



1.11.18

IRAN | Christians Receive Eight Year Sentences

Two Iranian Christians were sentenced to a total of eight years in prison by a revolutionary court in December 2017 after being convicted of national security-related crimes. Soroush Saraie and Eskandar Rezaie, who are both members of the Church of Iran denomination, each received seven year sentences for “creating a group that works against national security,” and an additional year for “propaganda against the state.” Both men are appealing the verdict, which was handed down on Dec. 28 by the 4th Chamber of the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz.

During the same court hearing, a Christian woman named Zahra Norouzi Kashkouli was sentenced to a year in prison for “being a member of a group working against the system.” She too is appealing the sentence.

Article 23 of the Iranian constitution states that “the investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.” Nevertheless, there has been a rise in arrests of members of minority faith communities since the advent of the Rouhani presidency, and Christians have routinely been charged with national security-related crimes in order to justify excessive sentences.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “These unwarranted sentences are yet another example of the unjust treatment of Iranian Christians, who are being criminalized on account of their faith. We call for these convictions to be overturned, and for the Iranian government to end its harassment of religious minorities. We urge the EU, the UK and the US to ensure that improvements in freedom of religion or belief and other human rights are a central part of any dialogues with the Iranian government.”

Saraie and Rezaie were initially arrested Oct. 12, 2012, along with five other Christians, during a raid on a prayer meeting. They were later found guilty of “action against national security” and “propaganda against the order of the system,” for which Saraie received a 2 ½-year sentence on July 16, 2013. His sentence was upheld on appeal, and he was jailed in July 2014. Rezaie was given a one-year sentence, which he began serving in July 2015.

Saraie was released early from Adelabad Prison in November 2015, and Rezaie was released during the same month. However, Saraie and Rezaie were both rearrested in July 2017 and

were returned to Adelabad Prison. They were released a few months later, after meeting bail payments of \$95,000 and \$140,000 respectively.