

Iran has a population close to 74 million.¹ About 89 percent are Shiite, with the Sunni percentage estimated at 9 percent.² Open Doors estimates that at least 450,000 Christians live in Iran. Of this estimate, about 370,000 are “new” Christians from a Muslim background. UN figures from 1996 estimate that about 250,000-300,000 Christians are living in Iran, of whom the majority are Ethnic Armenians.³

The Iranian government has notably increased its pressure on religious minorities since the 2009 elections. Political and religious leaders have made many inflammatory statements, whilst physical attacks and harassment against Christians and other religious minorities has increased. President Ahmadinejad himself called for an end to the development of Christianity in Iran.⁴ Mass arrests occurred at the beginning of 2011 and Open Doors knows about at least 207 Christians arrested in the period between November 2010 and June 2011.

Legal and political framework

Since 1989, religious clerics control Iran politically under Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. There is a widely acknowledged uneasy relationship between the Supreme Leader and the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. According to sources, this power struggle within the Iranian regime has a negative impact on the situation of minorities in general. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereafter called Iran) stipulates Islam, specifically the doctrine of the Twelver (Shi’a) Ja’afari School, to be the official religion of the country. Articles 19 to 42 guarantee certain fundamental human rights such as freedom of opinion, freedom of press, and protection from torture, house raids and arbitrary arrests. Article 23 states that *“the investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief”*. Other articles, however, grant authorities the freedom to limit the rights granted in the articles mentioned before. Article 4, for example, stipulates that all *“laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution as well as to all other laws and regulations, and the Fuqaha (jurists) of the Guardian Council are judges in this matter.”*

¹ UNFPA Iran “Country profile”, <<http://iran.unfpa.org/Country%20Profile.asp>> [accessed 17.05.2012]

² US State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor “July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report: Iran”, 2011

³ Economic and Social Council “Visit by the Special Rapporteur to the Islamic Republic of Iran”, UN doc. E/CN.4/1996/95/Add.2, February 1996

⁴ United States Institute for Peace: The Iran Premier “2011 Report: U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom” May 2011

<<http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/may/11/2011-report-us-commission-international-religious-freedom>> [accessed 18.05.2012]

Iran agreed to be bound by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) when it became a member of the United Nations in 1945. It furthermore ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1975 and thereby acknowledged the right to full freedom of religion or belief including the right to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, as spelled out in Article 18 of the ICCPR.⁵

THE IRANIAN PENAL CODE

Iran's Penal Code was ratified in 1982, and amended in 1991. The code has always been implemented on a temporary basis, which can be done on recommendation of a parliamentary committee without needing the plenary parliamentary vote. This temporary period has repeatedly been extended. Iranian legislation is subject to Shariah law, which sees apostasy as a capital offense and subject to the death penalty. The actual sentence, however, is left to the discretion of the judge. In 2008, the Iranian Parliament considered a new, amended penal code, including a section making the death penalty mandatory for convicted male apostates. In this provision, women were to receive detention for life and to receive hardship in prison until re-conversion to Islam.⁶ To date, uncertainty remains about whether the extended version of the penal code, including the apostasy provisions, was implemented in 2008 or not. On 6 February 2011, the 1991 version of the experimental penal code, thus the version without the apostasy provisions, was extended for another year, until March 2012, which means that death sentence is not mandatory under Iranian law.⁷ However, article 167 of the Iranian constitution still gives judges the authority to use authoritarian Islamic sources and Fatwa's in the absence of codified law.⁸ Consequently, judges have the mandate to sentence apostates to death under Shariah Law.

