



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 16, 2011

Despite Headlines, No Evidence of New Trial for Iranian Pastor

There has been a series of varying reports on the latest news concerning 32-year-old Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani (pictured at left), who had been condemned to death by an Iranian court for refusing to renounce his Christian faith. According to Baptist Press News, Reuters News Service had reported on October 11 that Iran's Supreme Court had sent the case back to the original court that had tried him, ruling that there had been insufficient investigation into the charges against the pastor. "The court will issue a new verdict," Reuters reported, citing the Iranian Student's News Agency (ISNA) as its source.



In another October 11 story, Agence France-Presse reported that Nadarkhani would face a retrial on the original charge of apostasy against Islam. "In its statement, the supreme court noted it had quashed the initial conviction and sentencing 'due to a technicality in the investigation,'" AFP reported.

Jordan Sekulow of the [American Center for Law and Justice](#), which has been monitoring Nadarkhani's case since it appeared that the pastor's execution was imminent, said the news coming out of Iran is most likely months old and does not offer firm evidence of a new trial for the pastor. "While it is possible that this is a new development at the urging of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, we have no confirmation of this from Pastor Youcef's attorney in Iran," wrote Sekulow. "More likely, it is rehashing of old news. As we have been reporting, the Supreme Court of Iran had heard his case earlier this year and remanded it to the trial court to determine if Pastor Youcef was a Muslim after reaching the age of majority before converting to Islam."

Sekulow noted that the Iranian Supreme Court had not heard the case since mid-June, when it sent the case back to the trial court for proof, in the words of the court, "that from [the age of 15 to 19 Nadarkhani] was not Muslim by his acquaintances, relatives, local elders, and Muslims he frequented." The high court ruled that Nadarkhani "must repent his Christian faith if this is the case. No research has been done to prove this[;] if it can be proved that he was a practicing Muslim as an adult and has not repented, the execution will be carried out."

Added Sekulow: "It is this investigatory hearing, held on September 25-28, where Pastor Youcef refused to recant his faith."

Nadarkhani has been in custody since October 2009, after he protested to education officials that his son had been forced to read from the Quran at school. Authorities followed up by arresting his wife, Fatemeh Pasandideh, in June 2010 in an apparent attempt to pressure him into renouncing his Christian faith. She was released some four months later, according to Amnesty International, but attempts to force Nadarkhani to recant have continued, culminating in the death sentence.



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Meanwhile, the ACLJ reported that 58 members of Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, had signed a letter asking Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to intervene for Nadarkhani's release. Included in that number was Representative Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), the first Muslim elected to Congress.

And, as reported by [The New American](#), "House Speaker John Boehner attempted to use his influence to turn the impending tide for the young pastor. 'While Iran's government claims to promote tolerance, it continues to imprison many of its people because of their faith,' Boehner said in a statement. He said that Nadarkhani's case 'goes beyond the law to an issue of fundamental respect for human dignity.' He urged Iranian officials 'to abandon this dark path, spare Youcef Nadarkhani's life, and grant him a full and unconditional release.'"

Even the Obama administration released a statement on behalf of Nadarkhani, asking Iran to release the Christian minister. Calling faith a "universal right for all people," the administration declared that the efforts of Iranian authorities to force Nadarkhani to renounced his faith "crosses all bounds of decency, and breaches Iran's own international obligations." The statement, issued in late September, added that a "decision to impose the death penalty would further demonstrate the Iranian authorities' utter disregard for religious freedom, and highlight Iran's continuing violation of the universal rights of its citizens." The White House called on the Iranian authorities "to release Pastor Nadarkhani, and demonstrate a commitment to basic, universal human rights, including freedom of religion."

Photo: Youcef Nadarkhani



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