanshah, before its demolition.



Mojdeh Falahi

On **9 September**, Christian convert Mojdeh Falahi was **arrested** at the prosecutor's office in Shiraz and transferred to the infamous **Pelak-e 100** detention centre, which is under the jurisdiction of the intelligence ministry. Ms Falahi, whose two older sisters were **arrested** five years previously, had gone to the prosecutor's office at around lunchtime at the request of a Christian friend who had been arrested the day before, in order to provide him with some documents required for his release.

However, once she arrived, Ms Falahi was detained and held on charges filed under the titles of "Christianity" and "illegal Christian activities". Ms Falahi's family visited the prosecutor's office several times and asked to see her, but were not permitted to; neither was Ms Falahi granted access to a lawyer. In **October**, her brother-in-law, Sam Khosravi, told **Morning Star News** she was "psychologically in a very bad condition and only cries". She was released on bail of 2.5 billion tomans (equivalent to \$40,000) on **8 October**. Middle East News reported that she faced charges related to "Zionist Christianity" and "propaganda against the Islamic Republic".

On **23-24 September**, three Christians who had been among a group of 20 arrested by Ministry of Intelligence agents in Nowshahr and Chalus in December 2023 were **re-arrested** by IRGC agents and taken to a detention centre in Sari, where they were held incommunicado and without access to a lawyer. Jahangir Alikhani, Hamed Malamiri, and Gholam Eshaghi were later transferred to Nowshahr Prison, and on **17 November** they were released on bail of 1 billion tomans (\$15,000).



Jahangir Alikhani



Hamed Malamiri



Gholam Eshaghi

They were subjected to physical as well as psychological torture during prolonged interrogations, and asked to write letters renouncing their Christian faith and expressing remorse for their actions in order to secure their release. On the day of their release, another member of the group, Javad Amini, was **re-arrested** and transferred to the Sari detention centre. Mr Amini's wife, Farzaneh Ahmadi, went home to discover it ransacked, and minutes later received another unwelcome visit from the agents, who claimed they were looking for her husband's phone and Bibles. The agents later returned for a third visit and confiscated several Bibles and other Christian books, as well as Mr Amini's notebooks related to his study of Christian theology. During her husband's detention, Mrs Ahmadi was interrogated by both Ministry of Intelligence and IRGC agents, who subjected her to **severe psychological pressure**, using vulgar and offensive sexual language. Two other Christian converts – both women – were detained on the same day as Mr Amini, and all three were released on **27 November** on bail of 1 billion tomans (\$15,000). The day before their release, the trial of Mr Amini, Mr Alikhani, Mr Malamiri and Mr Eshaghi, and eight others, took place at Branch 102 of

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2024

the Criminal Court of Nowshahr. “They have identified themselves as Christian during their defence,” Prosecutor Mohammad Reza-Ebrahimi wrote in the indictment. “And this is supported by the messages exchanged in their phones,” as well as through the “Gospels and other Christian literature found in their possession.” The prosecutor concluded that the 12 had “set up groups to teach the Christian religion” and were therefore guilty of a crime. Earlier in **November**, a UN General Assembly **resolution** had called on Iran to “cease monitoring individuals on account of their religious identity”. The outcome of their trial remained unreported at the end of 2024.



Javad Amini & Farzaneh Ahmadi



Anooshavan Avedian

On **24 September**, 62-year-old Iranian-Armenian church leader Anooshavan Avedian, who had been serving a 10-year prison **sentence** for leading a **house-church**, was **acquitted** and released after spending a little over a year in Evin Prison. Pastor Avedian was acquitted by Branch 21 of the Appeal Court of Tehran after Branch 26 of the Supreme Court accepted his petition for a retrial in **April**, having rejected all previous petitions.

On **29 September**, Christian convert Mehdi (Yasser) Akbari was **released** after nearly five years in Evin Prison, when his 10-year sentence was reduced to four years and five months by the same Tehran appeal court. Mr Akbari had spent four years and nine months in prison. During that time, he had applied for a retrial with the Supreme Court on five occasions. His first four applications were rejected, but his final application, also lodged in **April**, was accepted, and Branch 39 of the Supreme Court ruled that his sentence should be reviewed.



Yasser Akbari



Toomaj Aryan-Kia

On **5 November**, Christian convert Toomaj Aryan-Kia was **sentenced** to 10 years in prison at the 3rd Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Karaj for “propagating Christianity”, “collaborating” with the “hostile governments” of Israel, the UK and the US, and membership of “anti-regime groups”. According to Mohabat News, Mr Aryan-Kia, who was first arrested in October 2022, was also banned by Judge Mostafa Narimani from membership of any group for two years after his release.

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2024

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2024

Ghazal Marzban

Also on **5 November**, a 41-year-old Catholic convert and law graduate, Ghazal Marzban, was **arrested** by officers of the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FARAJA) as she protested in Tehran against the harassment she had endured since converting to Catholicism seven years prior, including being prevented from sitting her bar examinations and pressured to leave the country. On **10 December**, Ms Marzban was charged by Judge Afshari at Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran with “being in public places and public view without a religious hijab” and “propaganda against the regime by chanting slogans”. On **30 December**, she was **sentenced** to six months’ imprisonment and 74 lashes for the “propaganda” charge; the charge relating to the hijab was dropped. Ms Marzban was told she must complete one-third of her sentence, and that the rest, as well as the lashes, would be suspended for five years, dependent on future conduct.



Morteza Mashoodkari

On **23 December**, Christian convert Morteza Mashoodkari was **released** from the final month of his two-and-a-half-year prison sentence. Mr Mashoodkari, along with two other members of the Church of Iran, Ahmad (Youhanna) Sarparast and Ayoub (Farzin) Poor-Rezazadeh, was initially **sentenced** to five years in prison in April 2022, under the amended Article 500, but Mr Mashoodkari’s sentence was reduced by half upon appeal in November 2022. A year later, the three men were released from Lakan Prison in Rasht to serve the remainder of their sentences under “open prison” conditions, requiring them to work daily at an industrial factory from 7am to 5pm, while remaining under custodial oversight.

On **26 December**, over 40 Christians were **arrested** in two separate incidents in two different cities. The Christians, who cannot be identified, had met to celebrate Christmas. The arrests coincided with a statement by the head of Iran’s judiciary, Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei, declaring a five-day furlough for Christian prisoners and stating: “There is no difference between Muslim and Christian prisoners. The judiciary will provide the necessary help and assistance to the Christian community of the country.” However, the at least 18 Christian prisoners of conscience still serving sentences at the end of 2024 were not included as part of the furlough scheme, as their charges related to “national security”, while over four times as many individuals were convicted for their peaceful Christian activities in 2024 than in the previous year.



139 
ARRESTED

80 
DETAINED

96 
SENTENCED

2024
INCIDENTS

661 
INDIVIDUALS
AFFECTED*

25 
ENDURED
IMPRISONMENT

* Dependants directly affected by a Christian's detention

Trends



TARGETING FINANCES

1

In the latter half of 2024, a new trend emerged of arrests and questioning of known Christian individuals, and their lawyers, about receiving funding from abroad. In what appeared a growing trend, Christians were targeted in at least five different cities within a two-month period. Each arrest was carried out by IRGC intelligence agents, who sought to charge them under a provision within the amended Article 500 of the IPC, which calls for the maximum punishment of up to 10 years' imprisonment in cases where the individual has received "financial or organisational help from outside the country".

The Iranian government seems to have intensified its efforts to isolate and financially undermine the Christian community as part of a broader strategy to suppress its growth and influence. This crackdown begins by dismantling churches and Christian organisations, often by removing leaders and labelling their groups as "illegal". This tactic not only targets individual leaders but also aims to deny the community the right to freedom of association articulated in Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is party. In violation of Article 18 of the ICCPR, leadership development within the Christian community is also obstructed, as authorities shut down Bible schools inside Iran and view those who receive theology training abroad with suspicion, as though they were being prepared for espionage. Even initiatives established specifically to provide in-country training for Christian leaders are viewed as severe threats by the regime.



The 96 Christians sentenced in 2024 received fines totalling nearly \$800,000, the highest annual figure to date.

Making financial donations to support church activities is standard practice for Christians worldwide, but has been criminalised by Iran's Revolutionary Courts.

In the initial stages of this approach (2009-2013), financial resources were heavily restricted for the Protestant and Persian-speaking churches that still operated. The government placed limitations on church services, allowing only one meeting on Sundays – a weekday in Iran – which discouraged attendance and reduced both community

participation and financial support. Authorities then scrutinised church finances, requiring lists of donors and tracking contributions, often targeting the largest donors. They further restricted financial assistance from other Christian organisations, in particular preventing churches from receiving funding from abroad.

Making financial donations, charitable offerings, or paying tithes to support church activities are standard practices for Christians worldwide, but such activities have been criminalised by Iran's Revolutionary Courts. These activities are also common in churches that exclusively serve Armenian and Assyrian-speaking members, which do not face similar restrictions. While Iran invests in expanding its influence across the region in places like Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon, officials interpret any expansion of Christianity within Iran as an analogous threat, justifying further financial suppression. Authorities have even told some Christian detainees that “foreign hostile states”, including “Zionist groups”, are actively supporting Christian organisations in Iran, rationalising the severe measures taken against Church finances as a matter of “national security”. Yet in just one instance, the personal representative office of Iran's Supreme Leader in London **took** more than £100,000 from the British government as a furlough grant paid by UK taxpayers.