Legal status of religious minorities

The Constitution of Iran stipulates in article 13 that "Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized 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

⁵ General comment 22 explains that: "the freedom to "have or to adopt" a religion or belief necessarily entails the freedom to choose a religion or belief, including the right to replace one's current religion or belief with another or to adopt atheistic views, as well as the right to retain one's religion or belief." CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4

⁶ Article 225 of the extended penal code proposal of 2008

⁷ Information comes from several NGOs and Iranian lawyers. Furthermore, the following article writes about the extension of the penal code. However, none seems to be confident enough to give a definitive answer; thus the facts around this provision remain slightly misty

⁸ Article 167: "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 judgement on the basis of authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwa. He, on the pretext of the silence of or deficiency of law in the matter, or its brevity or contradictory nature, cannot refrain from admitting and examining cases and delivering his judgment."

education”.⁹ The definition of ‘Christian Iranians’ is understood to mean ethnic Christians: Christians born into families of Armenian and Assyrian background. The scope of religious freedom within the limits of the law is very narrow under the Iranian authorities’ official interpretation of Islamic laws. Religious minorities are subject to several forms of discrimination related to education, government jobs and services, and the armed-services. Senior positions as government officials are out of their reach as allegiance to the Islamic Republic of Iran and the state religion is required. Furthermore, it is impossible for an adherent of a religion other than Islam to become president. Several groups also face restrictions on the distribution of religious materials in the Persian (Farsi) language.¹⁰

Although recognized as a religious minority, the Jewish group suffers continuously under the promotion of anti-Semitism; usually Jews are targeted on the basis of ‘ties to Israel’. The Sunni Muslim minority is also a victim of suppression in Iran, on the grounds of insulting Islam.

NON RECOGNIZED RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Converts from Islam (to Christianity, another religion or atheism) are considered apostates and are not protected under Iranian law. Indeed, apostates can be subject to the death penalty under Shariah law. The Bahá’í community are also vulnerable, as their religion is not recognized in Iranian law. According to Iranian law, blood of Bahá’í is ‘*mabah*’, which means they can be killed with impunity.¹¹

THE POSITION OF THE RECOGNIZED CHRISTIAN MINORITIES

Ethnic Christians, although formally recognised and protected by law, are treated as second-class citizens.¹² Iranian Christians are generally members of the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Assyrian Church, or evangelical churches (including the Pentecostal Church and the Assemblies of God churches). The majority of those churches are registered but some are not. From 1989 onwards several evangelical churches lost their registration and were unable to re-register. As a consequence, those churches are not authorised to issue marriage or baptism certificates. In May 2009, a church which had been active for over forty years was ordered to stop their activities until a registration was acquired.

Recognized churches are allowed to gather in their own buildings only. Prior to 2009 these churches often held Farsi-speaking Friday services, as Friday is the official day off in Iran and Farsi the local language.

⁹ Matters of personal affairs are matters such as marriage between persons within the religion, divorce, and inheritance.

¹⁰ For example, Bibles in Farsi are prohibited

¹¹ USCIRF Annual Report 2009, p 34

¹² For example, family members of a murdered person belonging to a religious minority are to receive less financial compensation from the murderer than they would if the victim were a Muslim

Friday services were preferred because attending a church service on a Sunday means foregoing work – and pay – to attend: a difficult decision in a country reported to have 21.5% inflation as at 19 March 2012.¹³ In 2009 the Central Church of Tehran was ordered to close its Friday Farsi-speaking services. Those Christians attending the Friday Farsi service desired to worship in their own language, and although attendance at a Sunday service comes at a personal financial cost, the number of Christians at Sunday Farsi-speaking services has significantly increased following the closure of the Friday services. In February 2012, authorities also forced the last two official churches (Emmanuel Protestant Church and St. Peter’s Evangelical Church) offering Friday Farsi-speaking services to close these services.¹⁴ Such orders severely limit Iranian Christians’ freedom to worship – an integral element of freedom of religion.

The increasing pressure on Churches in Iran

THE SITUATION OF OFFICIALLY RECOGNISED CHURCHES

Increasingly, the officially recognised churches are coming under pressure from the authorities – in particular the authorities monitor churches’ contact with non-Christians. In January 2010, the Pentecostal Church of Assyrians in Kermanshah was ordered to close following accusations of spreading Christianity among Muslims.¹⁵

