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Written statement submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

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

[10 August 2026]

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

Requesting That Iran Return The Confiscated Churches To Their Rightful Owners And Stop The Persecution Of Christians

1. INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the worst persecutors of Christians. According to one estimate, it ranks number ten among the countries that systematically persecute Christians.⁽¹⁾ The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) in its capacity as a Special Consultative Status holder with the ECOSOC submits this report requesting that the Human Rights Council address the ongoing persecution of Christians in Iran.

2. BACKGROUND

While the current U.S.-Iran war has taken much of the world's attention, we urge that this Council does not lose sight of the ongoing persecution of Christians in Iran. For decades, Iran has persecuted Christians, especially those who leave Islam and convert to Christianity, by detaining, interrogating, torturing, imprisoning, and even killing them. In 2025, 254 Christians were arrested because of their religious beliefs.⁽²⁾ In 2026, following the anti-Iranian regime protests, Iranian security forces reportedly killed at least 19 Iranian Christians.⁽³⁾ Moreover, the security agencies keep record of church members and surveil new members to determine if they are converts. In addition to closely monitoring churches for converts, Iran has consistently closed and confiscated churches.

As is too often the case, governments will frequently use wartime conditions to justify the erosion of liberties. Unfortunately, religious freedom is regularly one of the first liberties constrained under the banner of "national security." And in fact, last year, when Iran arrested over 50 evangelical Christians, officials stated that they had "neutralized" them. Obviously, conflict enables states to impose emergency regulations, which too often lead to consolidated authority, limited assembly rights, monitored and/or suppressed religious communities, and the labeling of minority faiths as "national security threats." History shows that these regulations, although initially deemed temporary necessities, continue on long after the conflict ends. The chaos of war gives governments political cover to curtail freedoms, especially religious freedom, that is an essential and foundational human right. Therefore, Iran should not be allowed to use the cover of war to justify its continuing and increasing persecution of Christians.

3. VIOLATIONS

Following are just a few examples of the ongoing and escalating violations of religious freedom Iran has recently employed:

In July 2026, the Iranian regime shut down 150-year-old St. Peter Evangelical Church, the oldest Protestant Church in Iran, and outlawed Christian satellite television networks, labeling them hostile.

In June 2026, Iran issued a decree that declared St. Peter Evangelical Church, several residences, and two schools, as government property. Families living at the church-owned residences fled after threats from Iranian security forces.⁽⁴⁾ About twenty families were forced to leave their homes.

The confiscation has been apparently done pursuant to a 1998 order by the Revolutionary Court that ordered the compound's transfer to the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, a body operating under the Office of the Supreme Leader.⁽⁵⁾ Sadly, "[a]s one of the last functioning Protestant sites in the capital, the fate of [this] church has become a symbol of the shrinking space for minority religious practice in the Islamic Republic."⁽⁶⁾

In yet a further attempt to destroy freedom of religion, on July 14, 2026, Iran's Ministry of Intelligence classified Christian satellite broadcasters as hostile organizations. Any form of "cooperation" with Christian television networks is also prohibited.(7) As such, watching, contacting, or sharing content from any such organization could lead to prosecution under national security and espionage laws.(8) Indeed, it has been reported that "[a]t least five Christians have already been prosecuted under the new espionage laws."(9)

On June 4, 2026, the Evangelical Church of Mashhad was bulldozed by workmen under orders from Iran's regime. Prior to this, it had been closed for over two decades. Despite a 2012 ban on Iranian churches holding services in Farsi, many Christians hoped it would reopen.(10)

On May 16, 2026, defense attorney Bahar Sahraeian was arrested in Shiraz.(11) She is a well-known advocate for human rights cases and Christians in the country. She was released on bail on July 21 from Adel Abad Prison. During her detention, she was denied family visits and requests for bail.(12)

Also in May 2026, Mahshar Parandin, a Christian convert and artist who is serving a sentence in Evin Prison, was denied medical care. She has a heart condition and two tumors requiring immediate surgery. Despite eligibility for parole, she was denied conditional release.(13) Her vision, movement, and speech have been impacted, and her teenage son also has a chronic illness.(14)

The same month, authorities announced that "three 'main elements'" of "a 'Christian evangelistic network' that had converted friends and family to 'Zionist' Christianity, and 'prayed for the victory of the Zionist regime[.]'" were arrested.(15)

As of April 10, 2026, a house church leader in Iran using the pseudonym "Yahya," had been interrogated, abused, and detained for his ministry. Yahya came from a Muslim background. He also may face a long prison sentence for his ministry.(16)

On April 2, 2026, Mary Mohammadi—a journalist, human rights defender, and Christian convert—was transferred from an Ahvaz detention facility to an undisclosed location. The authorities refused to disclose her location or fate to her family.(17)

In March 2026, Christian convert Mohammad Nikbakht "was violently arrested at his home and held" for two months without communication. He was verbally threatened twice with charges that carry the death penalty. As of late June, he was being held in the political prisoners' ward.(18)

On February 5, 2026, Christian convert Somayeh Rajabi was arrested in a gathering of Christian converts in Babol County. She was transferred to a Sari prison one day later and reports had indicated the forces took all her musical instruments, religious books, and digital devices.(19)

Around the same time, Christian convert Mohsen Rashidi was killed when he was shot from behind while trying to recover a body of a friend who was killed during a demonstration. His family was forbidden from holding a funeral for him(20) and they were forced to pay thousands of dollars to have his body released by the government.(21)

4. REQUEST

We request that this Council take concrete steps to address the systematic abuses of religious freedom committed by Iran. In this regard, we request that the Council specifically include the shutting down of churches, confiscation of church properties, and detention, interrogations, and imprisonment of Christians in its resolutions and its mandate to the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran.(22) Finally, we request that the Human Rights Council ask the Iranian government to return St. Peter Evangelical Church to its rightful owner, the Council of the Evangelical Churches of Iran.

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