

Market Drayton Churches Together: Prayer for Persecuted Christians - 17 Apr. 2019

Iran

19 Mar: Seven converts in Rasht released on bail - Middle East Concern

www.mecconcern.org/2019/03/19/iran-seven-converts-in-rasht-released-on-bail
Iranian Christians are thankful that seven members of the "Church of Iran" who were recently arrested have been allowed release on bail.

Hossein Kadivar was the first to be released on Saturday 16 March. On Sunday and Monday, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Behnam Akhlaghi, Kamal Naamanian, Mohammed Vafada and Khalil Dehkanpour were also released, reportedly after submitting bail of 150 million Toman (US\$12,000 / £9,200) each. Mehdi Khatibi is expected to be released on bail today. The charges against them are not known. They expect to be summoned to court, but there is no indication when this might happen.

Khalil Dehkanpour and Hossein Kadivar were arrested at the end of January and detained in Lakan Prison. Their pastor, Abdolreza (Matthias) Haghnejad was arrested at his home on 10 February and Kamal Naamanian, Mohammed Vafada and Shahrooz Eslamdous were arrested on 15 February. Three more church members, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Mehdi Khatibi and Behnam Akhlaghi were arrested on 23 February.

Matthias Haghnejad and Shahrooz Eslamdous remain detained. Matthias is charged with action against national security and promoting Zionist Christianity.

24 Feb: House church and evangelical networks are a great threat to Iranian youth! - Mohabbat News

mohabbatnews.com/en/?p=4163

International Christian Concern reported about Iranian cleric Hujjat al-Islam Naser Rafiei who delivered a speech in Qom (home to the largest Islamic seminary in Iran) which warned against the spread of Christianity throughout the country. He specifically named house churches and evangelical networks as an attraction for Iranian youth whose faith in Islam is diminishing.

This growth in the Iranian church has led the regime to increasingly persecute Christians on the basis that they are seeking to overthrow and occupy Islamic land. The regime, which is heavily influenced by Iran's clerical class, is feeling pressured because of the widespread discontent of the population. Many Iranians are tired of the strict Islamic moralism imposed upon them by the government. The youth in particular are curious about alternatives, thus opening the door for the spread of the Gospel message.

The Iranian regime does not recognize the religious status of Muslims who convert to Christianity. They are often harassed, detained, imprisoned, and interrogated by the authorities.

Christians who can prove their family was Christian before the 1979 Revolution are freer to practice their faith, but still face heavy restrictions. They cannot share their faith and may only worship in designated spaces in a language other than Farsi (Iran's official language). Any perceived breach of these restrictions can also lead to imprisonment.

7 Feb: Ongoing Arrests of Christians - The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

www.vomcanada.com/ir-2019-02-07.htm

Iranian Christians are requesting prayer for a series of recent arrests. Shortly before Christmas, five Iranian women were

taken into custody, including 65-year-old Ruhsari Kamberi. Following her arrest, Ruhsari faced ten days of intensive interrogation. Authorities had also searched the senior woman's home, where they confiscated her phone, Bibles and Christian materials. After eventually being released on bail, Ruhsari was brought before the prosecutor in mid-January to answer charges of "acting against national security." During the court hearing, she was ordered to meet with an Islamic religious leader to be "instructed" and offered the opportunity to return to Islam.

On January 23rd, a young Christian man was arrested following a violent raid on his home in Isfahan. Witnesses report that Sina Moloudian was dragged out of his parents' home with bruises on his face. A few hours later, prison officials permitted Sina to phone his parents and let them know he was being held at the Dastgerd Prison. From there, he would be taken to court where the charges against him were to be announced.

Two days later, Ismaeil Maghrebinejad, 64, was also taken into custody. Ismaeil, a Christian for nearly 40 years, has been regularly harassed by security forces the entire time. After the recent arrest at his home in Shiraz, concerned members of his family attempted to contact the authorities to find out where he had been taken but were denied any knowledge of him. Although Ismaeil has since been allowed to contact his family, he did not know the location of his imprisonment nor the charges he is facing.

A concerted effort of governmental authorities to arrest and harass Christians continues throughout Iran. Article 18 reported at least 114 arrests in ten different cities during the first week of December alone. While most of these arrested believers were released after a few hours, they had been forced to write down details of their faith-related activities and ordered to have no contact with other Christians.

6 Jan: Christian Sisters Arrested in Iran Released on Bail - Mohabbat News

mohabbatnews.com/en/?p=4152

Two Christian sisters, Shima and Shokoufeh Zanganeh were temporarily released on bail from Sepidar Prison in Ahvaz. They remain free until their trial.

