

Iran levels false charges against Pastor Nadarkhani to justify death sentence

Country/Region: Iran, Middle East and North Africa

Barnabas statement on Nadarkhani case

Fabricated charges of rape and extortion have been levelled against Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani in a bid by the authorities to cover up his death sentence for apostasy.



On Friday (30 September), Gholomali Rezvani, deputy governor of Gilan province where Nadarkhani was tried, told the semi-official Fars news agency that Nadarkhani was a rapist, an extortionist, a Zionist and was guilty of "security-related crimes", adding, "No one is executed in Iran for their choice of religion".

Last week, Nadarkhani appeared in court in Rasht, where he was asked on three separate occasions to recant his faith in order to secure an annulment of the charge of apostasy and lifting of the death sentence, but he refused each time. The court's verdict is expected any day.

Western "slander"?

As Iran comes under increasing international pressure to overturn Nadarkhani's sentence, Fars, which is backed by the Revolutionary Guard, has been fighting back. In an article called "Slander of the Western Media", it wrote:

The information obtained by Fars through informed sources shows that Nadarkhani has been sentenced to death as a result of committing violent crimes such as rape and repeated extortions and basically his death sentence is not related to his denouncement of Islam.

The western media are using a rapist and a thief in Gilan province to criticise the Iranian judicial system by claiming that the courts in Iran have sentenced a man to death because of his conversion from Islam.

Apostasy, however, is the only charge listed against Nadarkhani in a translated Iranian Supreme Court brief from 2010, which says:

Mr. Youcef Nadarkhani, son of Byrom, 32 years old, married, born in Rasht in the state of Gilan is convicted of turning his back on Islam, the greatest religion the prophesy of Mohammad at the age of 19.

Justifying the unjustifiable

The World Evangelical Alliance condemned Iran's attempted cover up. CEO and Secretary General Geoff Tunnicliffe said:

The fabrication of charges against Pastor Nadarkhani is to justify his sentence and is therefore acknowledgement that death for apostasy is not justifiable.

Nadarkhani's lawyer, Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, a Muslim, is confident that the court will overturn the death sentence. He said that it was based on fatwas issued by a senior cleric, who is now dead, and that at least three others had challenged the ruling.

Apostasy is not a crime under Iran's penal code, but the system does make provision for judges to draw on fatwas and Islamic sources where national law is silent. Islamic law states that an adult male apostate should be given the death sentence.