

Iran's Christian Shutdown

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea follows this article.



Iran's Supreme Court has [upheld](#) a lower court ruling that Yosef Nadarkhani, a 32-year-old Iranian evangelical pastor, must reject his Christian faith or be put to death. It's the latest incident in the Islamist Republic's continuous and increased assault on its small Christian population.

Nadarkhani was first arrested on the charge of apostasy (leaving Islam for another faith) in October 2009 and [sentenced](#) to death by hanging for his refusal to teach Islam to Christian children. While Nadarkhani hadn't practiced any faith before he became a Christian at age 19, he was born to Muslim parents and thus [considered](#) to be a Muslim under Islamic law.

As such, Nadarkhani's conviction was upheld in September 2010 by a lower Iranian court when it found that he had proven his apostasy by "organizing evangelistic meetings, sharing his faith, inviting others to convert, and running a house church." At that point, Nadarkhani appealed to Iran's Supreme Court to have his death sentence reversed but that appeal has now been rejected.

To Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, Nadarkhani's attorney, the Iranian court decision came as a surprise as only one month ago he had been under the impression that his client's appeal had been granted. Instead, Nadarkhani now stands to be the first Iranian Christian executed for apostasy since 1990.

Ironically, Mohammad Ali Dadkhah finds himself unable to provide his client further legal assistance as he has just been [sentenced](#) by an Iranian court to nine years in jail and a ten year ban on practicing law for "actions and propaganda against the Islamic regime."

Needless to say, the Iranian court decision brought a quick rebuke from the US State Department, which issued a [statement](#) which read in part, "He (Nadarkhani) is just one of thousands who face persecution for their religious beliefs in Iran... While Iran's leaders hypocritically claim to promote tolerance, they continue to detain, imprison, harass and abuse those who simply wish to worship the faith of their choosing."

Understandably, Nadarkhani's case has also brought an outcry of protest from a bevy of Christian organizations and human rights groups. One such group, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), has [pressed](#) the Iranian government to honor its adherence to the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICPPR), a treaty which Iran signed and one which "guarantees freedom of religion and freedom to change one's religion or belief."

Of course, that seems a rather unlikely path that the Iranian government will take. While Iran's government has [claimed](#) that it tolerates other religions — often citing Christians "protected" religious minority status under the Iranian Constitution — the reality is far different. [According](#) to the 2010 State Department's *International Religious Freedom Report*, Iran's religious minorities — which [represent](#) 2 percent of its population — face "substantial societal discrimination."

That "societal discrimination" includes a history of harsh government retribution against those who have dared to abandon the Islamic faith, reprisals which have included mass [arrests](#) of Christians and other religious minorities. Unfortunately, this suppression has only increased in intensity over the past year.

Specifically, the Iranian government has been [targeting](#) Iran's growing network of "house churches." While the Iranian government allows officially sanctioned Christian churches, they are closely monitored by Iranian authorities. To avoid that scrutiny, Iranian Christians — many of whom are former Muslims — congregate in private residences for prayer and Bible readings.

As one expert on Iran has [said](#), "The reality is most of the house churches are so hidden that the government can't do anything, and they know it." For a regime whose survival necessitates total control over its citizenry, that poses a particularly difficult problem for Iran's Islamic authorities. Moreover, that threat has only grown stronger since the internal unrest that began in 2009 after the disputed election of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

So, it comes as little surprise then that the Iranian government has initiated a clampdown on the house church movement, one that began in earnest in the fall of 2010 when Iran's Islamic leaders began publicly [attacking](#) the house churches. That verbal assault culminated in a speech in October 2010 by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in which he [denounced](#) the growth of private house churches that "threaten Islamic faith and deceive young Muslims."

For many, Khamenei's comments served as the official go ahead to terminally squelch the house churches and its Christian participants. From December 2010 through January 2011, it has been [estimated](#) that Iranian authorities arrested over 120 Iranian Christians, most of whom were converts from Islam. Since January 2011 an additional 285 Christians in 35 Iranian cities have reportedly been arrested.

One of these detainees is Farshid Fathi who — according to the Iranian Christian news agency *Mohabat* — was [jailed](#) without charge in December 2010, kept in solitary confinement, and subjected to psychological torture in an effort to "extract information on Christian networks in Iran."

However, the whereabouts of people like Fathi are at least known. Others aren't so lucky. [According](#) to Iranian Pastor Hormoz Shariat of the International Antioch Ministries, "Most often the Revolutionary Guards arrest and don't even tell their family. They can't have a lawyer, not even a formal charge. Sometimes they get killed without even a formal charge.

***Note from Pastor Kevin Lea:** Islam is based on the teachings of Mohammed which are recorded in the Koran. No honest person can dispute the historical fact that Mohammed was a murderer who spread his religion of slavery with the sword. For sixteen centuries, those living under strict adherence to the Koran (like Iran today), are required to swear devotion to Allah (the false god of Islam) and Mohammed (his prophet). Those who refuse are labeled as "disbelievers" and are given a chance to repent or to be executed. The following two sections of the Koran are examples of the verses that are being used to execute people in Iran today, there are many others.*

Surah 16:88 (As for) those who disbelieve and turn away from Allah's way, We will add chastisement to their chastisement because they made mischief.

Surah 7:36-37 And (as for) those who reject Our communications and turn away from them haughtily-- these are the inmates of the fire they shall abide in it. Who is then more unjust than he who forges a lie against Allah or rejects His communications? (As for) those, their portion of the Book shall reach them, until when Our messengers come to them causing them to die, they shall say: Where is that which you used to call upon besides Allah? They would say: They are gone away from us; and they shall bear witness against themselves that they were unbelievers.

The true God of the Bible is not like the god of Islam. He sent His son Jesus to die on the cross so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have ever lasting life (John 3:16-18). Jesus did not come into the world demanding that people follow Him or else they would be beheaded. He wept over the unbelief of the people, because He knew their unbelief was leading them into death because of their sin. He came with His hand stretched out to save people from the consequence of sin, not with a sword to kill them.

I am so glad that Jesus is a loving God who has not asked me to kill those who don't believe in Him. Instead, He tells me to lay down my life so that others can be saved. There are many in Iran who are laying down their literal lives because they refuse to follow the god of murder, death, and evil. What is so maddening to the Ayatollahs is that they can't kill them fast enough to stop the spread of the gospel of love. Jesus said that His church would prevail against the powers of hell, and so it is. God's love and willingness to forgive will triumph over murder, death and hatred. Although it is likely that Nadarkhani will soon be killed by those deceived by Mohammed, his soul will immediately after be in the loving presence of God forever, where others who have put their faith in Jesus will soon join him.

Luke 23:39-43: Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Revelation 6:10-11: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. NKJV