LENGTHY SENTENCES

2

Another clear trend in 2024 was the remarkable increase in lengthy prison sentences, with the cumulative length of sentences issued in 2024 over six times higher than in 2023. This was partly due to a huge uptick in arrests in the second half of 2023 which required judicial processing, resulting in a surge of sentencing in 2024 of over four times as many Christians. Notably, five Christians received 10-year prison terms, while another was sentenced to 15 years – a stark example of the intensifying penalties imposed. Meanwhile, the 96 Christians sentenced in 2024 received fines totalling nearly \$800,000. Over the past decade, Revolutionary Court judges have increasingly been adding supplementary punishments such as fines on top of prison sentences. Other punishments frequently employed against Christians in recent years have included terms of internal exile, deprivation of social rights, enforced religious “re-education”, and travel bans.





CONFISCATION OF PROPERTIES

3

It was also notable in 2024 that in at least two cases, judges used the amended Article 500 of the IPC - the article used in over 70% of cases against Christians in 2024 - to issue confiscation orders for Christian properties and vehicles. Note 3 of Article 500 bis states: "The property of the leaders and financial providers of the groups subject to this article, which resulted from a crime or was used to commit a crime, or was prepared for this purpose, and the property belonging to the aforementioned groups, shall be confiscated for the benefit of the Treasury."



VILIFICATION OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

4

Over the last decade, state-supported media has often criticised Narcotics Anonymous (NA) for its Christian roots, but there was a clear intensification of efforts to vilify the organisation in 2024, while several of the Christians convicted in 2024 were affiliated with NA. The aim of the vilification is to discredit NA for its Christian principles and to portray the organisation as a front for Christian conspiracies to convert Muslims.



Table of Prisoners



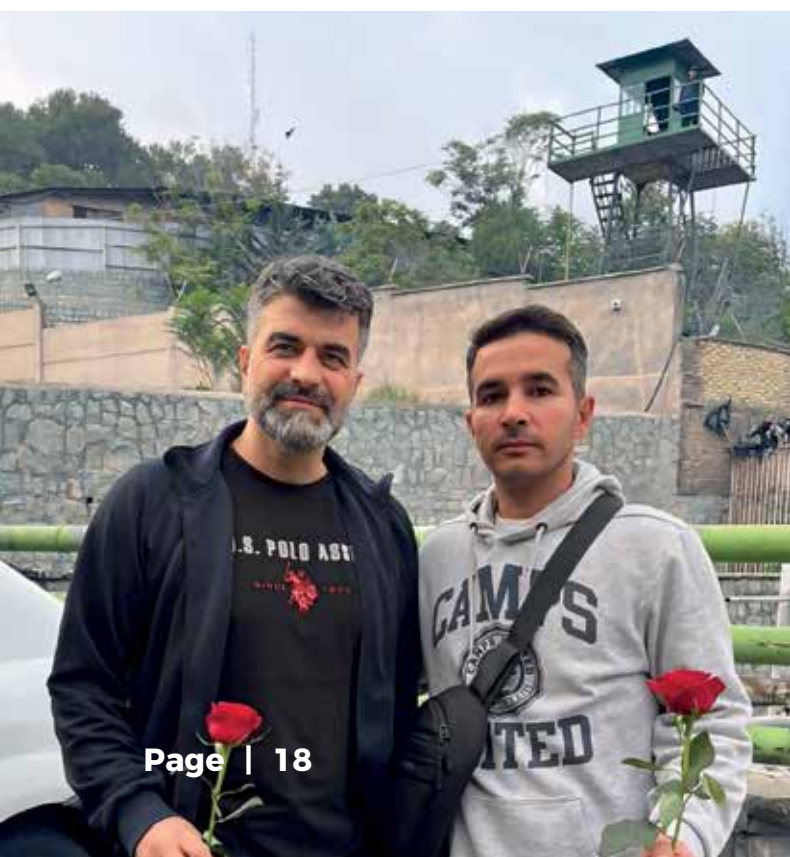
This table shows the public cases of Christians charged with offences related to their faith and detained or serving sentences of exile or forced labour in 2024. Some unpublicised cases have also been included, with individuals identified only by their first name, or a pseudonym.*



NAME	LOCATION	DETENTION BEGAN	RELEASED	CHARGE	SENTENCE
Mehdi (Yasser) Akbari	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jun 2020	Sep 2024	“Acting against national security by forming a house-church”	10 years <i>(reduced to 4 years 5 months after retrial)</i>
Abdolreza (Matthias) Ali-Haghnejad	Anzali / Minab Prison	Jan 2022	Dec 2024	“Acting against the security of the country by forming a group and propagating Christianity outside the church and in the house-church and giving information to the enemies of Islam”	6 years <i>(charges dropped in 2014 revived by judge in 2022)</i>
Ahmad Sarparast	Lakan Prison, Rasht	May 2022	- <i>Since October 2023 serving remainder of sentence in factory linked to prison</i>	“Engaging in propaganda and educational activities for deviant beliefs contrary to the holy Sharia” and “connections with foreign leaders”	5 years
Morteza Mashoodkari	Lakan Prison, Rasht	May 2022	Dec 2024	“Engaging in propaganda and educational activities for deviant beliefs contrary to the holy Sharia” and “connections with foreign leaders”	5 years <i>(reduced to 2.5)</i>

NAME	LOCATION	DETENTION BEGAN	RELEASED	CHARGE	SENTENCE
Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh	Lakan Prison, Rasht	May 2022	- <i>Since October 2023 serving remainder of sentence in factory linked to prison</i>	"Engaging in propaganda and educational activities for deviant beliefs contrary to the holy Sharia" and "connections with foreign leaders"	5 years
Sasan Khosravi	Exile	Aug 2022	Feb 2024	"Propaganda against the regime"	2 years' exile
Masih*	Karaj Central Prison	Dec 2022	-	"Propaganda against the state by promoting Christianity among Muslims" and "storing smuggled goods [Bibles]"	9 years
Hamid*	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jun 2023	-	"Propaganda against the regime"	3 years
Hakop Gochumyan (Armenian national)	Evin Prison, Tehran	Aug 2023	-	"Engaging in deviant proselytising activity that contradicts the sacred law of Islam" through alleged membership and leadership of "a network of evangelical Christianity".	10 years
Anooshavan Avedian	Evin Prison, Tehran	Sep 2023	Sep 2024	"Propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam."	10 years <i>(acquitted after retrial)</i>
Mohammad	Evin Prison, Tehran	Dec 2023	-	"Propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam" and "acting against national security through membership of illegal groups"	10 years
Amir	Evin Prison, Tehran	Dec 2023	-	"Acting against national security by connecting with Zionist Christian organisations"	4 years
Mina Khajavi	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jan 2024	-	"Acting against national security by promoting Zionist Christianity"	6 years
Laleh Saati	Evin Prison, Tehran	Feb 2024	-	"Acting against national security by connecting with Zionist Christian organisations"	2 years

NAME	LOCATION	DETENTION BEGAN	RELEASED	CHARGE	SENTENCE
Hossein	Evin Prison, Tehran	Apr 2024	-	“Acting against national security by connecting with Zionist Christian organisations”	2 years
Daniel*	Adel Abad, Shiraz	Apr 2024	Sep 2024	“Propaganda against the regime”	4 months
Soheil*	Karaj Prison	May 2024	-	“Propaganda against the regime”	3 years
Hamid	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jun 2024	-	“Participation in managing house-churches belonging to Assemblies of God churches” and “membership of groups with the aim of undermining national security.”	5 years
Davood*	Dastgerd Prison, Isfahan	Jun 2024	-	“Propaganda against the regime”	8 years <i>(reduced to 7 years - combination of two separate cases)</i>
Parham*	Dastgerd Prison, Isfahan	Jun 2024	-	“Propaganda against the regime”	2 years
Siroos*	Adel Abad, Shiraz	Aug 2024	-	“Forming gangs and crowds to disrupt security” and “propaganda against the system”	6 years



Iranian Christian prisoner of conscience Yasser Akbari, pictured here with fellow Christian convert Mehdi Rokhparvar outside Evin Prison following his release in September 2024. Mr Akbari was given a 10-year prison sentence for “acting against national security by forming a house-church”. Mr Rokhparvar was released in February 2023, having been sentenced to five years in prison.

