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The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[02 June 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Requesting That Iran Take Immediate Measures To Guarantee Religious Freedom For All Its Citizens And Release Christians Who Have Been Imprisoned For Their Faith

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) submitted a report for the 48th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). In our report, we expressed concern over the Iranian government's treatment of Christians, and its laws that have led to the arrests of hundreds of Christians who are simply practicing their faith. As we will demonstrate below, Iran's treatment of Christians has not improved. Instead, it has further cracked down on Christians practicing their faith.

2. BACKGROUND

Haiti recommended in Iran's November 8, 2019, review that Iran "[p]rotect the rights of Christians and other minorities and promote interfaith dialogue between religious groups in the Islamic Republic of Iran."⁽¹⁾ While Iran claimed to support this recommendation, the actions it has taken since then indicate that Iran has no intention to protect the rights of Christians and other religious minorities. Additionally, the Special Rapporteur on the Islamic Republic of Iran recommended in January 2025 that "Iran end the targeting, harassment and persecution of members of recognized and non-recognized religious minorities, refrain from targeting them with national security-related charges and end the criminalization of the peaceful expression of faith."⁽²⁾

In Iran, Christians are regularly harassed, arrested, and imprisoned for peacefully practicing their faith.⁽³⁾ Christians gathering for worship in homes are not safe from the government, as the government has routinely raided house churches, arrested members, and confiscated religious materials. These factors have contributed to Open Doors ranking Iran as the 9th worst country for Christians in its 2025 World Watch List.⁽⁴⁾

While the Iranian government only recognizes Armenian and Assyrian Christians,⁽⁵⁾ all Christians are prohibited from sharing their faith with others and Christian converts must practice their faith in secret.⁽⁶⁾ Further, the government uses Article 500 of the Penal Code of Iran to arrest Christians and confiscate religious material. Article 500 prohibits "deviant educational or proselytizing activity that contradicts or interferes with the sacred law of Islam" and "making false claims or lying in religious and Islamic spheres, such as claiming divinity."⁽⁷⁾ Additionally, the government also arrests Christians and accuses them of "acting against national security" or using "propaganda against the regime."⁽⁸⁾

Iran is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and, therefore, has a responsibility to uphold the rights established within.⁽⁹⁾ Under Article 18 of the ICCPR, Iran has an obligation to ensure that "[e]veryone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."⁽¹⁰⁾ This right also includes the ability for everyone to "either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching." In our report for Iran for the 48th session of the UPR, we highlighted numerous examples of Christians being arrested for practicing their faith and simply being involved in house churches. Below, we have highlighted further examples of Christians being arrested since Iran's last UPR. It is important to note that these are just a fraction of the examples of Christians being arrested because of their faith.

3. VIOLATIONS

Recently, Iran has stepped up its crackdown on Christians and has increased raids, arrests, and the number of Christians sentenced to prison.⁽¹¹⁾ In 2024, Iranian courts sentenced ninety-six Christians to prison, with some being sentenced up to fifteen years in prison.⁽¹²⁾ This is a drastic increase from 2023, when courts sentenced twenty-two Christians to prison.⁽¹³⁾

On April 12, 2025, authorities raided the home of a Christian named Lida.⁽¹⁴⁾ Authorities arrested Lida and confiscated her personal items.⁽¹⁵⁾ She was later released on bail in May 2025, for an amount equal to \$50,000.⁽¹⁶⁾ She was never informed of the charges against her. It is believed that the arrest was related to her involvement in house churches.⁽¹⁷⁾ Her husband, a Christian pastor, was also arrested earlier on February 6, 2025, and he remains in prison.⁽¹⁸⁾

In April 2025, two Christian brothers, Mahmoud Mardani-Kharaji and Mansour, were convicted for violating Article 500 of the Penal Code and sentenced to four years in prison.⁽¹⁹⁾ The two brothers were initially arrested in December 2022 when authorities raided a house church.⁽²⁰⁾