Christians are forbidden to share their faith and Muslims, who generally speak Farsi, are not supposed to attend church services. Therefore, Armenian and Assyrian churches are officially obliged to hold services in their own language. Furthermore, on 6 May 2012, leaders of the Assemblies of God’s Central Church of Tehran were obliged to tell their congregation that authorities have demanded a list of names and identification numbers of church members.¹⁶ This will put new Christians – those from a Muslim background – at major risk as conversion from Islam to Christianity is considered a criminal offence, labelled “apostasy”, and punishable by death or long-term imprisonment. Generally, visitors of churches are watched closely and registered through cameras at the entrance.¹⁷

Recognized Christian minorities are allowed to have their own schools in order to educate in their own

¹³ Reuters, *Al Arabia News* “Iran’s official inflation climbs to 21.5 percent”, 08 April 2012 <<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/04/08/206260.html>> [accessed 17.05.2012]

¹⁴ *Compass Direct News* “Iranian Officials Heighten Control on Farsi-Speaking Church”, 11 May 2012 <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/iran/article_1535485.html> [accessed 17.05.2012]

¹⁵ *Compass Direct News* “Crackdown in Iran Hits Official Churches”, 16 March 2012 <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/iran/article_1450525.html> [accessed 17.05.2012]

¹⁶ *Compass Direct News* “Iranian Officials Heighten Control on Farsi-Speaking Church”, 11 May 2012

¹⁷ The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security monitor religious activity closely, especially evangelical groups. Source: USCIRF Iran Annual Report 2009 p35, and Open Doors.

language, and attendance of Islam education is not mandatory for them. However, the Christian schools are closely supervised and religious literature used in the schools needs approval by the authorities.

THE SITUATION FACING HOUSE CHURCHES

Due to the increased pressure on official churches, many Christians decided to attend an (unregistered) house church. There has also been increased official rhetoric against house churches. On October 19 2011, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned of the ever expanding influence and numbers of home-based churches. Iran's supreme religious leader blamed "the enemies of Islam for establishing and encouraging the expansion of Christianity in Iran". Khamenei further stated that the house churches are a threat to Islamic faith and deceive young Muslims. In the same speech he warned against attacks from philosophies or religions such as Sufi Islam, Nihilism and the Bahá'í faith.

Also in October, Iran's intelligence minister said that his agents had discovered hundreds of underground church groups, including 200 in the Muslim holy city of Mashhad. In January the provincial governor of Tehran, Moreza Tamadon, said in a reaction to the arrests of Christians that more will follow in the near future. He especially criticized Christian evangelicalism, calling it a "corrupt and deviant movement", "a cultural invasion of the enemy" and likened the Protestant movement to the Taliban and the Wahabis in Islam. More recently, the Minister of Intelligence, Heydar Moslehi, has reportedly warned of the threat of house churches and other Christian interests during October and November 2011. He also indicated that new efforts are being made to battle against the growth of the house church movement in Iran.

Since the start of the anti-Christian rhetoric, the number arrests of Christians have increased. Indeed, in early February 2012, a house church was raided in the southern city of Shiraz and six persons arrested. The persons arrested were held in an unknown location and no formal charges were given as reasons for their arrest.¹⁸ On 21 February 2012 another house church was raided and 13 of the Christians who had gathered to worship were arrested. Authorities verbally and physically abused them during the arrest.¹⁹ Although most of the Christians were later released, pressure on the church remains high.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OF CHRISTIANS IN IRAN

The Iranian penal code itself does not regulate sentences for apostasy but according to the Shariah,

¹⁸ *Compass Direct News*, "Authorities Raid House Church in Shiraz", 10 February 2012
<http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/iran/article_1395833.html> [accessed 17.05.2012]

¹⁹ *Compass Direct News*, "Crackdown in Iran Hits Official Churches", 16 March 2012
<http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/iran/article_1450525.html> [accessed 17.05.20120]

conversion from Islam is forbidden and punishable by death. Iranian legislation further rules that converts from Islam to another faith or none lose their right to inherit family possessions. For recognised religious minorities, attendance of the religious (Islam) school is not mandatory. However, converts from Islam are still considered Muslim and are therefore obliged to follow Islamic education.