JUDICIAL RULINGS AGAINST IRANIAN CHRISTIANS



\$777,366
IN FINES

263 YEARS
IN PRISON



88 YEARS
SOCIAL DEPRIVATIONS*

48 YEARS
TRAVEL BANS



37 YEARS
INTERNAL EXILE

* Deprived of rights such as membership of political or social groups

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

in National and International Law

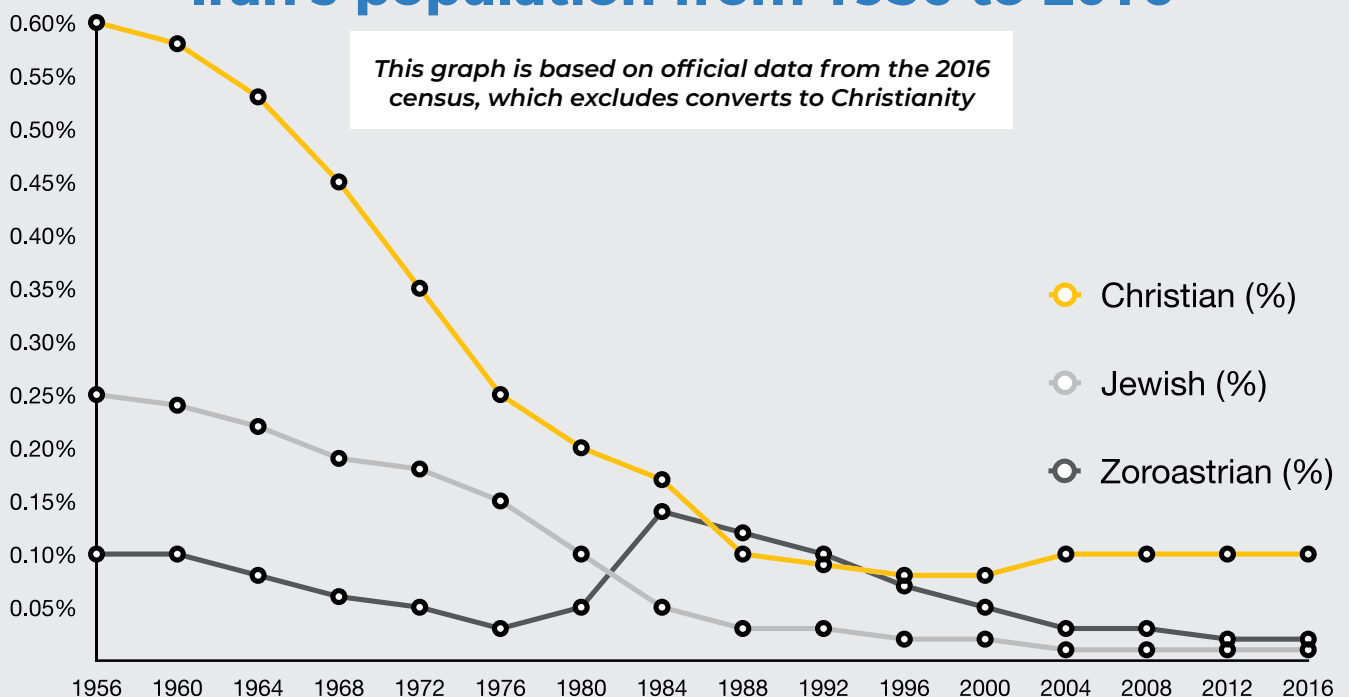


Iran is home to a variety of historically established religious and ethnic groups. The rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation, are protected by laws, both national and international. However, since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 the government has imposed a homogeneous Iranian identity with a Shi'a belief system, resulting in the repression of other cultures, traditions, religions and beliefs, when considered a threat to the Islamic Republic and its values.



Article 1 of the Iranian constitution institutes a theocracy, with Article 12 establishing the Twelver Ja'fari school of Shi'a Islam as the nation's official religion; therefore all Iranian laws must be derived from, and consistent with, Islamic law.

Share of followers of three non-Islamic religions in Iran's population from 1956 to 2016



Article 13 of the Constitution:

“Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognised religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.”



No other religious or belief minorities are recognised by law or afforded rights under the constitution, while the Christian community in Iran is restricted in the eyes of the authorities to ethnic Armenians, Assyrians, Georgians, and a small expatriate community.

These groups are relatively free to practise their faith, though they face legal and societal discrimination and are not permitted to hold services or possess religious materials in Persian (the national language), and can face imprisonment if they promote Christianity among people from a Muslim background, or have them attend church services. Meanwhile, Christian converts¹ from a Muslim background are numerically² the largest Christian community in Iran, but are not recognised by the state and are frequently targeted by the authorities and, in some cases, by their extended families and the wider society.

Unable to attend existing churches belonging to the Armenian, Assyrian and Georgian communities, converts either gather in informal meetings in private homes, known as “house-churches”, for prayer, worship, and Bible study, or are forced to remain isolated and disconnected from other Christians. In either case, their freedom to collectively express their faith is violated.

With converts constituting the largest – albeit unrecognised – Christian community in Iran, the issue of “apostasy” is a central concern. Apostasy has never been codified by the Islamic Republic, and differences in interpretation of Islamic law regarding apostasy contribute to a lack of certainty and consistency in how converts from Islam are treated. In 2022, a retired Iranian judge involved in approving the penal code said “apostasy was supposed to be included in our criminal code, but it was left out for fear of international pressure”.

¹ Christian converts show allegiance to various denominations or church movements. This report includes the violations suffered by the “Church of Iran” network of house-churches, whose members hold an unorthodox theology of the Trinity but maintain that salvation is through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

² A survey of Iranians’ attitudes towards religion in 2020, conducted by a secular Netherlands-based research group, revealed that 1.5% of Iranians from a sample size of 50,000 self-identified as Christians. Based on this, and taking into account possible skewing from the type of people who chose to respond, researchers estimated there could be as many as 800,000 Christians in Iran overall. Ethnic Assyrian, Georgian and Armenian Christians account for approximately 60,000-100,000, the remainder being converts from Islam.

The mistreatment of the Christian community, whether of the recognised Christian ethnic groups or the unrecognised Christian convert majority, violates Iran’s obligations under the ICCPR, which it ratified without reservation in 1975 and is obliged to uphold, along with other international treaties to which it is a signatory.

In 2023, the UN Human Rights Committee assessed the Islamic Republic’s compliance with the ICCPR, and recommended, among other issues, that Iran “should ensure respect for the right to freedom of religion or belief, including by ensuring that legislation and practices conform to Article 18 of the Covenant [regarding freedom of religion or belief], taking into account general comments No. 22 (1993) on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and No. 34 (2011) on freedoms of opinion and expression;[...] guarantee the right of everyone to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his or her choice and to change his or her religion; [and] ensure the freedom to manifest this religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, without being penalised”.³

Christian converts, the largest unrecognised Christian group in Iran, face frequent targeting by the authorities and societal hostility.

By failing to fulfil the civil and political rights of all its citizens, the Islamic Republic contravenes **Article 2.1 of the ICCPR**, whereby: “Each State Party ... undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognised in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”⁴

³ ‘Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under Article 40 of the Covenant, fourth periodic report of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Human Rights Committee, 139th session, Summary record of the 4038th and 4039th meetings held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, 9-10 October 2023,’ [digitallibrary.un.org]

⁴ Our 2024 [report](#) contained an overview of the range of individual articles of the ICCPR contravened by the Iranian authorities when targeting Christians, supported with relevant examples.

House-churches are the only refuge for Christian converts, whose collective worship is often met with risk of arrest.



Criminal law provisions

commonly applied to Christians



Christians are typically prosecuted under articles of the IPC that relate to national security and are open to interpretation. As they are charged with allegedly committing national-security crimes, they are tried in Revolutionary Courts.

On examining the leaked files from the Tehran district judiciary (see Section G), it becomes clear that Christians are most frequently charged with “propaganda against the Islamic State” under Article 500 (86% of cases), followed by membership (69%) or leadership (58%) of “anti-security” groups (i.e. house-churches) under Articles 498 and 499. These and other provisions of the IPC that criminalise the peaceful expression of religious belief are listed below:

498

Anyone, with any ideology, who establishes or directs a group, society, or branch, inside or outside the country, with any name or title, that constitutes more than two individuals and aims to perturb the security of the country, if not considered as “mohareb”⁵, shall be sentenced to two to 10 years’ imprisonment.

499

Anyone who joins, as a member, any of the groups, societies, or branches aforementioned in Article 498, shall be sentenced to three months to five years’ imprisonment, unless it is proved that he had been unaware of its aims.

499

BIS

Anyone who insults Iranian ethnicities or divine religions or Islamic schools of thought recognised under the Constitution, in the real or virtual sphere, with the intent to cause violence or tensions in the society, shall be sentenced to up to five years’ imprisonment, or 10 years if they received financial or organisational help from outside the country.

500

Anyone who engages in any type of propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations, shall be sentenced to three months to one year of imprisonment.

500

BIS

Anyone who engages in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam, through mind-control or psychological indoctrination, or making false claims, shall be sentenced to up to five years’ imprisonment, or 10 years if they received financial or organisational help from outside the country.

⁵ The Islamic Penal Code defines as mohareb “any person resorting to arms to cause terror, fear or breach public security and freedom will be considered as mohareb and to be ‘corrupt on the Earth’”.

513

Anyone who insults the sacred values of Islam or any of the Great Prophets or Shi'ite Imams or the Holy Fatima [Muhammad's daughter], if considered as "Saab ul-nabi" [defamation of the Prophet], shall be executed; otherwise, they shall be sentenced to one to five years' imprisonment.

610

When two or more individuals collude and conspire to commit crimes against the national or foreign security of the country or prepare the facilities to commit the aforementioned crimes, unless they are regarded as mohareb, shall be sentenced to two to five years' imprisonment.