In March 2025, three Christian converts, including a pregnant woman, were sentenced from eleven to fifteen years in prison for violating Article 500 of the Penal Code.⁽²¹⁾ The individuals were initially arrested in November 2024, after intelligence agents conducted three concurrent raids on their homes and confiscated Bibles, crosses, and musical instruments.⁽²²⁾

On February 6, 2025, Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh was re-arrested and taken to Evin Prison.⁽²³⁾ He had initially been released in 2022 after spending nearly five years in prison, where he was in the middle of serving a ten-year sentence for “acting against national security” because he belonged to a house church.⁽²⁴⁾

On December 26, 2024, more than forty Christians were arrested while celebrating Christmas across two different cities.⁽²⁵⁾

In 2024, at least six Christians received a prison sentence of at least ten years.⁽²⁶⁾ One of the Christians was arrested in October 2022, when undercover intelligence agents searched his home and confiscated Bibles along with other personal items.⁽²⁷⁾ Another Christian was sentenced to ten years in prison for visiting a house church and possessing copies of the New Testament in Persian.⁽²⁸⁾

On May 26, 2024, a Christian convert was arrested at his home by officers from the Ministry of Justice and was taken to an unknown location.⁽²⁹⁾ Officers also confiscated his laptop, mobile phone, and a framed picture of Jesus.⁽³⁰⁾

4. REQUEST

It is imperative that Iran immediately takes measures to protect religious freedom for all its citizens and release all Christians who have been arbitrarily imprisoned for practicing their faith. Further, Iran must reform its laws to guarantee and protect religious freedom for everyone, as is required under the ICCPR. Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right for everyone to enjoy, not just those belonging to the majority religion. Everyone should be permitted to peacefully practice their religion without fear of being harassed or imprisoned.

(1) OHCHR, UPR of Iran (Islamic Republic of)(3rd Cycle – 34th Session): Thematic List of Recommendations.

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- (3) Lisa Zengarini, Iran: Harassment Against Iranian Christians Increasing, VATICAN NEWS (Feb. 28, 2023).
- (4) Iran, OPEN DOORS.
- (5) Sara Monetta, Iran The Christians Celebrating Easter in Secret, BBC (Mar. 31, 2024).
- (6) Id.
- (7) Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran art. 500.
- (8) Jayson Casper, Report: Iran Arrested 166 Christians in 2023, Targeting Bible Distributors, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (Feb. 21, 2024).
- (9) Ratification Status for Iran (Islamic Republic of), OHCHR.
- (10) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, adopted Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171.
- (11) Id.
- (12) Prison Terms for Christians in Iran Shot up in 2024, Report Says, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (Jan. 22, 2025).
- (13) Id.
- (14) Iranian Christian Prisoners List, ARTICLE 18.
- (15) Id.
- (16) Pastor's Wife Released on \$50,000 Bail After Month in Evin Prison, ARTICLE 18 (May 13, 2025).
- (17) Id.
- (18) Christians Once "Pardoned" After Years in Prison Re-Arrested, ARTICLE 18 (Feb. 10, 2025).
- (19) Two Iranian Christian Converts Sentenced to Prison and Fined, BARNABAS AID (April 2, 2022).
- (20) Id.
- (21) Christian Converts Summoned to Begin Sentences or Forefeit \$20,000 Bail, ARTICLE 18 (May 8, 2025).
- (22) Id.
- (23) Pastor's Wife Released on \$50,000 Bail After Month in Evin Prison, supra note 14.
- (24) Christian Convert Freed After Nearly Five Years in Evin Prison, ARTICLE 18 (Oct. 17, 2022).
- (25) Imprisonment of Christians Jumps Six-Fold in Iran as Persecution Intensifies, CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN (Apr 1, 2025).
- (26) "Propagating Christianity" Among Charges Against Convert Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison, ARTICLE 18.
- (27) Id.
- (28) OPEN DOORS, IRAN: PERSECUTION DYNAMICS 8 (2024).
- (29) Iranian Christian Prisoners List, supra note 18.
- (30) Id.