The government has increased the arbitrary arrests of Christian converts and regularly raids their houses and churches. The police interrogate and pressure them to return to Islam, and detain them for an unspecified time, varying from one day up to several years. Often, arrested Christians are not informed about the charges against them and are often denied legal representation. Generally, converts are not sentenced to death for apostasy but are being sentenced for other charges, such as offenses based on religious belief; acting against state security; taking part in illegal gatherings; drugs smuggling; being a threat to state security; or anti government activities.²⁰ It is common practice to maintain the charges against the prisoners after their release, in order to have a ground to threaten them with re-imprisonment at any time. Consequently, they are often being monitored by the authorities and are not sure whether they will face further court hearings at a later date. This increases the uncertainty of their safety and increases the pressure on them. Furthermore, there is the risk of repercussions by Islamic fundamentalists, especially when Christians have shared their faith with Muslims.

Although most oppression and persecution comes from the authorities, violence against Muslim converts can also come from society and even one's own family. Many times, converts to Christianity are being pressured by their families to return to Islam. Often they are ostracized by their families. For example, at the end of 2010, a convert from Islam died as a result of injuries sustained when he was seriously beaten by a family member on account of his faith.

In contrast to the general policy of not sentencing apostates to death, the Revolutionary Tribunal of Gilan Province sentenced Yousef Nadarkhani to death for apostasy on 13 November 2010. His lawyer filed an appeal with the Supreme Court, which returned the case to the lower court on 22 June 2011, instructing it to investigate whether Yousef was Muslim at the age of 15 years until 19. In case he is found to have been Muslim, he must recant his faith or else the execution will take place. Authorities have allegedly treated Nadarkhani harshly, both physically and mentally. His wife, Tina, spent four months in prison in 2010. They have two children.

²⁰ The last Iranian convert known to be executed by the government was Hossein Soodmand in 1990, accused of working as an 'American spy'.

Cases of persecution

Since 2005, the Christians in Iran have been facing more pressure, which increased even more from 2008 onwards. During the period after the re-election of President Ahmadinejad in 2009, many adherents to religious minorities: Christians, particularly converts from Islam, and Bahá'í were arrested.²¹ The waves of arrests of Christians continued, especially between December 2009 until the start of 2010, and the period between December 2010 and the beginning of 2011. In addition, hundreds of Bibles were seized by security forces and burned during the first half of 2010.²²

Open Doors knows of at least 262 Christians arrested in the period between November 2009 and November 2010 (in 36 additional cases, Open Doors could not confirm the arrest). Additionally, in November 2010 alone, 250 to 300 Christians were imprisoned. Of the group of 207 Christians that were arrested in the period between November 2010 and June 2011, of which about 16 are still in prison. Open Doors believes that currently between 250 and 300 Christians are imprisoned. Many Christians who were released were released on bail. Consequently, they face continuous monitoring by the authorities and possible further court hearings.

PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE IMPACT OF PERSECUTION

Below is the personal account of a female Christian who fled Iran and is currently residing in the UK. This gives a good impression of the pressure faced by Iranian Christians.

"I was born into a Muslim family in Iran. I had a dream that was repeated three times. I saw a man. I asked him 'Who are you?' and he said to me 'Christ'. He looked into my face and said, 'Forgive everybody; and don't forget three things: live in God, hope and love.' Then he said to me, 'Come and follow me.' When I woke up my heart was thumping and I was very anxious because this is the first time that I saw Christ.

"When the authorities knew I was a Christian they shut down my office and cut my salary. They controlled all my phone calls. Two or three times I was taken to court. They told me that if I went to church I would be in danger: maybe someone would attack me and rape me. I was taken underground where it smelled very

²¹ *Compass Direct News*, "Authorities Tighten Grip on Christians as Unrest Roils" August 2009 http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/iran/2009/newsarticle_6057.html [accessed 18.05.2012]

²² Elam mentions the following source in its report of January 2011: *Website of Gerdab.ir, from the newspaper Vatane Emrooz number 343*, page 3.

bad. They made me sit in a chair and watch a film. It had a very bad effect on my mind. It was about the rape of women and girls in prison. They wanted to say to me indirectly, if you go to church, we will do this to you.

