



Iran – Christian woman who refused to renounce faith starts prison sentence at notorious jail

Fatemeh Bakhteri started a one-year prison sentence in Iran on 31 August after normal Christian activities, such as holding a worship meeting at home, led to her being convicted of “propaganda” against the government. Such accusations against active Christians are common in Iran.

She was first told she would serve one year in prison during a court appearance in September 2018. Then, in an initial appeal hearing in January 2019, she was pressured by the two judges to renounce her faith and return to Islam. But Fatemeh refused to reject Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour.

Later, in May 2019, she was told her appeal was rejected and in August summoned to start her jail term at Evin Prison in Tehran, a prison that is notorious for prolonged interrogations and the abusive treatment of inmates.

Fatemeh was also banned for two years from engaging in any social activity with more than two people, a punishment that will still be active after her release from prison.

Fatemeh is one of a growing number of Christians who have been given prison sentences in Iran for carrying out simple, everyday Christian activities.

She appeared in court with a fellow Christian convert from Islam, Saheb Fadaie, who was convicted of “acting against national security” and sentenced to 18 months’ imprisonment. Saheb, who also refused to renounce his faith, is already serving a ten-year prison sentence for other Christian activities.

Another Iranian Christian woman and convert from Islam, Roksari Kanbari, 65, was handed a one-year prison sentence on 29 July after being convicted of “propaganda against the system”. Roksari had been forced

to go to an Islamic religious leader to be “instructed” and “offered the opportunity to return to Islam” before she was sentenced. She may appeal. Appeals against the prison sentences of three Assyrian Christians, Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, his wife, Shamiram, and their son, Ramiel, imposed for “acting against national security” were postponed on 3 September because the judge failed to turn up.

Thank the Lord for the courageous Christians in Iran who are blameless sheep in the midst of wolves. Pray that they be wise as serpents and harmless as doves in the face of persecution (Matthew 10:16). Ask that Fatemeh and Saheb, Christians imprisoned for their faith in Iran, will hold fast to the word of life so that they may rejoice in the day of Christ. Pray that the Lord will protect them mentally, physically and spiritually in prison and that they shall be released soon to continue their Christian ministry. Pray that the appeals of the many Christians facing jail will be successful.

India – Pastors could be jailed for seven years under new conversion law

India’s anti-conversion laws have often been used to target Christians who are falsely accused of converting people by fraud, force or allurement, which is specifically banned by law in certain states. Now, pastors could face up to seven years in jail if they are found guilty of such “illegal conversion activities” in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh after a strict new law was approved on 31 August.

Indian church leader Sajan K George criticised the Himachal Pradesh state government over the new legislation, saying, “Anti-conversion laws are a tool to harass vulnerable Christians.” Under the new Himachal Pradesh Freedom

of Religion Act 2019, anyone convicted may be jailed for between one to five years, and up to seven if it involves the conversion of women, minors and Dalits (formerly termed “untouchables”, the lowest level of the Hindu caste system).

George, the president of the Global Council of Indian Christians, said, “The previous 2006 law [Freedom of Religion Act 2006] provided for a maximum of two years in prison for those who broke the rules. The new law contains some terms that were absent in the past, such as coercion, misrepresentation, marriage, excessive influence.”

He added, “Anti-conversion laws discriminate against religious minorities. They can plant seeds of sectarian suspicion among communities that have lived together in a peaceful manner and can be used against the weakest in society, in particular Dalits, women and children.”

Anti-conversion laws have been misinterpreted or twisted by accusers and have led to mobs attacking Christians and other minorities. Blind Pastor Balu Saste and his wife were stripped and beaten when they were arrested by police after an angry mob of extremists stormed their church in 2016. They and ten other Christians were finally cleared of charges of making “forced conversions” by a court in Madhya Pradesh in May 2019.

Call on the LORD to rise up and defend His cause (Psalm 74:22) by ensuring that no pastor or would-be convert is discouraged from the faith by fear of persecution or even prison. Ask that not one Christian will be prosecuted under the new anti-conversion law in Himachal Pradesh. Pray that the rising tide of intolerance of religious minorities in India will lose its momentum and crumble and that politicians and other leaders will instead move toward seeking peace and pursuing it (1 Peter 3:11).