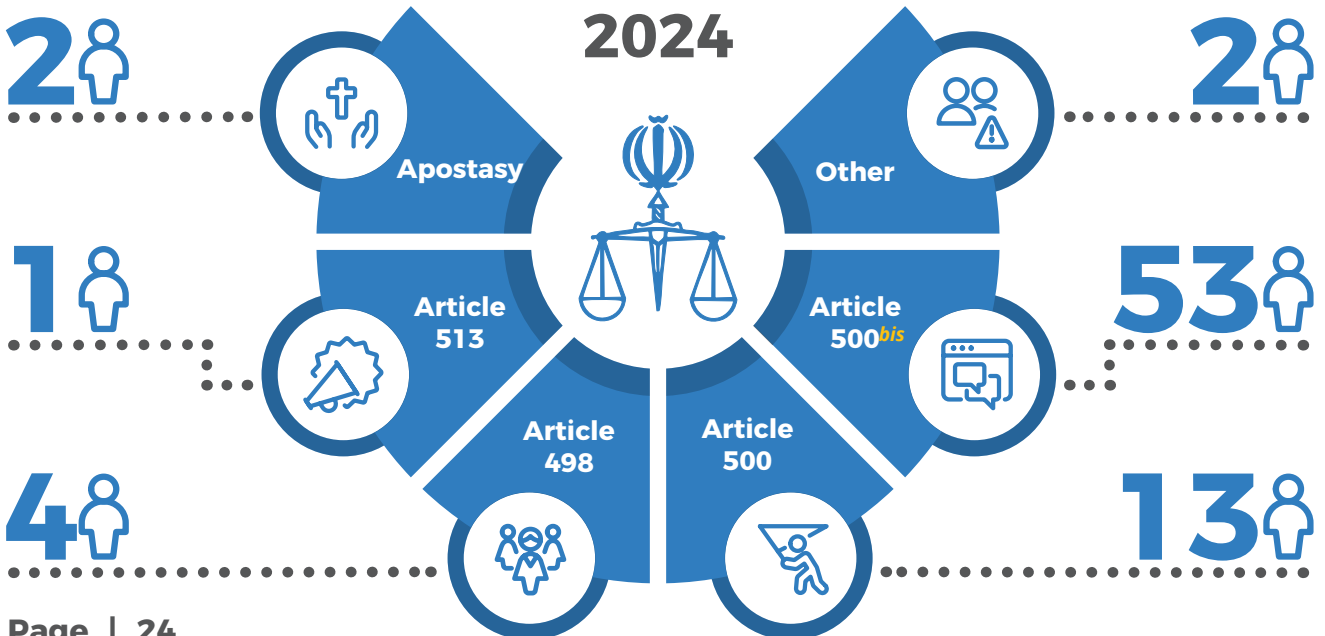
Some Christian converts have also faced "apostasy" charges, which could theoretically lead to a death sentence. Although apostasy is not codified in the IPC, judges can refer to **Article 167** of the Iranian Constitution, which states:

The judge is bound to endeavour to judge each case on the basis of the codified law. In case of the absence of any such law, he has to deliver his judgment on the basis of authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwa.

Rev Hossein Soodmand of the Assemblies of God (AoG) denomination is still the only Iranian Christian convert to have been executed for "apostasy" – back in 1990. Since then, others have been sentenced to death, but in each case the sentence has been overturned following an international outcry. However, in 1994, Christian convert **Rev Mehdi Dibaj** of the AoG was freed from death row, only to be killed extrajudicially five months later. Pastor **Yousef Nadarkhani** of the Church of Iran denomination was the most recent publicly reported instance of an "apostate" being sentenced to death, in 2010, but he was also later acquitted.

It has also become increasingly common for judges to impose additional punishments on top of prison sentences, such as **fines, restrictions on employment, travel bans, or internal exile.**

**CHARGES AGAINST
DETAINED CHRISTIANS IN
2024**





ANALYSIS

The leaked Tehran judiciary files

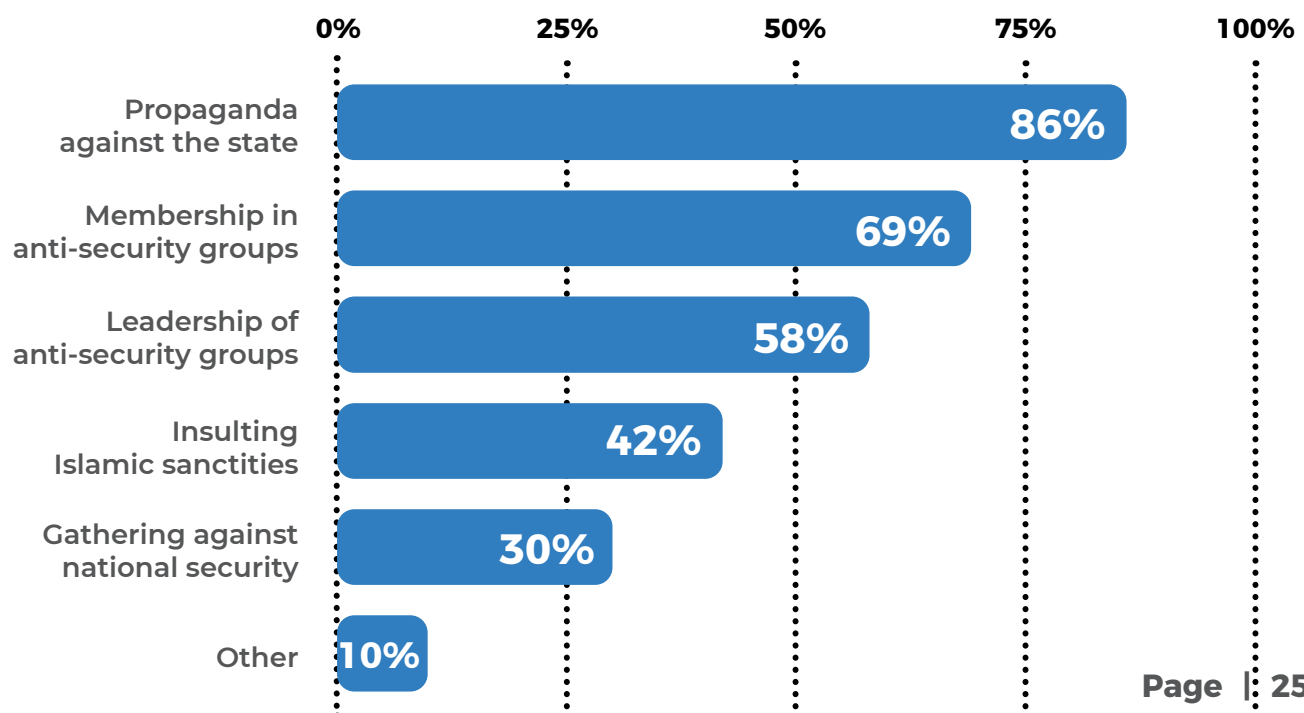


The case files of over 300 Christians who faced charges related to their religious beliefs and activities were among over 3 million prosecutions **leaked** by the anti-Iranian government hacker group Edaalate Ali in 2024.

The data from the Tehran judiciary's website included the cases of at least 327 Christians prosecuted in the Tehran area between July 2008 and January 2023, including at least seven ordained ministers.

Given that the 327 cases only relate to the Tehran region, they represent the tip of the iceberg of overall convictions country-wide over the 15-year period. For example, the report authors documented a further 37 cases involving at least 96 individuals in the Tehran region alone over this 15-year period that were not included in the leaked files.

Common Charges



~90%

The vast majority were converts to Christianity

60%



Male

6.7%

of Assyrian or Armenian descent

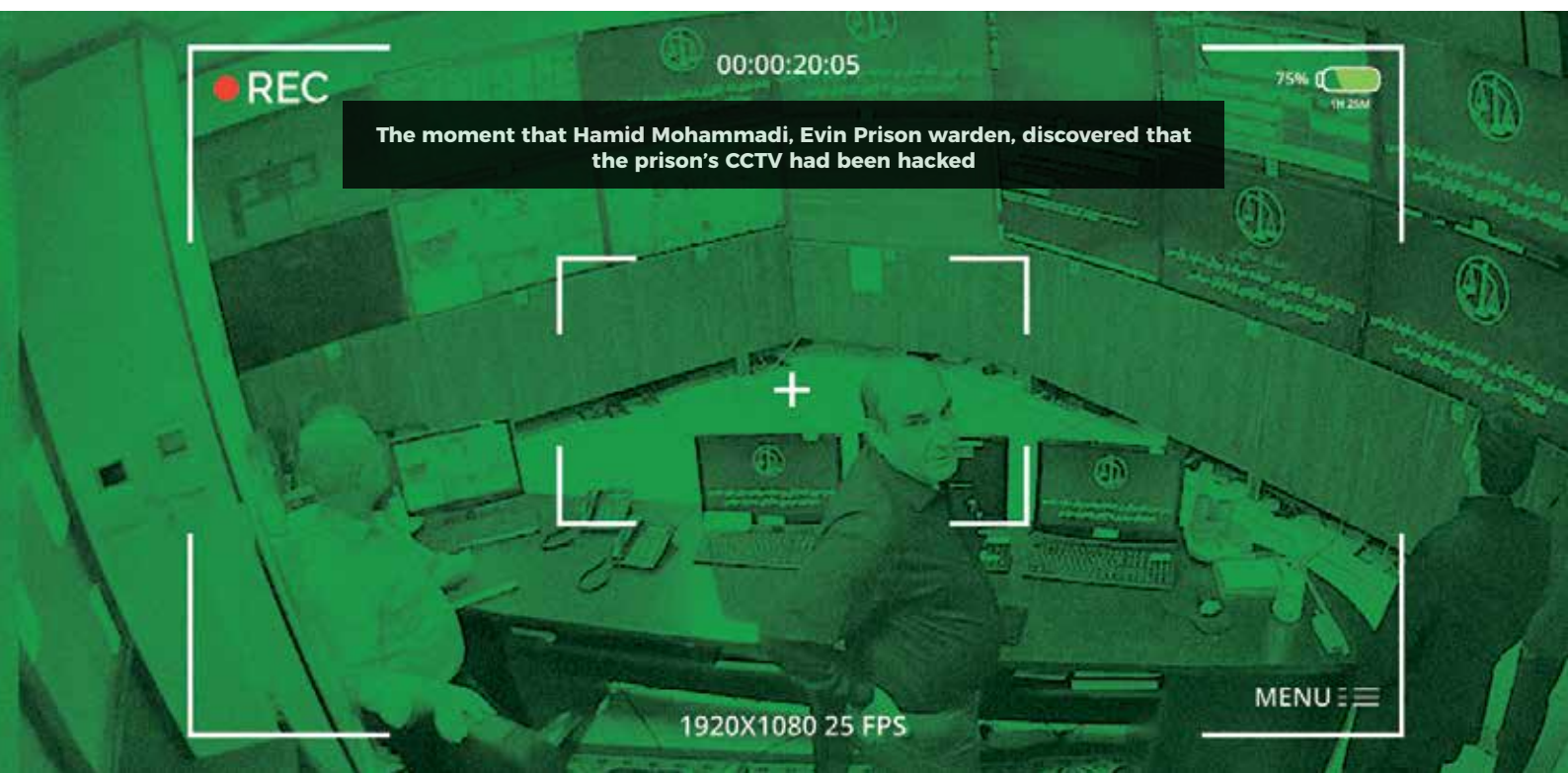
It is also worth noting that the majority of cases in the leaked files (58%) were not previously known to the report authors, highlighting the challenge of documenting cases that individuals or their families choose not to publicise.