Shima and Shokoufeh Zanganeh, two Christian converts arrested earlier for their Christian faith were temporarily released on a heavy bail of 500 million Tomans (approximately 100,000 USD).

Shokoufeh Zanganeh spent 24 days in prison and was released on bail on December 25, 2018. Her sister, Shima, spent six more days in prison and was released on December 31, 2018. They were both being held in Sepidar Prison in Ahvaz.

Both sisters are residents of Ahvaz and had been arrested on December 2, 2018 around 12:00 pm. They were charged with action against Iran's national security through evangelism.

Security authorities raided Zanganehs' residence and confiscated multiple Bibles, memory sticks with Christian material on them and other printed Christian material.

Reports of their arrest and interrogation state the two sisters were tortured as part of the interrogation sessions.

A large number of Christians have been arrested in Iran in the last few weeks. Additionally, Iranian government run media constantly reports on these arrests to terrorize the Iranian Christian community.

Dates of next meetings: Wednesdays 15 May, 19 June, 17 July & 21 August

8 Mar: Persecution Unapologetic Human Rights Abuser Takes Control of Iran's Judiciary - ICC

www.persecution.org/2019/03/08/unapologetic-human-rights-abuser-takes-control-irans-judiciary

International Christian Concern (ICC) has learned that on March 8, 2019, Ebrahim Raisi was sworn into office as the new Judiciary Chief of Iran's Islamic Republic. His long anticipated appointment comes with a five-year term, which is approved by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Raisi's career trajectory comes at the expense of a long line of serious human rights abuses that have provoked great alarm regarding his new position.

Raisi is a hardline Islamic religious cleric who studied at Qom Seminary and quickly rose through the ranks of Iran's judiciary. His name first rose to prominence in 1988, when Raisi served on Iran's notorious death commission which massacred thousands of political prisoners declared to be "apostates of Islam." He would later serve as a prosecutor, deputy chief justice, and attorney general. He would launch an unsuccessful bid for president in 2017, after which momentum began to build for his current appointment.

Raisi has remained unapologetic for his record of serious human rights abuses. In a 2018 speech, he highlighted his involvement in the 1988 mass killings and said it "was one of the proud achievements of the system." This is a reflection of the regime's position that the judiciary exists to safeguard Iran's Islamist ideology. It is for this reason that many of Iran's Christians are tried for political crimes and viewed as apostates.

"The human rights violation of religious minorities in Iran would most likely get worse under the leadership of Mr. Ebrahim Raisi as Iran's new judiciary chief," worries Mike Ansari from Heart4Iran, an Iranian Christian partnership platform.

His judiciary appointment comes at a time when the regime is under significant pressure from its citizenry, who are increasingly discontent with the government's hardline view of Islam. One Iranian woman shared with ICC, "I am a Muslim, but I don't like the way that the government is forcing us to do it."

This enforced Islamist pressure on Iran's citizens has caused an organic interest in Christianity, which the regime views as a national security threat. "As Christianity is growing fast in Iran, the top religious leaders are alarmed... Their strategy is to arrest a few, but publicize their arrest to put fear in the hearts of 1-3 million Christians and make them isolated, fearful, and prisoners in their homes," explained Dr. Hormoz Shariat of Iran Alive Ministries.

See also:

3 Apr: Persecution Iran's Terror Factory: Part 1 - ICC

www.persecution.org/2019/04/03/irans-terror-factory-part-1

4 Apr: Persecution Iran's Terror Factory: Part 2 - ICC

www.persecution.org/2019/04/04/irans-terror-factory-part-2

25 Feb: Iran at 40...what's changed? - Mohabbat News

mohabbatnews.com/en/?p=4159

In February 1979, a recently returned-from-exile Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini led an uprising that eventually ousted the Shah of Iran. Although he initially spoke about human rights and freedom of religion, the rise to power saw the Ayatollah in pursuit of an Islamist agenda and the imposition of Sharia law.

The early days of the new state also saw a group of Iranian students held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days, frayed global diplomatic ties, Saddam Hussein's invasion and a bloody eight-year war. As a result, today's Islamic Republic faces acute economic challenges as it struggles with a mix of domestic hardships and US sanctions. Increasingly isolationist rhetoric feels like a turning back of the clock, but Heart 4 Iran's Mike Ansari says, "During sanctions it is unlikely for Iran to close its doors. However Iran is closely monitoring its border-activities, identifying and dealing with threats as it sees necessary."

