

Persecution of Iranian Christians worsened in 2016: Barnabas Aid



Christian charity group Barnabas Aid claims that persecution of Iranian Christians worsened in 2016. The charity group revealed that there was a sharp rise in Christian persecution in Iran. This increased persecution came through various mediums including government sponsored anti-Christians campaigns.

Barnabas Aid claimed that this steep rise was organized and systematic. State sponsored anti-Christians campaigns were run via radio and television. The charity group states that there were also attempts to defame well-known Iranian Christians. These campaigns were intended to portray them as morally corrupt.

The charity group further stated that there was a crackdown against Persian speaking Christians. Dozens of house churches were closed, during these raids while the congregants were harassed, imprisoned and probed.

United States Commission for International Religious Freedom in its annual report of 2016 had recommended Iran to be designated as a country of special concern with regards to religion based persecution. In 2016, USCIRF recommends that the Secretary of State re-designate the following nine countries as CPCs: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. USCIRF also finds that eight other countries meet the CPC standard and should be so designated: Central African Republic, Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria, Tajikistan, and Vietnam, USCIRF report stated.

Over the past year, there were numerous incidents of Iranian authorities raiding church services, threatening church members, and arresting and imprisoning worshipers and church leaders, particularly Evangelical Christian converts. Since 2010, authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained more than 550 Christians throughout the country. As of February 2016, approximately 90 Christians were either in prison, detained, or awaiting trial because of their religious beliefs and activities.

Some Christians were released from jail during the year, including two long-serving prisoners of conscience, Saeed Abedini (released in January 2016) and Farshid Fathi (released in December 2015). Abedini's early release was part of a prisoner swap between the United States and Iran. He had been serving an eighty year prison sentence for threatening the national security of Iran for his activity in the Christian house church movement. Fathi had been serving an extended prison term on trumped-up security charges related to his religious activities, USCIRF stated in its annual report of 2016.

Source : Christians in Pakistan