



Written by [James Heiser](#) on February 23, 2012

Iranian Pastor May Face Imminent Execution

In a decision likely to further alienate Western nations against the Iranian regime, a trial court in Iran has found Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani (left) guilty of apostasy and has sentenced him to death. Prior to his arrest in 2009, Nadarkhani had led a 400-person house church movement in Iran after his conversion from Islam. The court demanded on several occasions in late September of last year that the pastor renounce his Christian faith, or face possible execution for apostasy from Islam.



As [Dave Bohon](#) reported in September for *The New American*, Nadarkhani has been imprisoned since October 2009, “when he was arrested while trying to register his church.” He was found guilty of apostasy and sentenced to death in 2010 for abandoning the Islamic faith, but the Iranian Supreme Court sought a reexamination of his case in order to determine whether or not he had been a practicing Muslim adult before his conversion to the Christian faith.

A February 22 article for FoxNews (“[Iran court convicts Christian pastor convert to death](#)”) reports that the review of Nadarkhani’s case is now complete, and he may now be executed “at any time without prior warning, as death sentences in Iran may be carried out immediately or dragged out for years.”

As [previously reported for *The New American*](#) last November, Iranian officials endeavored to obscure the religious nature of the trial and conviction of Nadarkhani, spreading false accusations of rape and “Zionism” in an attempt to attack the character of their prisoner — and those false accusations were reported in the Western news media:

The regime even claimed that there was never a plan to execute Pastor Nadarkhani. 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.

Nadarkhani’s conviction for apostasy — abandoning the Muslim religion — is a telling example of sharia



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law in action. While reporting on the latest development in the case, a [February 22 article](#) for the *International Business Times* noted: "Although apostasy is not a crime under Iran's official legal code, it is punishable by death according to Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwas and religious decrees, thereby bringing Nadarkhani's trial through Iran's special Revolutionary Court." Although Iran has purportedly not executed anyone for apostasy in 20 years, the fact that a legal code dictated by the tenets of Islam has the power to carry out executions is a clear signal that such nations are far removed from Western notions of a separation of sacred and secular.

The FoxNews article contains the observation that "Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and 89 members of Congress, along with the European Union, France, Great Britain, Mexico and Germany, have condemned Iran for arresting Nadarkhani and have called for his quick release." However, apart from the disinformation spread by the Iranian regime last year that was aimed at blackening the reputation of its prisoner, the government has remained resolved to punish those who deviate from the tenets of Islam. According to the *International Business Times*, the European Union has "condemned Iran for breaking with the Universal Declaration of Human rights, of which Iran is a signatory," but this is hardly a surprise. The repellent practice of executing converts to Christianity is not a new practice within Islam, and even the Council of Foreign Relations [acknowledged back in 2007](#) that "Conversion by Muslims to other faiths is forbidden under most interpretations of sharia and converts are considered apostates (non-Muslims, however, are allowed to convert into Islam). Some Muslim clerics equate this apostasy to treason, a crime punishable by death. The legal precedent stretches back to the seventh century when Prophet Mohammed ordered a Muslim man to death who joined the enemies of Islam at a time of war."

For now, Nadarkhani's advocates continue to plead for his life — though Iranian practices regarding executions could keep his execution secret for weeks after the sentence has been carried out. The *International Business Times* quotes Jordan Sekulow of the American Center for Law and Justice, who noted: "Iran's legal system is not like any legal system in the world. [The order] is still being kept secret. Even his legal team might not find out about the execution until the body is delivered to the family."

Photo: Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani



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