Crackdown on Christians

Still, the celebratory atmosphere of the milestone date (February 11) managed to temporarily obscure the darker realities.

Notably absent, the Christians. In the run up to the anniversary, religious rights watchdog groups noted what appears to be a government crackdown, as evidenced by hundreds of arrests. Ansari confirms it. "In an effort to demonstrate its power to force Iran's fast growing underground Church into submission, they have ramped up harassment and persecution of Farsi-speaking churches. Vast majority of Iranian people have lost their confidence in their leaders. Many have become disillusioned with Islam and as such turning to Christianity."

When asked why it seems there's been a focused shift against Christianity, he responded, "Since 2010 when Ayatollah Khamenei declared the spread of house churches a critical threat facing the Islamic regime, the crackdown on Christian activities became more pronounced which continues till today." A joint report released last month by Open Doors, Middle East Concern, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and Article18, further supported his assertions. In it, according to public records, authorities held 29 Christians in 2018 for terms of 6 months to 10 years (if formally sentenced at all). Of that group, eight saw release. The important thing to note is that many more detentions of Christians remain undocumented.

A national security threat

The strong government response to Christians begs the question: 'what is it about them that creates such a zealous reaction?' Ansari explains, "The evangelicals are considered national-security threat inside Iran. It appears the end game is to eliminate the threat for the sake of their longevity." Yet, as he mentioned earlier, there's disillusionment with the government and despair for the future. Hope has an irresistible pull. "The Church in Iran has endured centuries of threat and persecution. Yet it has never been as strong as it is now. It is true that there are more arrests than before, but never before have we seen so many Iranians convert to Christianity."

Crisis of faith

Ansari leads a movement called Heart 4 Iran, whose aim it is reach more Iranians with the Gospel message of Christ's love. Among the ministries involved with the movement is Mohabbat TV, a Farsi Christian television channel, of which Ansari is director. When asked if the pressure scares people away from asking spiritual questions, he responded, "The pressure is meant to intimidate the public but in 2018 our ministry handled several hundred contacts with curious seekers inside Iran every day! Despite the pressure, people are still looking for alternatives." Iran is 40 years into a theocracy called the Islamic Republic of Iran, but it seems there is a growing crisis of faith. To that end, "We ask the believers to pray for Iranian government officials to end the harassment of Christian converts. Pray for God to give strength and perseverance to persecuted Christians across Iran. And pray for basic human rights in Iran to be observed."

A PDF version of these notes will be available for download from the P4PC, Recent Reports page of the website a.s.a.p.

The links in it can be clicked on to open any of the pages listed in these notes.

Other Countries

EGYPT

16 Apr: Persecution Coptic Christians Without Church for Easter Following Mob Attack - ICC

www.persecution.org/2019/04/16/coptic-christians-without-church-easter-following-mob-attack

International Christian Concern (ICC) has learned that on April 12, 2019, a mob of extremists attacked the Church of Society of Anba Karassof in Khalaf Allah Jaber village, located in Egypt's Sohag Governorate. As a result, the church was damaged, three people were injured, Christian children attending Sunday School were traumatized, and the church was closed to avoid further violence.

KAZAKHSTAN

4 Mar: One city, two raids, three fines - Forum 18

www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2458

Police in Taraz – including anti-terrorism officers – raided two Baptist worship meetings on successive Sundays in February. Police fined three Baptists and issued two warnings. Despite claiming "our laws don't ban praying", state religious affairs official Balgabek Myrzayev defended punishing people meeting for worship without state permission. A government minister has claimed that legal changes restricting freedom of religion and belief may be brought back in 2020.

22 Mar: More raids on worship, fines - Forum 18

forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2464

Police raided a third Baptist church in Taraz, summarily fining two more worshippers. Only one of five now fined did not appeal. "We don't pay fines voluntarily, so they'll take the money from his pension," a Baptist noted. Police raided a Hare Krishna meeting in Atyrau. Officials later withdrew the prosecution.

CHINA

16 Apr: Over 350 Religious Sites Shuttered in One City - Bitter Winter

bitterwinter.org/over-350-religious-sites-shuttered-in-one-city

According to information received by Bitter Winter, since last year, crosses in at least 281 Protestant congregation sites in the city have been torn down, including some that belong to the government-approved Three-Self Church. Additionally, 81 Protestant congregation sites have been shut down, 16 of which were demolished.

16 Apr: Christmas 2018 Witnessed More Destroyed Churches in Henan - Bitter Winter

bitterwinter.org/christmas-2018-witnessed-more-destroyed-churches-in-henan

Two more state-approved Three-Self churches are reported to have been demolished, and their assets and valuables looted during the holiday season last year.

