

# Prisoners of faith

**release**  
PRISONERS

EMAIL ALERT

SEPTEMBER 2011

## Vahid Rofegar & Reza Kahnamoeei Iran



Vahid Rofegar Photo : FCNN

Sustained pressure from the authorities on Iranian Christians has resulted in further recent arrests of church leaders and new converts. According to reports received by the Iranian Christian News Agency Mohabat News, in one incident, two Azeri-speaking Christian converts, Vahid Rofegar (25) and Reza Kahnamoeei (25), who reside in the city of Tabriz (in the East Azerbaijan province in northwest Iran) were arrested by the security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran at 3pm on July 24.

The two men had travelled the 200 kilometres from Tabriz to visit family and friends in Kalibar and apparently their movements had been monitored since their arrival the previous day. Their condition since their arrest is unknown. Reports indicate that both men were identified and then pursued by security forces while they were riding on a motorcycle through the city of Kalibar. Once the men realised they were being chased and were likely to be arrested they attempted to escape. During the chase that followed, they were thrown to the ground when they lost control of the bike.

Eye-witnesses stated that both men, who had been injured as a result of the accident, were arrested and then beaten by the police before being taken into custody. 'Even though Reza's leg was badly hurt, the officers didn't care about his injuries and didn't provide any medical assistance,' they said. According to one report the security officers started swearing and savagely punching and kicking the two young Christians the moment it was discovered they were carrying Bibles. The two men were then transferred to a jail in Kalibar.

When their families heard what had happened they contacted the authorities to determine the condition of the two men. At that stage they were informed that both men would be released on July 31.

Following the detention security personnel undertook a thorough search of Vahid's home but apparently failed to find anything of any significance. There has been no news to date as to whether Reza's home has also been searched. Mohabat News says that although officials have made promises regarding their release, these two men remain in prison. The latest update on their case is that security officials have transferred them to a prison in the city of Abhar, and put them in separate cells.

Various Christian news commentators believe these arrests are directly related to the increasing pressure on the Azeri-speaking Christians of Iran. Recently, some pro-government websites appeared to confirm this while bemoaning the rise in the number of converts and the spread of Christianity in Iran and especially in the city of Tabriz. Majid Abhari, the adviser to the social commission of the Islamic parliament of Iran, recently said that 6,500 copies of the New Testament were seized in Abhar city in Northwest Iran. The majority of the nearly 300 believers arrested over the past year have been released, either on bail, or with severe warnings and threats against any further Christian activity. Some of those detained have been subjected to severe beatings and torture.

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

**'I am in chains for Christ'** Philippians 1:13

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## PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ That God will strengthen, protect and ultimately release both Vahid and Reza.
- ▶ For the families of persecuted believers in Iran.
- ▶ For wisdom for those advocating on their behalf.

## PLEASE WRITE

When writing please do not mention Release International, advance your political opinions or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities.

Send a card of encouragement to Vahid and Reza C/O Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 9RT.

You may also send a letter to the Iranian Ambassador in the UK, expressing your concern at the growing number of arrests and the increased harassment and discrimination faced by Christians in Iran.

Sample letter:

His Excellency Mr Rasoul Movahedian  
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 16 Prince's Gate, London SW7 1PT.

Your Excellency,

I would like to express my concern about the recent arrest and detention of two Azeri Christians, Vahid Rofegar and Reza Kahnamoei. The two men were arrested in the city of Kalibar on July 24, while visiting friends and family. I believe they are currently being held in a prison in Abhar City. In recent months there have been several arrests of Christians who appear to be law-abiding citizens and yet have been targeted in this way simply because of their Christian beliefs. The Iranian Constitution supports the rights of religious minorities in Iran and many in the international community are concerned that the actions of the Iranian authorities are both unconstitutional and unjust.

I respectfully petition your Government to ensure all of its citizens are afforded equal treatment under the law and that in the case of these two men their freedom to practise their faith is upheld, and that they are released.

Yours sincerely,

Release International produces the Prisoners of Faith alert every month as part of its ministry to support persecuted Christians. To receive your own copy free of charge by email, please register your details at [www.releaseinternational.org/signup](http://www.releaseinternational.org/signup).

If you would like to make a financial donation to support Christian Prisoners of Faith and their families, you may give securely online at [www.releaseinternational.org/donate](http://www.releaseinternational.org/donate), or by calling 01689 823491. Registered Charity 280577.

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