“I am single. Some believers are married with children and the government doesn’t let them register their children at school. Christians are always treated as second class citizens. The government won’t let them start their own businesses. But I never wish I had not had the dream. All the time I say to God, ‘You give me everything, but the most precious thing you have given me is salvation in Christ’.

“My father said to me, ‘Before you are my daughter you are God’s daughter. If you want to be a Christian you must go. I could not tolerate it if anything happened to you. I want you to be safe.’ I love my country. I miss my country. I miss my Dad. I miss my Mom. I miss my relatives. But I had to come, because they threatened me...”²³

SOME EXAMPLES OF PERSECUTION²⁴

May 1, 2012 – Christians arrested and Pastor detained

Several Christians who were arrested in Isfahan, south of Tehran, on Feb. 22 were released on bail, though the pastor of St. Paul Church of Isfahan, Hekmat Salimi, remains detained at Dastgerd prison.

April 28, 2012 – Pastor Nadarkhani’s Lawyer’s 9 year sentence upheld

The main defence lawyer for Iranian pastor Yousef Nadarkhani – who is appealing a death sentence for apostasy – was sentenced in July 2011 to a nine-year prison sentence and a 10-year ban on legal practice and teaching. An appeals court upheld this sentence on April 28 2012. Charges against him included “membership of an association seeking the soft overthrow of the government” and “spreading propaganda against the system through interviews with foreign media,” according to a press statement by Amnesty International.

April 14, 2012 – Homes raided and two Christians detained

Iranian authorities raided the homes of two Christian converts in the capital, Tehran, and arrested them. The two Christians are identified only as Ladan N., 26, and Hooman H., 27. They were reportedly held in Evin Prison, and though charges against them are unknown, authorities have sent their parents letters of summons to appear in court to answer questions about the converts’ activities.

²³ *Open Doors*, ‘Open Doors Magazine. Iran: Where Faith Costs the Most’, May 2010

²⁴ All examples taken from *Compass Direct News* articles

April 11, 2012 – Christian released after 6 month detention and house raid

Fariborz Arazm, 44, was released from Evin Prison. A Christian convert, he was arrested at home in the area of Robat Karim in October 2011. Authorities had ransacked his house, confiscating Bibles, photos, CDs and his computer hard-drive, among other items. He was charged with being in contact with missionaries and of promoting the Christian faith among Iranian Muslims. Before enduring six months of interrogation in Evin's Ward 350, he was held in solitary confinement for 21 days in Rajaei-Shahr prison – his whereabouts unknown for a long time.

February 22, 2012 – Christians arrested at home and at work

Intelligence officers arrested approximately seven Christians at their homes between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. They have been identified as Hekmat Salimi, pastor of St. Paul Anglican Church, a convert of 30 years and author of theological books; Giti Hakimpour, 78, a female pastor at St. Luke's Anglican Church (later released on Feb 25); Shahram Ghaedi, an actor; Maryam Del-Aram, 54 (who was denied proper medical treatment); Shahnaz Zarifi, a mother of two; and Enayat Jafari.

Majid Enayat was arrested on the same day at his workplace. He is a member of a house church. Other members of his house church have also been arrested.

February 21, 2012 – Thirteen Christians arrested

Authorities raided a house church in Kermanshah on Feb. 21, arresting 13 Christians who had gathered to worship. Authorities verbally and physically abused them during the arrest. Of those arrested, most were released the next day, and now only three remain in prison.

February 8, 2012 – Eight Christians arrested: three remain detained

Eight Christians were arrested in the southern city of Shiraz. Three were released on bail after 36 days in police custody. Five are still retained in the Adel-Abad prison. They have reportedly faced interrogation but charges against them are unknown. Their families have been unable to receive any information about them other than the news that they will not be released on bail. Their names are Fariba Nazemian, Mojtaba Hosseini, Homayoun Shokoohi, Mohamad-Reza Partoei and Vahid Hakkani.

January 18, 2012 – Christian given two year sentence

Leila Mohammadi, a Christian arrested in July 2011, was sentenced on 18 January 2012 to two years of prison for "collaborating with foreign-dependent groups, broad anti-Islamic propaganda, deceiving citizens by forming house churches, insulting sacred figures and acting against national security." Prior to this she

spend 74 days in solitary confinement at Evin prison, Tehran.