16 Apr: Sola Fide (Justification by Faith) House Churches in China - Bitter Winter

bitterwinter.org/sola-fide-house-churches-in-china

Increasingly persecuted, members of these conservative Protestant churches are fleeing China in growing numbers.

16 Apr: Ailing Believer Dies After Repeated Threats - Bitter Winter

bitterwinter.org/ailing-believer-dies-after-repeated-threats

A Protestant from Henan was reported merely for letting some fellow religionists sing and pray for her, which spurred the authorities to harass her to death.

15 Apr: Jiangxi officials crack down on Christianity - China Aid

www.chinaaid.org/2019/04/jiangxi-officials-crack-down-on.html

Since September, authorities in an area of China's eastern Jiangxi province have carried out a sweeping crackdown on Christianity, destroying the crosses of 25 churches and imposing various measures in order to keep a tight rein on religious activities.

11 Apr: Non-Christian seized by police for helping Early Rain Covenant Church members - Chin Aid

www.chinaaid.org/2019/04/non-christian-seized-by-police-for.html

Authorities in China's southwestern Sichuan province targeted a non-Christian friend of Early Rain Covenant Church members, closing her store and asking that she no longer host her friends who attend the church.

8 Apr: CCP Demands Cameras Installed in Rental Properties - Bitter Winter

bitterwinter.org/ccp-demands-cameras-installed-in-rental-properties

China expands its draconian surveillance systems intended to monitor, track, and persecute citizens, with particular attention to transient and religious populations.

5 Apr: Catholic Churches in Shaanxi Converted into Community Centers - Bitter Winter

bitterwinter.org/catholic-churches-in-shaanxi-converted-into-community-centers

As an alternative to demolition, Catholics are told that their churches should be stripped of all religious symbols. Once this has been done, the buildings are declared "cultural centers" where religious activities are prohibited.

4 Apr: Anti-Religious Bounty Hunters in Guangzhou: The Full Story - Bitter Winter

bitterwinter.org/anti-religious-bounty-hunters-in-guangzhou-the-full-story

Last week, several media reported that rewards were offered in Guangzhou to citizens reporting illegal religious activities to the police. **Here is the full story.**

3 Apr: High-Tech Used to Monitor Religious Venues - Bitter Winter

bitterwinter.org/high-tech-used-to-monitor-religious-venues

The authorities are using satellite positioning systems, aerial drones, and other high-tech tools to conduct surveillance on believers.

NIGERIA

16 Apr: Persecution Boko Haram Attacks Village Near Chibok on Day of Kidnapping Anniversary - ICC

www.persecution.org/2019/04/16/boko-haram-attacks-village-near-chibok-day-kidnapping-anniversary

The day that Chibok was remembering five-year anniversary since the abduction of their daughters by Boko Haram, the village of Kwarangulum, just 10 miles away was being attacked. Four trucks full of Boko Haram militants pulled into the village, shooting indiscriminately and burning down houses. During the attack, they stole as much food and supplies as their vehicles could carry and burned everything else.

12 Apr: 5 years on, 112 Chibok girls missing - but they are just 'tip of the iceberg' - World Watch Monitor

www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/04/5-years-on-112-chibok-girls-missing-but-they-are-just-tip-of-the-iceberg

Five years ago, April 14th, 2014, about 230 girls from Chibok Girls' Secondary School in NE Nigeria were rounded up at night by men in army dress and driven off on trucks into the darkness. In the immediate aftermath, 47 of them escaped; some

jumped off the trucks, others managed to get away within a few days.

10 Apr: Standing with the Chibok parents five years on - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/nigeria-190410

"Anytime I hold this picture I feel as if she is here with me," she says. "I have so much hope that if she is alive, God willing, one day my tears will be wiped away." Saratu was among the 230 girls abducted by Boko Haram extremists from Chibok Secondary Girls' School five years ago, on 14 April 2014. Some escaped during the kidnapping or very shortly afterwards. But 112 Christian girls are still captive and no one knows how many are still alive.

1 Apr: Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - There's a change in my husband: When God restores family - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/nigeria-190401

When your family is ripped apart, how do you go back to normal? This is a question Charity faces after she was abducted by Boko Haram when they attacked her village. Her husband managed to run away, but Charity was held captive by Boko Haram for three years. As a Christian, an 'infidel', Charity was forcibly married. She fell pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl, called Rahila. After being freed by the military and returning home, her husband beat her and rejected baby Rahila. She and her baby now live in an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camp.

