

PRISONER PROFILE

Prisoner Name: **Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz**

Location: **Iran**

Arrested: **December 2014**

Sentence: **Awaiting**

Current Status: **Released on bail**



Arrest and background

Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz is an Assyrian pastor whose pastoral role is officially recognised by the Iranian Government. He has served as a faithful minister in Iranian Pentecostal churches for many years, most recently in Tehran, as General Superintendent in Shahr-Ara Pentecostal Church.

As an ancient community of modern-day Iran, Assyrian Christians have been officially permitted to worship in their own language, which is a form of Aramaic. However, Pastor Victor's church in Tehran has remained closed since 2009 after he refused to comply with regulations that demanded Assyrian church leaders ban non-Assyrians from attending and stop services in Farsi, the language of the Muslim majority. Jonathan Betkolia, an Assyrian Member of Iran's Parliament, played a key role in the closure of the church. Influenced by Mr Betkolia, the Council for Assyrian Churches in Iran demoted Pastor Victor from his pastoral role and forced him to abandon official ministry. He has continued his ministry outside the official churches.

On December 26, 2014, Pastor Victor was arrested at his home while celebrating Christmas with a number of Christians. Apparently, the authorities deemed such a gathering to be 'unauthorised and illegal'. A large group of plain-clothes security police entered the house at 5.30pm and temporarily arrested all present. The police, who identified themselves as Revolutionary Guards, separated men from women and searched them, seizing all Bibles, mobile phones and identity documents. Two female officers conducted the body searches on female detainees. All detainees were filmed and asked to introduce themselves to the camera and say why they were there and why they thought they were being arrested. The Revolutionary Guards searched the house thoroughly and confiscated a computer, more mobile phones and several books. They then arrested Pastor Victor and took him to Evin prison. One of the Christian converts present, named Amin, was taken to a car to be questioned privately. Then a few officers took him to his house to search there. There have been no reports of his whereabouts since. The Revolutionary Guards released all of the other detainees, but warned them that they may be summoned to the office of the Intelligence Ministry for further investigation. The Guards left the house at 1am.

The 60-year-old pastor apparently suffers from diabetes and family members are concerned for his health. They are also unsure about what actual charge, if any, that Pastor Victor is being held under. In a very brief phone call from prison to his family, the pastor reportedly was forced to speak Farsi, instead of using his native language, so that guards could monitor what was said.

June 2015 - Expecting to be summoned to court

Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz is expected to be summoned to court soon. Following his arrest at his home in Roudehen, Damavand County, Tehran Province on Boxing Day 2014, Victor was released on bail in March 2015. Pastor Victor, who has been in poor health of late, has had difficulty finding a lawyer to defend him as some have experienced a backlash after representing Christians in court. Pray that Pastor Victor will be acquitted.

Please pray

1. That any charges against Pastor Victor would be dropped and that he would be released.
2. That he would experience God's presence, peace and power.
3. For his immediate family and wider circle of friends.

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 Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz

Please consider sending a card or letter of encouragement to Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz to let him know that he is being prayed for. Release will endeavour to forward these cards and letters to Pastor Victor.

Mark cards for Pastor Victor and send to: Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 4RT

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