Of the 327 individuals, the vast majority (around 90%) were converts to Christianity; 60% were male; eight were foreign nationals; three had dual nationality; and 22 were of Assyrian or Armenian descent.

The most common charge, referenced in 86% of cases, was “propaganda against the state [by promoting Christianity]”, followed by membership (69%) or leadership (58%) of “anti-security” groups (house-churches).

Other common charges included “insulting Islamic sanctities” (42%) and “gathering and collusion against national security” (30%), while 34 individuals were charged with “disturbing public opinion”; 30 with “disrupting peace and order”; 28 with “insulting the Supreme Leader”; 26 with possession of satellite receivers; and 25 with “apostasy”.

Two individuals were accused of “spying”, and in another case the managers of three online shops which sold Christian books were charged with “selling deviant evangelistic materials” and “hurting public modesty and morals through the display, promotion and sale of evangelistic books and items”.



The moment that Hamid Mohammadi, Evin Prison warden, discovered that the prison's CCTV had been hacked

Uncommon Charges in Tehran Judiciary Files



Can the information be trusted?

Edaalate Ali first gained global attention in August 2021, when it **released** footage from security cameras inside Evin Prison exposing the abuse and torture of inmates. The footage included disturbing scenes of prisoners being beaten by guards and incidents where some prisoners attempted suicide. Several imprisoned Christian converts were identifiable in the videos (screenshot below).





Mohammad Mehdi Haj-Mohammadi, the Head of Iran’s Prisons Organisation, issued an apology for the mistreatment of prisoners shown in the footage, thereby implicitly confirming its validity. However, the judiciary files leaked in 2024 met with a different response. Although state media claimed the files were “distorted, manipulated, and outdated”, many individuals whose cases were included have verified the accuracy of the information, including several Christians whose cases had already been documented by the reporting organisations.

The documents also align with the accounts of victims over the past 45 years, revealing the opaque inner workings of the Islamic Republic, including the judiciary’s longstanding use of legal prosecution as a mechanism to suppress FoRB.

The documents cover a wide range of judicial proceedings – from criminal cases involving ordinary citizens, to case files of political or religious prisoners of conscience – which shed light on the darkest corners of the Islamic Republic’s judicial system, offering researchers, experts and members of the public insights into the mindset, decision-making processes, and operational procedures of Iran’s security and judicial apparatus.

Leaked judiciary files in 2024 reveal the systematic use of legal prosecution to suppress religious freedom, uncovering the stark realities of Iran’s opaque judicial system.

Ten indicators of THE SYSTEMATIC REPRESSION OF CHRISTIANS

1

Vilification of Christians as members of a ‘sect’ and ‘security threat’

The leaked communications from Iranian security and judicial officials reveal efforts to distinguish between Christians who are considered “aligned” with the Islamic Republic and those who are viewed as “unaligned” or oppositional. Christians deemed “aligned” are formally recognised, while those involved in any form of evangelism are seen as a “security threat”.

For instance, Mohammad Nasirpour, the Deputy Prosecutor of Tehran and head of the 33rd District Prosecutor’s Office, argued the following in an indictment against four Iranian Christians on 18 June 2022:

“Christianity, as one of the divine religions, has the largest population among religions, comprising three main branches: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, with followers in Iran primarily of Armenian and Assyrian ethnicity. In the realm of threat assessment, Armenian and Assyrian Christians in the Catholic and Orthodox denominations are considered aligned with the Islamic Revolution and even seen as contributing to the advancement of its objectives. However, Armenian and Assyrian Christians in the Protestant denomination, with their evangelical nature and mission to Christianise Iran, are perceived as a security threat to the Islamic Revolution, aimed at undermining the Islamic foundation of the Islamic Republic. It could be said that Persian-speaking evangelical movements are supported by fundamentalist evangelical Christians and Zionists.”



This classification reduces Persian-speaking Christians to a mere “movement”, rather than recognising them as a legitimate religious community. It also labels all Protestant Christians, particularly evangelicals, as a “security threat”, and excludes Protestant Armenians and Assyrians from the category of “aligned” Christians. The leaked files also show that at least one **Orthodox Christian** and four Catholic converts faced similar accusations.

Such language is frequently found in the leaked documents and reflects the dominant perspective of Iran's security and judicial institutions. The extensive polarisation between "authentic Christians" and "deviant sects" reflects a threat assessment by the authorities based on unfounded assumptions regarding those who are obliged to worship in their homes following forced church closures. The primary reason for framing Christians as a threat may be rooted in a rising public interest in Christianity. Deputy Prosecutor Nasirpour's reasoning for convicting several detained Christians illustrates this point:

"These [Protestant and evangelical] churches firstly do not appear to have the endorsement of authentic Christians and are therefore deviant sects. Secondly, establishing house-churches contradicts the practices of authentic Christians. Thirdly, the ultimate goal of forming house-churches is to convert Muslims to Christianity and mislead individuals... Since the goal of these sects in establishing house-churches and evangelical activities within the Islamic Republic is to convert Muslims to Zionist evangelical Christianity under the influence of international Zionist intelligence services, such activities aimed at converting the population from Islam to Christianity would leave no trace of the Islamic Republic. Therefore, forming house-churches for proselytising purposes is perceived as forming an association to disrupt national security."

Such unfounded theorising, and the division of Christian denominations into "good" and "bad", "aligned" and "unaligned", "authentic" and "deviant", has resulted in disastrous outcomes for many Christians, and judicial authorities sometimes exploit their influence over official churches and "aligned" religious or political leaders to justify their rulings against converts.



~ **Nazila Ghanea**

UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB

Effectively, we should say that Christian converts, and Christians that have Persian as their language and are not ethnically distinct, are [both] not recognised. That's what we see [in] practice.

In 2017, Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani and three other converts were each **sentenced** to 10 years in prison for "forming house-churches" and "promoting Zionist Christianity". Hassan Babaei, head of the 54th Court of Appeal in Tehran, viewed their house-church activities as evidence of "the activity of a new proselytising Christian sect that promotes house-churches to disrupt national security and undermine the public's [Islamic] religious beliefs". He added that "recognised religions in the country, including Christianity, Assyrian [churches]... and bishops of churches operating in Iran do not endorse this sect and do not recognise it".

Babaei referred to two letters, allegedly written in 2017 by official church leaders, describing house-church members as a "scattered, Westernised, and deviant group". Consequently, he ruled that these converts did not qualify as members of a "religious minority" under Article 13 of the Iranian Constitution, stating that "under the disguise of Christianity, they form a deviant group and congregation that operates against national security".

These actions clearly violate Articles 3, 13, 14, 23 and 26 of the Iranian Constitution, which stipulate non-discrimination and equal opportunities in both material and spiritual aspects, allowing Christians to freely practise their religious rituals, and respecting their rights – particularly their rights to peaceful assembly and association.

2

Criminalisation of ‘promoting Christianity’

In the vast majority of Christian cases in the leaked files, any form of faith-based activity aimed at promoting Christian beliefs has been criminalised under labels such as “propaganda against the Islamic Republic” or “subversive promotional activities in the form of evangelical Christianity in favour of enemies”.



For example, in a case involving the Assyrian leader of the Shahrara Church in Tehran, Rev Victor Bet-Tamraz, one of the charges against him was “spreading falsehoods by disseminating evangelical Christian teachings” and “spreading lies to disturb public opinion”. Following his sentencing to **10 years in prison**, Rev Bet-Tamraz left Iran with his wife, Shamiram Issavi, who had been sentenced to **five years in prison**.

In another case, an investigator characterised the faith-based activities of a Christian convert as “creating grounds for ideological corruption among the public”. With the addition of the two new amendments to the IPC in 2021, particularly Article 500 bis, stricter penalties were introduced for anyone who engages in “propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam”.

However, Article 18 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for “everyone”, including the “freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching”.

Consequently, charging Christians with “promoting Christianity”, as occurred in 280 of the 327 cases in the leaked files, contravenes the Islamic Republic’s international obligations, which, according to Article 9 of Iran’s Civil Code, are considered binding law.