28 Mar: Christian Woman Raped, Killed as Herdsmen Attack Two Villages in Nigeria - Morningstar News

morningstarnews.org/2019/03/christian-woman-raped-killed-as-herdsmen-attack-two-villages-in-nigeria
Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked two predominantly Christian villages in north-central Nigeria after beating, raping and killing a 19-year-old Christian woman in the pre-dawn hours on Saturday (March 23), her father said.

27 Mar: Christian Clergy among Those Caught in Wave of Kidnappings in Nigeria - Morningstar News

morningstarnews.org/2019/03/christian-clergy-among-those-caught-in-wave-of-kidnappings-in-nigeria
A Protestant pastor and a Catholic priest in two different states in north-central Nigeria were kidnapped by gunmen on Monday (March 25), sources said. Amid a nationwide wave of kidnappings including last week's discovery of the body of another abducted Catholic priest in southern Nigeria, the Rev. Emmanuel Haruna of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) was kidnapped at gunpoint outside his home on church premises in Gidan Ausa, Nasarawa state.

"He was making a phone call by his house when some men shot into the air and took him away," the Rev. Romanus Ebenwokodi, ECWA spokesman, told Morning Star News. "Please pray for his safety and release." Earlier on Monday (March 25) in Kaduna state, gunmen reportedly abducted the Rev. John Bako Shekwolo, priest of St. Theresa Catholic Church in Ankwa Kachia County, according to an archdiocese statement. Little else was known at this writing.

25 Mar: Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Learning to love my baby: When God restores hope and identity - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/nigeria-190325

A mother's love for her child. It's powerful. Sacrificial. Unlimited. But what if you didn't want that child? What if that child is a reminder of forced marriage and rape? How do you love that child? Esther has no idea who her baby's father is. She

was only a teenager in Nigeria when she was kidnapped by Boko Haram extremists. The Christian women were separated from the Muslim women and offered a choice: forced marriage or slavery. Esther chose slavery. But it didn't matter: they married her off anyway.

21 Mar: Attacks Against Christians Persist - The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

www.vomcanada.com/ng-2019-03-21.htm

The violence against Christian communities in Nigeria continues unabated, resulting in dozens of deaths this February and March. As authorities seek how to effectively deal with the attacks, a West African court has ruled that, at least in one instance during 2016, Nigeria failed in its duty to protect citizens.

Danger comes from multiple directions. The Boko Haram terrorist group continues to oppress, though the number of incidents seems to be on the decline due to concerted pressure from various countries throughout West Africa.

18 Mar: Another 10 Christians Killed in Kaduna State as Carnage Continues in Nigeria, Sources Say - Morningstar News

morningstarnews.org/2019/03/another-10-christians-killed-in-kaduna-state-as-carnage-continues-in-nigeria-sources-say

Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed 10 Christians in southern Kaduna state, Nigeria on Saturday (March 16), bringing the lives lost in the past five weeks to 140 with 160 houses destroyed, sources said.

PAKISTAN

26 Mar: Christian Mother in Pakistan Forcibly Converted, Married and Tortured, She Says - Morningstar News

morningstarnews.org/2019/03/christian-mother-in-pakistan-forcibly-converted-married-and-tortured-she-says
Returning home from a night shift at a call center on the outskirts of Islamabad, Pakistan on Feb. 25, Naveed Iqbal learned from his sons that a local criminal and three other men had taken his wife away, he said.

"On March 5, police informed me that Saima had been found, but that she had converted to Islam and married Satti," Iqbal told Morning Star News. Officers told him to forget about his wife and stop pursuing the case, he said.

BRITAIN - 20 to 24 March

Radio 4 Asylum Failed Applicant Interview (Originally aired, 24th March 2019) - YouTube

www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0M-TCBLD4g

Home Office shows biblical ignorance in asylum decision - The Christian Institute

www.christian.org.uk/news/home-office-shows-biblical-ignorance-in-asylum-decision

Church of England criticises Home Office over Bible references in asylum refusal notice - Premier Radio

www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Church-of-England-criticises-Home-Office-over-Bible-references-in-asylum-refusal-notice

Home Office quotes Bible in asylum refusal letter - Channel 4 News

www.channel4.com/news/home-office-quotes-bible-in-asylum-refusal-letter

Home Office refuses Christian convert asylum by quoting Bible passages that 'prove Christianity is not peaceful' - The Independent

www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/home-office-christian-convert-asylum-refused-bible-not-peaceful-a8832026.html