



Iran - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Thursday 3 March 2016

Information on treatment of Christians/perceived Christians

In October 2015 the *United Nations Secretary General* states in a report that

The Iranian Constitution officially recognizes Islamic schools of jurisprudence other than Shi'ism, and recognizes Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity as minority religions. Under the law, adherents of these religions are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, to conduct personal affairs and address religious education, in accordance with the tenets of their faith. However, reports indicate that members of these faiths, including Christian minorities from Muslim backgrounds in particular, continue to face severe restrictions" (United Nations Secretary General (6 October 2015) *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran : note by the Secretary-General*, pp.22-23).

This document also states that:

"Christians reportedly continue to be prosecuted for their involvement in informal house churches" (ibid, p.23).

A report issued in October 2015 by the *United States Department of State* points out that:

"The government closely monitors and regulates Christian religious practice" (United States Department of State (14 October 2015) *2014 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran*).

This document also states that:

"Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shia, particularly for Bahais, but also for Sunni Muslims, including Sufis; Christians, especially evangelicals; Jews; Yarsanis; and Shia groups that did not share the government's religious views" (ibid).

It is also noted in this report that:

"Numerous Christians remained imprisoned at year's end. Prison authorities reportedly withheld proper medical care from many prisoners, including some Christians, according to human rights groups. On April 17, a prison guard reportedly broke Christian convert Farshid Fathi's foot by stomping on it during a cell inspection in Evin Prison. Authorities reportedly then prevented Fathi from visiting a hospital for three days. Christians, particularly evangelicals, continued to experience disproportionate levels of arrests and high levels of harassment and surveillance. The status of many of these cases was not known at year's end. Authorities released some Christians almost immediately upon detention, but held others in secret locations without access to attorneys. The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran reported in October that authorities held at least 49 Protestant Christians in custody, many for involvement in informal house churches" (ibid).

It is also noted in this document that:

“Police targeted Christians with home raids, sometimes confiscating personal property in such raids, including religious material” (ibid).

A publication released in November 2015 by *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* notes that:

“There has been no improvement in human rights under Rouhani's presidency, despite his reputation as a moderate. Instead Iran has witnessed a deterioration in the human rights climate since his election to office. Political opponents, journalists, activists and members of religious minorities continue to be imprisoned, with converts to Christianity and members of the Baha'i faith being targeted particularly” (Christian Solidarity Worldwide (9 November 2015) *14 Christians arrested near Tehran*).

Human Rights Watch in November 2015 notes that the government:

“...jailed and harassed Christian converts” (Human Rights Watch (13 November 2015) *Pope Should Press Iran Leader on Rights*).

In January 2016 a report published by *Freedom House* commenting on events of 2015 states that:

“There is an ongoing crackdown on Christian converts” (Freedom House (27 January 2016) *Freedom in the World 2016: Iran*).

A report published in January 2016 by *Human Rights Watch* commenting on events of 2015 notes:

“Security and intelligence forces also continued to target Christian converts from Islam, Persian-speaking Protestant and evangelical congregations, and members of the home church movement” (Human Rights Watch (27 January 2016) *World Report 2016: Iran*).

In February 2016 *Amnesty International* reviewing events of 2015 notes that:

“Members of religious minorities, including Baha'is, Sufis, Yaresan (Ahl-e Haq), Christian converts from Islam, Sunni Muslims, and Shi'a Muslims who became Sunni, faced discrimination in employment and restrictions on their access to education and freedom to practise their faith” (Amnesty International (24 February 2016) *Amnesty International Report 2015/16: Iran*).

In January 2016 the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* notes that:

“Despite President Hassan Rouhani's pledges during his election campaign in 2013 that “All ethnicities, all religions, even religious minorities, must feel justice,” the targeting of Christian converts for state persecution and prosecution has continued unabated under his administration” (International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (4 January 2016) *Persecution of Christian Converts Continues under Rouhani*).

A report issued in January 2016 by the *Barnabas Fund* states:

“More than 400 Christians have been arrested since 2012 in Iran, according to Mohabat News. Christians come under particular threat over the Christmas period when authorities often clamp down on house churches” (Barnabas Fund (7 January 2016) *Iran frees imprisoned pastor two years early, but arrests a Christian convert*).

Open Doors International released a report in January 2016 which included stating:

“Persecution is strongest in the church and national spheres. Almost all churches that had services in Farsi were closed during the past five years and their leaders arrested. Converts from Islam experience persecution in all spheres of life. All other Christians are at least discriminated in the community and national spheres. This affects especially Christians who are ministering to Muslims. Converts are considered unclean especially in villages; rural areas and in conservative cities in the north. Any Muslim who leaves Islam faces the death penalty. At least 108 Christians who were arrested and or imprisoned for their faith in November 2015, another increase compared to last year. Apparently there is a connection between churches going underground and a rise in the number of Christians arrested” (Open Doors International (13 January 2016) *World Watch List 2016: Persecution Dynamics – Iran*).

In January 2016 the *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* notes:

“The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, reminded the Iranian Government of its responsibility to ensure that no one is prosecuted or detained because of their religious views or activities, including Christians of Muslim backgrounds. Mr. Abedini was arrested by the authorities in 2012 reportedly for his activities related to home churches. “While Iranian officials allowed pastor Abedini to board the plane and put this horrible ordeal behind him, they continue to hold dozens of Iranian Christians on vague and overly broad national security charges like ‘propaganda against the system.’ These detentions clearly violate not only Iran’s obligations under international law but their own constitution,” Mr. Bielefeldt noted” (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (19 January 2016) *Iran: United Nations human rights experts welcome freeing of Iranian-Americans and call for more releases*).

A report published in February 2016 by the *United Nations General Assembly*:

“Expresses serious concern about ongoing severe limitations and restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and restrictions on the establishment of places of worship, as well as attacks against places of worship and burial, as well as other human rights violations, including but not limited to harassment, persecution and incitement to hatred that lead to violence against persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities, including Christians, Jews, Sufi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Zoroastrians and members of the Baha’i faith and their defenders, and calls upon the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to release the seven Baha’i leaders declared by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the Human Rights Council to have been arbitrarily detained since 2008 and to eliminate, in law and in practice, all forms of discrimination, including the closure of businesses, and other human rights violations against persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities...” (United Nations General Assembly (25 February 2016) *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, p.3*).

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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.

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