



## Iran – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 16 October 2014

### Q18730 - Information on the treatment of converts to Christianity in Iran.

A report by the *United States Department of State* under the heading “Legal/Policy Framework” states:

“The constitution does not provide for the rights of Muslim citizens to choose, change, or renounce their religious beliefs. The government automatically considers a child born to a Muslim father to be a Muslim and deems conversion from Islam to be apostasy, which is punishable by death.” (United States Department of State (28 July 2014) *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013 Iran*)

In a section titled “Government Practices” it states:

“Muslim converts to Christianity faced harassment, arrest, and sentencing. Many arrests took place during police raids on religious gatherings, which also included government confiscation of religious property. Plainclothes officials arrested Mohammad Reza Farid, Saeed Safi, and Hamid Reza Ghadiri on May 29 during a house service for Christian converts, according to a human rights organization. As of July 8, their families had not been able to obtain information about their detention conditions and authorities had not presented charges.” (ibid)

A report by the *UN Human Rights Council* under the heading “Christians” states:

“In recent years, Christians, many of whom are converts from Muslim backgrounds, have faced a similar pattern of persecution. At least 49 Christians were reportedly being detained in the Islamic Republic of Iran as at January 2014. In 2013 alone, the authorities reportedly arrested at least 42 Christians, of whom 35 were convicted for participation in informal “house churches”, association with churches outside the Islamic Republic of Iran, perceived or real evangelical activity, and other standard Christian activities. Sentences range from one to 10 years of imprisonment.

The Christians most commonly prosecuted appear to be converts from Muslim backgrounds or those that proselytize or minister to Iranian Muslims. Iranian authorities at the highest levels have designated house churches and evangelical Christians as threats to national security.” (UN Human Rights Council (18 March 2014) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran* – pg.10)

The report continues:

“While most cases involving Christians are tried in revolutionary courts for national security crimes, some Christians face charges in public criminal courts for manifestation of religious beliefs; for example, a court sentenced four Christians to 80 lashes each for drinking wine during communion in October 2013. Sources also reported that, although prosecutions for the capital offence of apostasy are very rare, officials routinely threaten to prosecute Christian converts for apostasy, which, while

not found in any Iranian criminal law, has been prosecuted based on an Islamic law interpretation commonly used by Iranian courts.” (ibid) (par.41)

A report by the *Danish Immigration Service* under the heading “Converts to Christianity” states:

“Concerning the obstacles Iranian converts face in Iran because of their conversion to Christianity, an international organisation in Turkey did not consider that there would be any issues if this is not made known. However, if a convert is active in informal church activities or proselytizing, problems may arise with the authorities. Additionally, if conversion comes to the knowledge of the authorities, an individual might lose his or her job. The source explained that at workplaces in Iran, there are offices of Herasat (representatives of the ministry of intelligence and state security) that monitor the employees. They are also present at universities, state organizations and schools. Private companies of a certain size will also have a Herasat office. If Herasat gets news of a person’s conversion, he or she could risk being fired from his or her job. Additionally, family members could also risk losing their jobs or be denied access to higher learning.

Converts who are attending university may be expelled or in some cases merely suspended.” (Danish Immigration Service (23 June 2014) *Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran; Report from the Danish Immigration Service’s fact-finding mission to Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom* – pg.5)

In a section titled “Consequences of conversion with regard to a convert’s relation to family and social network” it states:

“Some Christian converts may risk maltreatment from their own family members and relatives but mostly, Christian converts are facing persecution at the hands of the state, according to Mansour Borji. The source found that it could happen that family members would report on their own family if somebody has converted to Christianity, often with good intentions hoping that an encounter with the authorities will have a ‘deterrent’ effect on them and make them forget about conversion. It could also happen that neighbors report on a convert, however, the source considered that the threat of persecution stemmed mainly from the authorities.” (ibid) (pg.12)

A report by the *Wall Street Journal* notes:

“Iran’s leaders are preparing for another visit to New York this month for the U.N. General Assembly, but many of their citizens aren’t going anywhere as they languish in the regime’s prisons for political crimes. One notable case is Farshid Fathi, an evangelical Christian pastor who this week will spend his 35th birthday in jail.

The intelligence ministry arrested Pastor Fathi in December 2010. The father of two then spent a year in solitary and semi-solitary confinement in Evin prison’s Ward 209, reserved for political cases. There he was interrogated for hours on end and subjected to psychological abuse, according to an Iranian Christian convert who has also spent time in prison for his beliefs, currently resides in the country and is familiar with Pastor Fathi’s case.” (Wall Street Journal (3 September 2014) *A Christian prisoner in Iran*)

The report continues:

“Converts to Christianity receive harsher treatment since Tehran's authoritarians won't tolerate Shiites leaving the official religion. Apostasy is punishable by death under Shariah law, and Persian-language Bibles are banned (though contraband editions can be purchased in some bookstores). Yet the Internet has made it increasingly difficult for Tehran to root out evangelical Christianity, and the movement by some estimates claims up to 500,000 Iranian believers.” (ibid)

A report by *Amnesty International* under the heading “Freedom of religion or belief” states:

“Pastor Yousef Naderkhani, arrested in 2009, was sentenced to death after a court convicted him of apostasy in 2010. The Supreme Court upheld the sentence but his conviction was overturned when the case was referred for guidance to the Supreme Leader. He was released in September, having served a three-year prison term for evangelizing Muslims.” (Amnesty International (23 May 2013) *Amnesty International Report 2013 - The State of the World's Human Rights – Iran*)

In a section titled “Death penalty” it states:

“The death penalty remained applicable in cases of murder, rape, deployment of firearms during a crime, spying, apostasy, extra-marital relations and same-sex relations.” (ibid)

A report by *Freedom House* under the heading “Freedom of Expression and Belief” states:

“Conversion by Muslims to a non-Muslim religion is punishable by death. Pressure on Christian converts and churches persisted in 2013. In May, plainclothes security forces arrested three Christian converts during a worship session in Isfahan. Also that month, the authorities shut down Iran's oldest Persian-language Protestant church in Tehran and arrested one of its pastors. In August, a court upheld the eight-year prison sentence of Iranian-American Christian convert Saeed Abedini.” (Freedom House (23 January 2014) *Freedom in the World 2014 – Iran*)

## References:

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

**Sources Consulted:**

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UN Human Rights Council  
United States Department of State  
Wall Street Journal