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IRAN | Christian Faces Spurious Charges After Arrest

CSW learned that a Christian named Mohammadali Yassaghi, who is also known as "Estifan," was arrested April 10 and accused of "spreading propaganda against the establishment" and later transported to Babol prison in the province of Mazandaran.

A 52-year-old father of three and member of the Church of Iran denomination, Yassaghi converted to Christianity over 20 years ago. His arrest is part of an ongoing official campaign targeting Christians through intimidation, spurious arrests and charges, and excessive sentencing.

Most recently, four Christians who were convicted of "acting against national security" by "promoting Zionist Christianity" had their 10-year sentences upheld on appeal. Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, Mohammadreza Omid (Youhan), Yasser Mossayebzadeh and Saheb Fadaie, also from the Church of Iran, had their 10-year sentences upheld on appeal by the Iranian authorities in Rasht on May 2.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned by the continuing use of the criminal justice system to suppress the right to freedom of religion or belief in Iran. Mr. Yassaghi's arrest violates the Iranian constitution, which recognizes the right of the Christian community to freedom of religion or belief and is also contrary to Iran's obligations under international covenants to which it is a signatory. We urge the Iranian authorities to drop all charges against Mr. Yassaghi, and to release him. We also call on the international community to encourage Iran to comply with its own constitution, and to end its campaign of harassment against religious minorities."