Algeria – Church closures continue as police seal sixth building

Algerian authorities are persisting in their campaign of church closures, with one occurring every few months on average. The latest, the Church of the Prince of Peace in Ighzer Amokrane, was sealed by police on 2 September at the second attempt.

Only days earlier, on 28 August, Christians had prevented an attempt to shut the church, which is located 85 miles east of Algiers, by occupying the building and refusing to leave. Church leaders later met with provincial authorities to argue that the closure of the church had not been ordered by a court and was therefore illegal. The authorities said they would consider the issue but the church heard nothing more. Then police suddenly arrived early in the morning on 2 September and sealed the building.

It brings to at least six the total number of churches closed since the beginning of 2018. Committees of officials started regularly visiting churches in late 2017, with the declared aim of checking fire and safety, but they also asked about permits to operate as churches, obtained from the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship. However, despite numerous requests from churches, it has been reported that the commission has never issued a permit.

Church leaders have called for the buildings to be reopened and warned that many more churches are under threat.

Pray that the Lord will soften the hearts of the Algerian authorities so that they will cease despatching the committees of officials to churches. Pray that no fault will be found in any church visited, so there will be no excuse to shut them down and congregations will be able to worship freely. Ask God to empower the

harassed Christians throughout North Africa to preach the Word with fervour, to be ready in season and out of season, in favourable and unfavourable times (2 Timothy 4:2).

Cameroon – Boko Haram extremists cut off ears of women in raid on mainly Christian town

Boko Haram terrorists cut off the ears of at least three Christian women after snatching them from their homes during a night-time raid on a mainly Christian town in the far north of Cameroon on 29 July. The Islamist extremists dragged their victims to the outskirts of Gagalari town in the district of Yagoua where they sliced off one ear from each victim.

They then released the women, threatening to return to the town, near the border with Chad, in the future. The injured women were taken to a clinic about 160 miles away where they received medical treatment.

Boko Haram, which operates in the region surrounding Lake Chad, has been stepping up its attacks on villages in the mainly Christian far north of Cameroon. Certain Christian villages have been repeatedly targeted, and Christians are taken away into captivity.

Ask the Lord to bless and comfort the women who were mutilated because of His Name, let them take refuge in the shadow of the LORD's wings until these calamities have passed by (Psalm 57:1). Pray that the many Christians under threat in the far north of Cameroon will run to God for help in whatever crisis they face, that they will praise Him as they wait expectantly, confident in His love and care. Ask that the Islamic extremists that carried out such cruel acts will be brought to justice, and that these persecutors will be given the opportunity to turn from their evil ways, seek forgiveness, and embrace Christ as their personal Saviour. Pray that

the extremism that is now rife in West Africa will diminish and that love will conquer hate, and peace will reign.

DR Congo – Islamist militants kidnap 200-plus, loot church hospital

More than 200 people including women and children were abducted and a church mission hospital and shops looted by Islamist extremists on 23 August during a raid on Boga, Democratic Republic (DR) of Congo, a majority-Christian country.

During the three-hour assault, government troops based in Boga were overrun by the militants. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) Islamist terrorist group has been operating in the region for more than two decades and has repeatedly attacked Christians.

A local church leader said, "The situation is terrible. People are terrified. Families are traumatised and grieving over their abducted loved ones. The ADF has never been active in Boga, so people are confused and don't know how to understand the current situation."

"I appeal to people of good will everywhere to lobby their home governments to put pressure on the DR Congo government to stabilise the security situation in eastern Congo. We also appeal for a massive outpouring of sustained prayer from Christians everywhere," he added.

Pray that those captured by Islamic extremists in the DR Congo will not be harmed. Ask the Lord to bear the burdens of the captives so that they will know that He hears their cries and will answer in accordance with His perfect plan and purposes. Ask that these captive Christians, despite their tribulations, will be confident that nothing will be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you
and be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth**
John 14:16-17

UK 9 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX Email info@barnabasfund.org

Australia PO Box 3527, Loganholme, QLD 4129 Email bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org

New Zealand PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland 2241 Email office@barnabasfund.org.nz

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland Office 113, Russell Business Centre, 40-42 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 6AA Please send post to our UK office address. Email ireland@barnabasfund.org

South Africa Office 301, 3rd Floor, Eikestad Mall, 43 Andringa Street, Stellenbosch 7599 Email bfsa@barnabasfund.org


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