

## Iran Threatens To Expel Christian Children From Schools



Iran's government has ordered children belonging to families of one of the country's largest house church movements to study the Koran and Shi'a Islam teachings or face expulsion from school, a church official confirmed to BosNewsLife Thursday, September 7. The Church of Iran movement is also concerned about four jailed members saying one of them "was deported to a feared secret police facility" in the southern city of Shiraz.

These latest education measures and pressure on Christian prisoners are part of a government campaign against Bible believing Christians in the Islamic nation, according to Christians familiar with the situation. "Right now [Iranian President Hassan] Rouhani wants to prove that he is a good Muslim by persecuting Christians," said Firouz Khandjani, a Church of Iran council member. "Most of the new Christians are former Muslims."

The government-backed policy adopted by school authorities in Shiraz and the coastal city of Rasht deprives Christian children of primary and secondary education unless they agree to religious instruction that does not conform to their faith, he confirmed.

Parents and other believers might also face prison for openly confessing that Jesus is Lord, seen as blasphemy by strict Islamic authorities, BosNewsLife learned. The Church of Iran said it now fears mistreatment of active members Mohammad Roghangir, Bijan Haghighi, Eskandar Rezaie and Surush Saraie who are behind bars in Shiraz.

In 2013, Roghangir was sentenced to six years and Massoud Rezaie to five years imprisonment on what their friends viewed as "trumped-up charges" such as "action against the national security" and "propaganda against the system."

### **NEW DETENTION**

Saraie was "re-arrested" at his home in Shiraz after being released early from Adelabad Prison in November 2015 while Rezaie, was detained again in July, after being released temporarily from Adelabad Prison in December 2015, Christians said.

Both men were initially captured in October 2012, along with five other Christians, during a police raid on a prayer meeting, and found guilty of threatening national security and propaganda against the Islamic state. Saraie received a two-and-a-half year sentence in July 2013, later upheld on appeal, which he began serving in July 2014. Rezaie received a one year sentence, which started in July 2015.

One of them, Surush Saraie, was recently taken to Pelak 100, a notorious detention center run by the Intelligence Services (VEVAK), Khandjani explained. "It's like the Gestapo [during World War Two]." While there, attempts were allegedly made to pressure him into making confessions, he said. "Usually they want to make us confess that we receive money from Britain or the United States to shake Islamic values," Khandjani noted.

"The authorities are trying to eradicate Christianity, just as the Islamic State group, but smarter," claimed Khandjani, who is himself

in hiding.

Rights activists say Iran is violating its Constitution, but Iranian government officials say they are defending the country's Islamic traditions. The Church of Iran and missionaries say there are at least 100,000 devoted Bible believing Christians in Iran, despite the ongoing reported crackdown.

Source : BosNewsLife