



Iranian and Pakistani Christians Freed From Imprisonment

In both Iran and Pakistan, important victories have been won in the conflict between Christian faith and Islamic persecution. In Iran, after three years in prison awaiting execution for the “crime” of converting to Christianity, Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani has been freed. In Pakistan, a young girl wrongly accused of burning pages of the Koran has been released from prison and the Muslim cleric who planted false evidence has been arrested.



[According to a report from FoxNews.com](#), the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) — a watchdog group which has long championed Nadarkhani’s cause — announced over the weekend that Nadarkhani has been released from his imprisonment after his charges were “lowered to evangelizing to Muslims, which carried a three-year sentence.” Since the 32-year-old Nadarkhani had already spent three years of his life in prison awaiting execution, he was released for “time served.”

Nadarkhani was charged with “apostasy” — leaving the Islamic religion — on the basis of his conversion to Christianity. But the primary reason he became the victim of the animosity of the Islamic Republic of Iran was his service as the pastor of a 400-member house church movement: He was arrested in 2009 when he was trying to officially register the church with the government. After his arrest, Nadarkhani was taken before a judge and commanded to either renounce Christianity or face the death penalty. When he did not submit, he was sentenced to death in 2010.

When Iran faced international outrage over its intention to execute a Christian for his faith, the regime sought to sow confusion regarding the case. As [reported previously for *The New American*](#), Pastor Nadarkhani not only faced a sentence of death for his beliefs, but the Iranian regime spread false accusations of rape and “Zionism” against him in an attempt to distract the Western media from the real reason for his plight. In some circles, those efforts almost worked:

For example, an article for the *International Business Times* reported both the false accusations against Nadarkhani, and the government’s denial of its intention to execute him....

The author of *International Business Times* then declared that “If Nadarkhani were indeed guilty of rape and of Zionism, which could be the treasonous crime of spying for Israel, the death penalty would not be off the table. Both convictions are subject to capital punishment in Iran, and the death penalty is mandatory in rape cases unless the victim forgives the rapist.”

However, given the sudden appearance of these charges against Nadarkhani, long after he had, in fact, actually been convicted for apostasy — and not rape or espionage — treating the Iranian regime’s charges as anything other than a smokescreen does a disservice to the persecuted pastor.

When Nadarkhani was once again brought before a judge on September 8, supporters of the imprisoned pastor worried that the regime was preparing new false charges. As reported by FoxNews:



Written by [James Heiser](#) on September 10, 2012

Nadarkhani was originally called to Saturday's [September 8] hearing to answer to "charges brought against him," leading to speculation that the new charges from the Iranian Supreme Court could be for a security-based crime, a charge often handed down to cover-up prisoners being held and sentenced on faith-based charges.

"While we praise the release of Pastor Youcef, we must recognize that Iran felt obligated to save face among its people and continue its pattern of suppressing religious freedom with intimidation tactics," Tiffany Barrans, a legal director for ACLJ said to FoxNews.com.

"International attention to this matter saved this man's life, but we must not forget the human right of freedom of religion includes the right to freedom of expression."

And, in a country given to "public protests" which serve the agenda of the government, it is by no means certain that Nadarkhani has escaped the wrath of the Islamic Republic.

In the case of the girl who faced false accusations in another nation known for being a paragon of Islamic "justice" — Pakistan — her three-week imprisonment has now ended with a helicopter flight away from the prison in which she was being held: Even after it had been proven that the charges against her were false, the authorities apparently determined they could not protect her from Muslim militants unless she was spirited away from her jail cell. Her identity has thus far been concealed, on account of her age, but her youth was no protection from facing the false accusation that she had burned pages of the Koran — and facing imminent death on the basis of that accusation. According to the Associated Press, her release signals that she is one step closer to being completely cleared of the false accusation:

The release a day after a judge granted her bail is another step closer to ending an episode that has focused an uncomfortable spotlight on Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws, which can result in life in prison or even death for defendants. Many critics say the laws are misused to wage vendettas or target Pakistan's vulnerable minorities like the Christians. ...

Her lawyers say they will now push to have the case against her thrown out entirely.

"Her parents were with her when she was freed from the jail, and she has been taken to a safer place," said a member of her legal team, Tahir Naveed Chaudhry.

The girl's release came a day after a judge in Islamabad granted bail to the mentally challenged girl, a move hailed by the human right activists and representatives of Pakistan's minority Christian community. Bail is rarely granted in blasphemy cases, and the decision signals a degree of sympathy that could result in all the charges being dropped.

Now, the cleric who planted evidence implicating the girl has been exposed by a member of his mosque; if that individual had kept silent — or joined the hundreds of Muslims who had surrounded her home, demanding "justice" — she might very well have faced ongoing prosecution for the false charge against her.

The absurdity of the entire case highlights the inherent injustice of trying non-Muslims on the basis of Islamic sharia law. The notion that an adult could be prosecuted — even judicially murdered — by an Islamic regime for "blasphemy" is absurd. That a mentally impaired teenage girl faced such a threat on the basis of a false accusation is appalling. When the charge was initially made, the child's home was surrounded by hundreds of angry Muslims; in such an environment of hostility, intimidation, and violence, the contrast of creeds could not be greater.



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