



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 28, 2011

## Iranian Pastor Faces Death for Refusal to Renounce Christian Faith

A pastor in Iran who has twice refused to renounce his Christian faith may be executed within days, reported Baptist Press News. It would be the first time in over 20 years that the Iranian government has executed someone for apostasy against Islam. The Baptist news site reported that "Yousef Nadarkhani [pictured at left], who leads a 400-person house church movement, refused in court on Sept. 25 and Sept. 26 to recant Christianity and was scheduled to get two more chances on Sept. 27 and Sept. 28, according to the British-based Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), which monitors religious freedom." The organization noted in a press release that without recanting, Nadarkhani would most likely be put to death.



While the plight of two American hikers imprisoned in Iran garnered worldwide media attention, and their release came following the intense efforts of an American interfaith alliance, no such campaign has been pushed for the lone Iranian minister. "The American interfaith delegation ... who made headlines when they traveled to Tehran and secured the release of the two American hikers last week should pack their bags again," wrote Nina Shea of the [Hudson Institute's Center on Religious Freedom](#) on September 26th. "They need to make a return trip. And they better hurry."

Nadarkhani has been imprisoned since October 2009, when he was arrested while trying to register his church. While he was found guilty and sentenced to death in 2010 for abandoning the Islamic faith, the Iranian Supreme Court "recently asked for a re-examination of his case to establish whether or not he had been a practicing Muslim adult before he converted to Christianity," reported the CSW. "However, the court ruled he wasn't a practicing Muslim, but is still guilty of apostasy because he has Muslim ancestry."

Baptist Press News reported that the "last person to be executed for 'apostasy' in Iran was Hossein Soodmand, who was hanged on Dec. 3, 1990. Soodmand's case has parallels with Nadarkhani's. Soodmand also was a pastor, and he also became a Christian as a teenager. Soodmand however, believed in the Islamic religion as a child."

Writing on [WashingtonPost.com](#), Jordan Sekulow of the [American Center for Law and Justice](#) pointed out that the "11th branch of Iran's Gilan Provincial Court has determined that Nadarkhani has Islamic ancestry and therefore must recant his faith in Jesus Christ. Iran's supreme court had previously ruled that the trial court must determine if Yousef had been a Muslim before converting to Christianity. However, the judges, acting like terrorists with a hostage, demanded that he recant his faith in Christ before even taking evidence. The judges stated that even though the judgment they have made is



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against the current Iranian and international laws, they have to uphold the previous decision of the 27th Branch of the Supreme Court in Qom.”

Sekulow recalled that when the judges demanded that he repent of his Christian faith, Nadarkhani responded: “Repent means to return. What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ?” The judges clarified: “To the religion of your ancestors, Islam.” To which Nadarkhani replied simply, “I cannot.”

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 Yousef Nadarkhani’s life, and grant him a full and unconditional release.”

CSW is encouraging individuals to add their voices to the international cry for justice for Pastor Nadarkhani by [e-mailing the Iranian embassy](#) and asking the Iranian government to stop the execution.



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