

Prisoners of faith

release
PRISONERS

EMAIL ALERT

FEBRUARY 2011

Vahik & Sonia Iran



Photo : FCNN

Pastor Vahik Abrahamian and his wife Sonia Keshish-Avanessian, along with Arash Kermanjani and his wife Arezo Teymouri, have been imprisoned for almost five months following their arrest on September 4. Sonia who was pregnant at the time of their arrest is reported to have lost her baby while in prison. She had previously suffered three miscarriages.

The two couples, who are close friends, were at the Abrahamians' home in Hamadan when they were detained by agents of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. On the same day, several other Christians in various parts of the city were also arrested. Two of those arrested spent a month in prison before being released; the condition and whereabouts of two other detainees is not known.

The Abrahamians and their friends spent the first 40 days of their detention in solitary confinement. They are now allowed family visits. Each of the families of those imprisoned were threatened with dire consequences if they publicised the matter – a warning they initially heeded. But after several months with no sign of any positive developments they have spoken out and appealed for Christians across the world to pray that their loved ones be released.

Both of the detained couples have been accused of a variety of offences including being connected with exiled opposition sources, propagating Christianity in Iran, opposing the Islamic Republic and the formation of opposition groups in and out of the country. Their family and friends say these allegations are absurd.

Pastor Vahik and his wife, who are in their 40s, spend much of their time working with drug addicts and helping the needy and disadvantaged. He spent 53 days in prison earlier in 2010 after being arrested on false allegations in February. Arash and Arezo, who are in their early 30s, are new Christian converts.

It has been reported that all four suffered intense physical abuse and psychological pressure at the Ministry of Islamic Guidance prison before their move to Hamadan prison. The totalitarian Islamic regime in Iran is a severe persecutor of Christians, especially converts; President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has reportedly pledged to 'stop Christianity in this country'.

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

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

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PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ That both couples will be released
- ▶ That God will comfort, strengthen and protect each of them
- ▶ That God will touch the hearts of Iranian officials overseeing their case

PLEASE WRITE

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

Sample letter which may be emailed to : info_leader@leader.ir
Or posted to: Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei at the following address:

Leader of the Islamic Republic
Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street - End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern about the arrest and detention of four Iranian Christians who are currently being held at Hamadan prison. Mr. Vahik Abrahamian, Iranian passport nr. R2384252, his wife Mrs. Sonia Keshish-Avanesian, Iranian passport nr. U16390013, Mr. Arash Kermanjani, Iranian passport nr. A12223128, and his wife Mrs. Arezo Teymouri were arrested in Mr. Abrahamian's residence in Hamadan on September 4, 2010. They spent the first 40 days in solitary confinement. According to information I have received these four people have been arrested solely for the peaceful exercise of their Christian beliefs.

International law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Iran is a state party, clearly states that everyone has the right 'to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice' and to 'either individually or in community with others and in public or private, manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching'. Therefore I respectfully petition your intervention in this case to ensure that the basic human rights of these four Christians are respected. If indeed they are detained solely due to the peaceful exercise of their religious convictions, I request their immediate and unconditional release.

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.

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