January 2012 – Christian given three year sentence

Masoud Delijani, a convert to Christianity, was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of being a Christian, holding illegal house church gatherings, evangelizing Muslims and action “against national security.” Initially arrested in on March 17, 2011, Delijani suffered great mental and physical pressure while in prison. In July 2011 he was released on bail amounting to about US\$100,000 and rearrested two weeks later. Authorities did not give him due legal process, denying him legal defense.

August 29, 2011 – Vahik Abrahamian released after 359 days in prison

Vahik Abrahamian was released after 359 days of detainment on charges of spreading Christianity among Farsi-speaking Iranians and having ties with foreign Christian organizations. Vahik Abrahamian, 45, belongs to Iran’s Armenian community and was arrested along with his wife, Sonia, on Sept. 4, 2010 in Hamadan, along with another Iranian Christian couple, Arash Kermanjani and Arezou Teimouri. Sonia, Kermanjani and Teimouri were released on 30 April 2011 after appearing in court. All four had spent 44 days in solitary confinement in the detention center of the Ministry of Information.

May 2011 – Eleven Christians acquitted

Eleven members of an evangelical house church were arrested in April 2011 and charged with 'action against the order of the country' and drinking alcohol. The charges referred to their involvement in a house church meeting and taking communion wine. The Revolutionary Tribunal in Bandar-Anzali court ruled that, since the eleven claimed to be conducting a Christian ceremony, their activities were covered by Article 13 of the Iranian Constitution, which allows Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians to "perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education".

17 March 2011 – Ten Christians arrested

Ten Christians were arrested in Kermanshah on 17 March 2011. Among them were Meghdad Babakarami, Nahid Shirazi (Later released in April). On 9 July 2011, Masoud Delijani was temporarily released from jail. A large bail of 62,000 pounds had to be paid to unite him with his family.

13 February 2011 – Several arrests (45 in total)

Forty-five Christians were arrested in different places. At least five people were held in Tehran's notorious

Evin prison. At least one woman was detained in Mashhad. Two men were detained in Ahwaz, one other man in Karaj. One man and his pregnant wife were released after being informed that they had to return for questioning once their child is born.

11 January 2011 – Several (35) arrests

Mr. Ebrahim Firouzi (or Abraham Ferouzi) was arrested in Keykavar, 30km South-West of Tehran. Initially he was arrested on 8 January and released on 9 January, but re-arrested on 11 January. Three Christians were arrested in Ahvaz: Mostafa, Shokrollahi and Khalil Yar-Ali. Three Christians were arrested in Mashhad. Three Christians were arrested in Karaj. Two Christians were arrested in Rasht. Two Christians were arrested in Shiraz, but released on bail. One Christian was arrested in Isfahan and twenty Christians were arrested in Khorasan Razavi.

26 December 2010 – At least 70 arrested

At least 70 Christians were arrested over Christmas. They were mistreated, photographed and were interrogated about how they converted to Christianity. They were also asked to name their Christian friends and give information about them

November 2010 – Twenty-four Christians arrested

On 14 November 10 Christians who gathered in a home to worship. In addition, some bibles, Christian literature and a personal computer were confiscated. Fourteen more were arrested on 30 November. All arrested were transferred to the intelligence unit of the Ministry of Information, detained overnight and subjected to severe interrogations.

13 November 2010 – Yousef Nadarkhani sentenced to death

In October 2009, Yousef Nadarkhani, a Christian from Rasht, was arrested and imprisoned. On 13 November 2010, authorities found him guilty of apostasy and sentenced him to death. His lawyer filed an appeal with the Supreme Court. On 22 June 2011, the Supreme Court returned Yousef's case back to the Revolutionary Tribunal of Gilan Province, instructing it to investigate whether it can be proved that Yousef Nadarkhani was a practicing Muslim at the age of 15 to 19. If the Court decides this is the case, he must recant his faith or be executed. Authorities have allegedly treated Nadarkhani harshly, both physically and mentally. His wife, Tina, spent four months in prison in 2010. They have two children.