3

Inquisition into beliefs and forced recantation

According to Article 23 of Iran’s Constitution, “investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden, and no-one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief”. However, the leaked documents show clear violations of this principle.

One example is found in the arrest warrant issued for a Christian convert in February 2023, which states:

“In questioning the defendant, H. Abbasi, it should be clarified: (a) what religion and sect the defendant adhered to; (b) the methods through which they were drawn to evangelical Christianity; (c) the means they have used to attract others to Christianity; (d) the locations where they have conducted house-church gatherings and engaged in Christian proselytising and educational activities.”

The defendant's defence statement... reveals the depth of his deviation from the true religion of Islam. Reform and repentance are unachievable as he remains defiant and persists in his stance. His guilt is clear.

Separately, following their detention and temporary release, a Christian couple with two children and infirm parents were recorded to have been forced to “express remorse and regret, make confessions on camera, attend classes on Islamic jurisprudence and the fundamentals of the Islamic faith, and cease contact with their fellow believers”. Their letter of remorse, which is included in the leaked files, stated:

“From the date listed in the case file to the present, and at any other time, we have had no interaction with any of those individuals [other Christians] and will not. During this period, we cooperated fully with judicial and intelligence authorities, attended Islamic jurisprudence classes, and appeared before the intelligence agents on camera to express regret and repentance. I humbly implore you, honourable authority, given our two children and sick parents, to grant us pardon and forgiveness.”

Among the 25 examples in the leaked files of a Christian convert being charged with “apostasy”, Judge Mashallah Ahmadzadeh of Branch 26 of Tehran’s Revolutionary Court convicted one individual who had converted over 13 years earlier and was a member of a recognised church. It was further noted by the judge that the church the convert attended had been shut down by Tehran’s Security Prosecutor in 2009 because “the majority of participants and active members were Muslim converts to Christianity”, and that as a result of the church’s closure, the convert had participated in house-church activities.

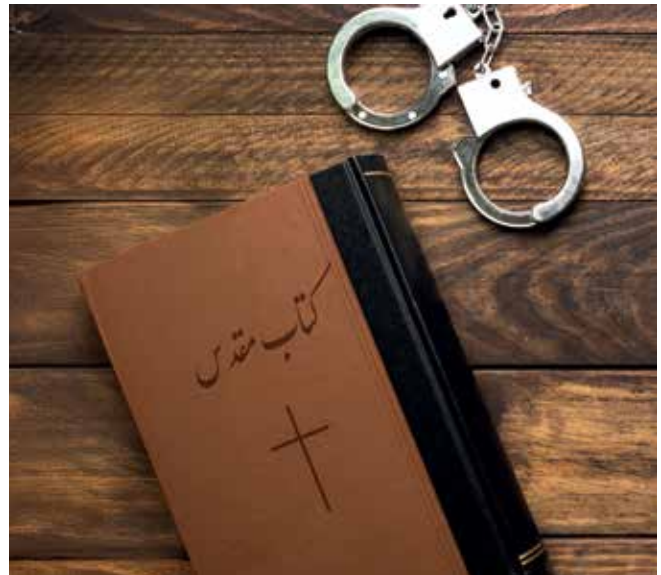
It appears that the defendant’s resistance to pressure to renounce his faith significantly influenced Ahmadzadeh’s decision to impose a 10-year prison sentence. The judge emphasised: “The defendant’s defence statement, as reflected in the court session, reveals the depth of his deviation from the true religion of Islam. Reform and repentance are unachievable as he remains defiant and persists in his stance. His guilt is clear and aligns with the indictment.”



4

The Bible as contraband and evidence of a crime

An Iranian branch of the Bible Society, which lawfully published and distributed Christian literature in Persian even before the 1979 revolution, was dissolved and banned by the Islamic Republic in February 1990. A year later, Iran's representative at the United Nations wrote to the UN's special rapporteur, saying "the Bible Society has been temporarily closed", pending investigation of "violations of the Islamic Republic's laws and regulations" – without specifying which – and adding that "when the situation of the accused becomes clear, the Society could continue its activities". Yet despite the passage of years, the Bible Society remains closed, and the Bible and other Christian



books are frequently treated as illegal contraband and evidence of a crime. In 2023, more than one-third of individuals arrested for Christian activities faced charges related to distributing Bibles, with sentences of up to 10 years and heavy fines, as noted in our [2024 annual report](#).

The leaked files reveal that in 2021, complaints from Tehran's Culture and Media Prosecutor Office and the Head of Intelligence led to charges against the managers of three online marketplaces – Sheypoor, Divar, and Digikala – for "offending public morals" through the "promotion and sale of Evangelical books and items". After committing to "remove such advertisements from their sites", the platforms ultimately avoided punishment.

In other instances, Bibles and other confiscated Christian texts were labelled "contraband items" or "misleading heretical literature". The charge against one South Korean Christian was "possession of heretical books and proselytising". Another individual, identified as A. Tahoori, faced charges of "insulting Islam and its sanctities through the sale of Christian and Evangelical literature in his bookstore".

In another case, Amin Naseri, Deputy Prosecutor General of Tehran, accused Rev Sargez Benyamin, the official overseer of Presbyterian churches, of "trafficking Evangelical contraband and storing and distributing such items", after raiding the church's office and library, and seizing all Bibles and Christian texts.



Confiscated Bibles and other Christian material is portrayed as evidence of a crime by a "religiously deviant network" in this article by an IRGC-backed news agency.

5

From hate speech to judicial violence

Indictments and judgments from Revolutionary Courts frequently used terms such as “the Zionist evangelical Christian sect”, portraying Persian-speaking Christians and Protestant Christianity as “deviant sects” or even “satanic cults”, and thereby manufacturing illegality by deliberately creating a false narrative to render lawful acts unlawful.

In another ruling by Judge Babaei, the accusation against a Christian convert **sentenced** to 10 years in prison was framed as “acting against national security by forming house-churches and promoting Zionist Christianity, satanic cults, etc.”

“The motive of the offender is not only to undermine national security, religion, and the beliefs of the people, but also to create hostility between the religions of Islam, Christianity, Assyrians, etc., causing harm, conflict ... and religious deviation,” Babaei wrote.

The leaked documents reveal a coordinated effort by security and judicial authorities to distinguish between recognised Christians and those whom the government disapproves of – particularly those who actively promote Christianity.

The indictment against Christian convert A. Yazdani referenced a famous 2010 piece of hate speech by Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, in which he warned that Iran’s enemies were trying to *“destabilise the foundations of [our] people’s faith, especially the youth, by spreading immorality, fake mysticism, Baha’ism, and networks of house-churches. These are the actions that today are being carried out with careful planning and foresight by the enemies of Islam...”*



The judge also referenced warnings from other religious leaders as justification for increasing the crackdown on Christian activities, noting: “Senior clerics also emphasise the Islamic government’s duty to combat instances of moral and ideological deviation. For instance, Ayatollah Vahid Khorasani stated: ‘Today, Wahhabism, Baha’ism, and Christianity are running amok in this country... House-churches are running amok. Baha’ism has taken hold, even owning pharmacies in our country. It is the government’s duty to confront these threats...’ Similarly, Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi and Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani have expressed concern about evangelical proselytism and house-church activities, and warned the authorities.”

Echoing these anti-Christian sentiments, Deputy Prosecutor Nasirpour wrote the following to the head of the Tehran Islamic Revolutionary Court: “The evangelical Christian sect, serving the interests of global imperialism, targets the faith of Muslim citizens, destabilising families and spreading immorality by attempting to convert people from Shi’a beliefs and promoting libertinism; thereby working towards the soft overthrow of the Islamic Republic.”

6

Criminal charges for peaceful Christian activities and religious practices

Despite the frequent use of the term “Zionist Evangelical Christianity” and attempts from judicial and security bodies to connect the peaceful activities of Persian-speaking Christians to Western countries or Israel, only two individuals were officially charged with “espionage” in the leaked files, while it appears there was no evidence to substantiate the charge in either case, as both were dismissed.

The authorities seek to justify the violation of FoRB by labelling lawful and legitimate Christian activities as security threats. However, Article 9 of the Constitution states that “in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the freedom, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of the country are inseparable from one another, and their preservation is the duty of the government and all individual citizens. Similarly, no authority has the right to abrogate legitimate freedoms, not even by enacting laws and regulations for that purpose, under the pretext of preserving the independence and territorial integrity of the country”.

In one notable case, a church leader and official representative of a Christian organisation recognised by the Ministry of Interior both before and after the 1979 revolution was charged with “acting against national security by managing the illegal association of the Iranian Evangelical Council”.



Another church leader was accused of “foreign travel and collaboration with missionary organisations and intelligence services”, for having attended international Christian conferences alongside church leaders from various countries.

In his verdict against a third church leader, a judge concluded that travel to particular countries constituted a criminal offence, claiming that the pastor had “made multiple trips abroad to countries such as the United States, Armenia, Turkey, Germany, the Netherlands, Cyprus, India, Sweden, and France, all known as centres directing missionary activities”. The judge offered no evidence to substantiate his conclusion.

Such extrajudicial restrictions imposed on leaders and members of Persian-speaking churches contravene Article 26 of the Constitution, which grants recognised religious minorities the freedom to form associations within the law's limits. The law does not impose any ethnic or linguistic restrictions on these minorities; therefore, Christians from any linguistic or ethnic background ought to be protected under this provision.

