

October 12, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

We write as an informal group of organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious leaders, human rights advocates, and practitioners to express our deep concern for Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, an Iranian Christian pastor who has been convicted of apostasy and sentenced to death. On behalf of Pastor Nadarkhani, and others persecuted for their faith in Iran, we urge you to use all diplomatic efforts to call for his immediate and unconditional release.

On October 13, 2009, Pastor Nadarkhani's was arrested after attempting to invoke his rights under the Iranian Constitution to educate his children according to the religious teachings of his family. After being brought before a tribunal, Pastor Nadarkhani was formally charged with apostasy (turning one's back on Islam). Almost a year later, in September 2010, a state court convicted Pastor Nadarkhani and sentenced him to death by hanging. Affirming this conviction and death sentence, the Iranian Supreme Court remanded the case to the state court for further investigation, stating that "if it can be proved that he was a practicing Muslim as an adult and has not repented, the execution will be carried out."

Recently, September 25-28, 2011, the state court held four days of hearings, during which the judges determined that Pastor Nadarkhani had abandoned the faith of his ancestors and must face execution unless he recants. Each day of the hearings, the Judges asked Pastor Nadarkhani to recant his faith, to this he replied, "Repent means to return. What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ?" The judges replied, "To the religion of your ancestors, Islam." To which he replied, "I cannot." We still await the formal written decision from these hearings.

We are painfully aware of Iran's systematic targeting of its religious minorities. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of the Guardian Council, recently publicly demonized non-Muslim, referring to them as "sinful animals" and "corrupt." In October 2010, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei publicly stated that "enemies of Islam" are using the spread of Sufism, the Baha'i faith, and Christian house churches to weaken the faith of young people in society. As State Department Spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said "[there are] thousands who face persecution for their religious beliefs in Iran, including the seven leaders of the Baha'i community ... and hundreds of Sufis who have been flogged in public because of their beliefs. While Iran's leaders hypocritically claim to promote tolerance, they continue to detain, imprison, harass, and abuse those who

simply wish to worship the faith of their choosing.” This systematic religious cleansing will continue if we do not speak up on behalf of those persecuted.

Pastor Nadarkhani’s conviction and death sentence violate both the Iranian Constitution and the nation’s obligations under international law. Imposing the death penalty for changing religion blatantly violates one of the most fundamental of all human rights, the exercise of religious freedom. The right to freedom of religion is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran has pledged to uphold. Moreover, this fundamental right is enshrined in Articles 13, 14, and 23 of Iran’s Constitution. Article 23 of the Iranian Constitution provides that the “investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.” Pastor Nadarkhani’s conviction and pending execution, demonstrates an utter disregard for the fundamental freedom of religion.

As your State Department has reported, Iran has a history of carrying out executions before releasing formal decisions and without notice to the family. It is with grave concern that we impress upon you our belief that Pastor Nadarkhani could face execution at any moment, even before a written verdict is supplied. For this reason, we implore you to raise your voice at this critical juncture on behalf of Pastor Nadarkhani. It is time he be released to his wife and two children. We must not stand by while the Iranian Regime executes an innocent man.

As the Secretary of State for the United States, we urge you to raise this issue with the United Nations and with Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The OIC’s charter declares that is organized to adhere “to the principles of the United Nations Charter, the present Charter and International Law; [and] to preserve and promote the lofty Islamic values of peace, compassion, tolerance, equality, justice and human dignity.” According to these principles, Iran’s pattern of gross and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of its minority religions must be brought to the forefront of the OIC’s agenda. For these reasons, we implore you to do all you can through diplomatic efforts and to rally the international community to do the same.

Respectfully,

American Center for Law & Justice

Baptist World Alliance

Advocates International

Jubilee Campaign

The Institute on Religion and Public Policy

Institute for Global Engagement

Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union

Andrew Apostolou, Freedom House

Dr. Carl Moeller, President & CEO, Open Doors USA

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the US

Hindu American Foundation

Law and Liberty Trust

Church of Scientology, Washington, DC

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty

Dan Fefferman, President of International Coalition for Religious Freedom

Greg Mitchell, President of The Mitchell Firm

Thomas F. Farr, Georgetown University

Dr. Richard Land, President of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty
Commission

Dr. Joel C. Hunter, Senior Pastor of Northland – A Church Distributed

C. Naseer Ahmad, AZI Consulting Inc.

Dr. Katrin Michael, Writer

Paul Marshall, Senior Fellow at Center for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute

Stephen Baskerville, Associate Professor of Government, Patrick Henry College

Senge Sering, President of the Institute for Gilgit Baltistan Studies