The leaked files reveal that punishments such as imprisonment, fines, and even flogging have been imposed for receiving or providing Christian charitable aid, and participating in the religious rite of Holy Communion.

In a case involving a family of Christian converts, Deputy Prosecutor Nasirpour described what he perceived as being signs of “membership” and “proselytising for the Zionist Evangelical Christian splinter group”, saying: “The accused, K. Yazdani, was drawn to the sect by her mother and attended the [Assemblies of God] Church. Pastor Soorik helped her to convert. Later on, the accused chose Natalie as her pastor. Initially, she studied the [Alpha Course] and subsequently completed a course on the Bible. Eventually, she joined [St] Paul’s Church [in Tehran], met [church member] Mahin, and contributed tithes.”

Regular Bible study, making financial donations, charitable offerings, or paying tithes to support church activities are standard practices for Christians worldwide. However, such activities have been criminalised by Iran’s Revolutionary Courts. These activities are also common in churches in Iran that exclusively serve Armenian and Assyrian-speaking members, and which face no restrictions.

The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, responsible for collecting public donations through charity boxes since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, announced in 2024 that “total donations in 2023 amounted to about 209.26 trillion tomans [over \$4 billion], showing a 26% increase from 2022”. Mohammad Dehruyeh, Deputy for Public Participation of the Foundation in Tehran, stated that 20 billion tomans [over \$300,000] of public donations were collected within a month and sent to Lebanon. However, if leaders of unrecognised Christian churches receive donations or aid for charitable work, they face accusations of “obtaining funds through illegitimate means”.

CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES COMMONLY CONSIDERED AS CRIMES



In 2018, Judge Ahmadzadeh, in his verdict against Iranian-Assyrian Christian Shamiram Issavi, wrote:

“The accused has acted against national security by fulfilling the goals of missionary organisations, with the explanation that she is the wife of Victor Bet-Tamraz, pastor of the Shahrara Church. Her husband has a separate case and has also been convicted. The Shahrara Church was shut down in 2009, but they continued evangelising and missionary activities by establishing and leading a house-church. During a Christmas celebration [in 2014], where 17 converted Muslims were present in Victor’s home, they were **arrested**... The accused, as a church member, in the capacity of teacher and head of the counselling and theology department at various levels, engaged in criminal acts. During the ceremonies, she led the church choir and, at times, preached in the absence of the pastor... According to her own statements, after the church’s closure, worship and prayer meetings were moved to homes. She served in the church alongside her husband and for many years was a member and leader of the Sunday school of the Assemblies of God Church.”

Judge Ahmadzadeh sentenced Mrs Issavi to five years in prison for “membership of an illegal house-church” and another five years for “collusion to commit a crime against national security”.

Amin Afshar-Naderi was arrested at the same Christmas celebration, and **sentenced** by Judge Ahmadzadeh to 10 years in prison for “establishing and leading an illegal house-church”, and a further five years for “insulting the sacred” (blasphemy). His alleged crimes included playing Christian worship songs on his guitar. To justify the sentence, Judge Ahmadzadeh emphasised that “Naderi performed music as a musician in the house-church and played guitar for church hymns in various house-churches, even in some provinces, as it is one of the most appealing forms of music for misleading Muslim youth”.

Meanwhile, the alleged crimes of another Christian convert arrested at the same gathering and also sentenced to 10 years in prison, **Kavian Fallah-Mohammadi**, were stated by Ahmadzadeh to have included “attending Christmas celebrations at Victor’s home multiple times and being arrested during hymn singing at a Christmas gathering on 26 December 2014 at Victor’s house. He copied Christian movies and hymns and distributed them among his peers and printed new Christian hymns”.

In a 2018 verdict, playing Christian worship songs on a guitar was cited as ‘misleading Muslim youth’ and resulted in a 15-year prison sentence for Amin Afshar-Naderi.

In 2017, Judge Ahmadzadeh sentenced Yousef Nadarkhani and three other Christian converts from Rasht to 10 years in prison and two years in exile for “acting against national security by propagating house-churches and promoting ‘Zionist’ Christianity”. A year earlier, three of the defendants had been sentenced to 80 lashes in a Rasht court for consuming wine during Communion, deeming it a criminal offence. Judge Mohammad Mehrani of Branch 105 stated in that ruling:

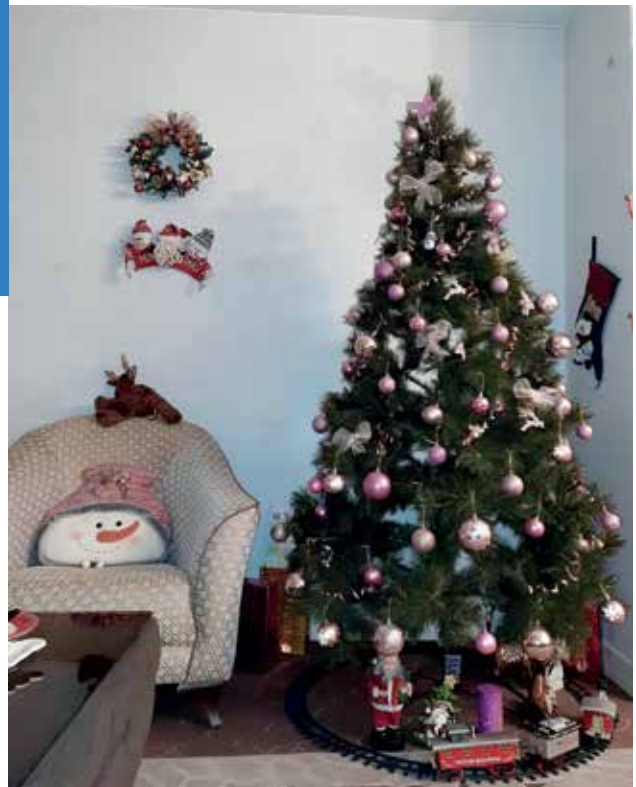


~ **Elaheh Kiani**
Christian Convert

Agents from the Ministry of Intelligence “searched everywhere, confiscating Bibles, a children’s Bible, Christian books... a family photo album, a painting of the Last Supper, a gold-framed picture of Jesus Christ, our Christmas tree and its decorations. They filled 12 bin bags in all.”

“The defendants were arrested and confessed to drinking wine... The defendants and their attorneys argued that they consumed a sip of wine as part of a Christian religious ceremony, asserting that their action was not a crime... However, the court concluded that the defendants are Muslims and Shi’a, merely using Christianity as a guise for atheistic beliefs and participating in subversive propaganda.”

It is illegal for Muslims to drink alcohol in Iran, but there are exemptions for recognised religious minorities, including Christians. Article 13 of the Constitution states that members of the three recognised religious minorities are “free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies”, including drinking wine for Communion. However, converts are not recognised as Christians; hence the above judgment.



7

Additional judicial sentencing

Some of the leaked files contain surprising punishments, such as obliging individuals to transcribe books that promote the ideology of the regime.

In 2023, Christian converts [Sara Ahmadi and her husband Homayoun Zhavah](#), who has advanced Parkinson’s disease, were given the following additional sentences alongside their respective eight and two-year prison sentences:

1. A two-year ban on leaving the country
2. A two-year prohibition on membership of any political or social group or organisation.
3. Six months of community service at a facility for individuals with mental disabilities, requiring four hours of service each day.

In the same year, another Christian couple, Mohammad and Zhila B, were ordered to adhere to the following requirements when their custodial sentences were converted into a period of supervised probation, owing to their child's ill health:

1. Avoid contact or socialisation except for work or family-related matters.
2. Attend a monthly four-hour life skills course based on the Islamic lifestyle, supervised by the Cultural and Social Council on Women and Family Affairs of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, and afterwards complete a 90-page research report that requires certification from the council.
3. Obtain judicial authorisation for any travel abroad during the probation period.

Human rights lawyer Saeid Dehghan told the report authors that the use of such additional punishments against religious prisoners of conscience violate Articles 7 and 10 of the ICCPR, as they are “cruel, inhuman, and degrading” and cause “disrespect for the inherent dignity of the human person”.



~ **Saeid Dehghan**

Iranian human rights lawyer-Director of Parsilaw

The purpose of these [additional] punishments is essentially to prevent and confront dangerous criminals. This is while, based on the undisputed principles of freedom of expression and belief, those accused of ideological charges should not be prosecuted, tried, and punished in principle, let alone issued with complementary punishments that are essentially intended for dangerous criminals.



8

Forced migration and internal exile

In recent years, an increasing number of Christian converts arrested due to their religious activities in house-churches have faced not only imprisonment but also forced residence in remote areas far from their homes.

For example, each of the following individuals were sentenced to two years of forced residence far from their homes following the completion of their prison terms: Ebrahim Firouzi was sent to Sarbaz, Yousef Nadarkhani to Nik Shahr, Zaman Fadaei to Nehbandan, and Mohammadreza Omid to Borazjan.

In addition, a leaked letter regarding the case of political activist and Nobel laureate Narges Mohammadi provides a clear example of how security and judicial institutions try to force activists or dissidents to leave the country when they are deemed too great a threat. In a highly confidential letter to the Deputy Prosecutor and Head of the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office, the Director General of Legal and Judicial Affairs of the Ministry of Intelligence accuses Ms Mohammadi of "playing the victim" and "inciting public emotion", claiming that her travel ban has resulted in "media manipulation". The letter recommends lifting her travel ban to "manage information control, prioritise the benefits of her departure over any disadvantages, prevent her from self-destructive actions, harm her reputation among opponents, and increase the distance between her and [US-based activist] Masih Alinejad".

This approach is consistent with the testimonies of victims interviewed by the reporting organisations in recent years, including Christian convert Alireza Mohammadpour, who **testified** in 2021 that while on bail, he and two Christian co-defendants were called and threatened:

“Either leave Iran, or stay in Iran and you’ll have to go to prison for about three to five years.”

It has become increasingly common for judges to impose additional punishments on top of prison sentences, such as fines, restrictions on employment, travel bans, or internal exile.

9

Judicial subordination to intelligence agencies

The leaked documents further reveal the influence of security and intelligence agencies over the judiciary, significantly undermining any claims of independence and impartiality.

One of the documents relates to an 80-year-old Christian named **Alexander B**, who was sentenced in 2022, based on fabricated



charges, to five years in prison and two years of forced residence in Kahnuj, located in southern Iran. His lawyers submitted an 11,000-word appeal, outlining numerous legal violations, including case manipulation by the Ministry of Intelligence interrogator:

“Contrary to what is stated in the case file, our client is a native Iranian who holds dual American citizenship. He is a noble, peaceful, and devout individual who stays away from political issues and has a deep affection for Iran, which he considers his only homeland and birthplace. He respects and adheres to the laws and regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”



The lawyers emphasised that the interrogator was a trained officer of the Ministry of Intelligence, who had made every effort to implicate the accused, regardless of whether or not the charges applied, saying:

“From an organisational perspective, building a substantial case file, linking charges to the accused, and ultimately securing a conviction leads to commendation from superiors and a positive record in the interrogator’s personal file.”

Mr B’s lawyers provided detailed explanations regarding the persistent legal violations committed by the interrogator and the lack of oversight by higher judicial authorities. In their conclusion, they voiced their objection to the “unchecked authority” and unlimited powers granted to the interrogator in deciding the defendant’s fate:

“Article 32 of the Code of Criminal Procedure is a crucial point in the investigation process. Judiciary officers, as implied by their title, are trained individuals who operate under the supervision of the prosecutor or other judicial authorities. Unfortunately, this supervision, which is both the right and duty of judicial officials, was not exercised in this case... Not a single directive or caution from the responsible judicial authority is present in the case file. According to Article 28 of the Criminal Procedure Code, judiciary officers are agents who, under the prosecutor’s oversight and guidance, are tasked with investigating crimes according to the law, yet no directive or practical oversight is found in this file, as per Articles 90 and 92 of the Criminal Procedure Code... Besides his legal duty to be impartial and uphold the law, the interrogator is also expected to function as a trusted representative of the prosecutor’s office and, in fact, even for the accused. However, regrettably, he has brazenly attributed unsubstantiated accusations and statements to our client within the case summary and procedural report – documents that judicial authorities should prepare – yet no evidence supporting these claims can be found in the referenced pages. As the case officer who operates under judicial oversight, the interrogator has explicitly interfered in the legal process and imposed decisions for the judicial authorities. This is evident in the issued ruling, which includes the maximum sentence and forced exile for our client. These blatant interferences and false statements against our client, along with using terms such as ‘evangelist’, ‘rebellious’, and other accusations that our client never did or spoke, all reveal the interrogator’s influence and direction over the case. This clear interference in the case violates the procedural laws and undermines a just legal process, placing an innocent person under criminal suspicion.”

10

Fabrication of cases for hostage-taking purposes

The lawyers reviewed Mr B's "five-volume, over 1,000-page file" and accused the intelligence officer of fabricating the case so that their client could be exchanged for Iranian detainees in the US. He had effectively been "taken hostage" for use in a prisoner exchange.

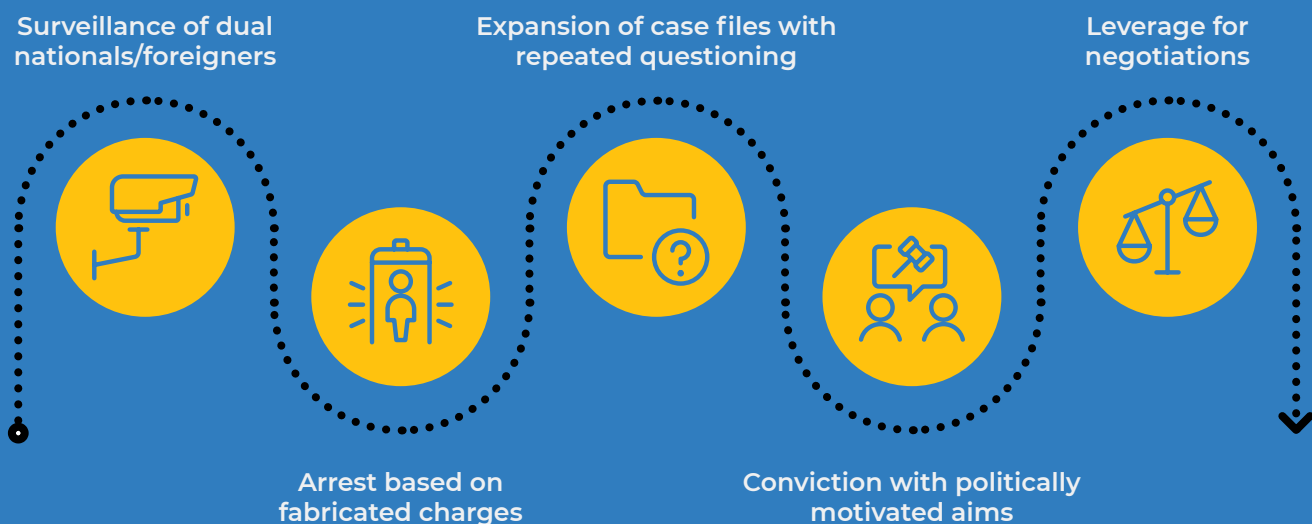
They concluded that the interrogator had transformed a "simple, friendly gathering" that had included Christian prayer into a set of criminal charges:

"By adding labels such as 'pastor', 'priest', 'evangelist', 'Zionist', and 'soft warfare', the interrogator has attempted to steer the case towards assigning multiple criminal charges to the client. The interrogator aimed to create a substantial accusation by repeating questions and adding volumes to the case file, ultimately securing a conviction with the apparent goal of exchanging Alexander for Iranian detainees in the US. What greater injustice exists than to strip away an innocent person's right to freedom due to the endless, unfounded paperwork of a politically motivated case? This reality is evident across all parts of the case file...

"The repeated questioning and explanations by the interrogator demonstrate that the true intent was only to expand the case file's volumes, to inflate the accusations and to present the accused as valuable enough to facilitate a prisoner exchange with the United States on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The Iranian government has frequently used dual nationals and foreigners as leverage to extract concessions from Western nations. Mr B's case exemplifies how intelligence officers aim to construct cases to portray defendants as spies or foreign agents for political purposes.

FABRICATION OF CASES FOR HOSTAGE-TAKING



Recommendations



To the government of Iran:

- Ensure full enjoyment of the right to FoRB for every citizen, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic background, including converts from other religions, thereby amending Article 13 of the constitution in line with Article 18 of the ICCPR.
- Release immediately and unconditionally Christians and other religious or belief minorities detained on charges related to their faith or religious activities.
- Drop all charges against Christians related to church activities **deemed lawful** by the Iranian Supreme Court.
- End the criminalisation of house-church organisation and membership, and allow registration of official places of worship for Christians of ethnic and language groups other than the Armenian and Assyrian communities, permitting Christians of all linguistic and ethnic backgrounds to worship freely and collectively.
- Return places of worship and other properties and material confiscated from Christians and other religious or belief minorities on “national security” charges.
- Reopen places of worship closed on public health grounds during the Covid-19 pandemic and churches that were forcibly closed for welcoming converts and conducting services in the Persian language.
- Clarify where Persian-speaking Christians may worship freely in their mother tongue, without fear of arrest and prosecution.
- Cease using provisions such as Articles 498, 499, 500 and 513 of the IPC and Article 167 of the Iranian constitution to unjustly detain minority-faith or belief adherents.



- Guarantee access to legal counsel for all individuals charged with national security-related crimes, along with the right to select a lawyer of their choice, thereby repealing the Note to Article 48 of the Criminal Procedures Regulations.

- Grant unhindered access to the country for the UN Special Rapporteurs on FoRB and on the situation of human rights in Iran to investigate the nation's compliance with international human rights law.

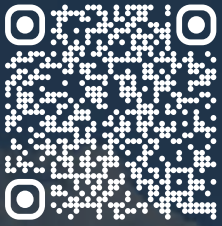
To the International Community:

- Hold Iran accountable for failures to fulfil its obligations under international law, including to promote, protect and fulfil FoRB for all its citizens, highlighting human-rights infractions during bilateral and multilateral dialogues.

- Countries hosting Iranian Christians who have claimed asylum are encouraged to assess their cases with due diligence, recognising their well-founded fear of experiencing persecution if returned, given the ongoing harassment and severe mistreatment of individuals identified as engaging in Christian activity.

To the United Nations and its Special Rapporteurs:

- Include the situation of Christians (and particularly Christian converts) in all reporting on human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.



Scan this QR code with your phone to access the digital version of the report, which includes extra links to sources.



Anglican Church of St Simon the Zealot in Shiraz, which has remained closed to its small group of highly restricted worshippers since 2020.



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