



20 ANNUAL  
26 REPORT

# SCAPEGOATS

*Rights Violations  
Against Christians in IRAN*



OpenDoors



CSW everyone  
free to believe  
Christian Solidarity Worldwide

In memory of those  
who gave their lives in  
the pursuit of freedom



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*in national and international law*

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# Executive Summary

On 28 December 2025, protests began to erupt in Iran, leading to weeks-long nationwide demonstrations calling for an end to the Islamic Republic's leadership of the country. The response to those protests has been horrifying, with reports of many thousands killed, including several Christians, and every Iranian - regardless of their religious background - affected. The road ahead for Iran appears far from clear, but as we release this latest annual report of rights violations committed against Christians in 2025, we stand with the people of Iran in their call for leaders who will act on their behalf, rather than repress them. For 47 years, the Iranian people have been subjected to a regime that not only consistently fails to uphold human rights for its citizens, but brutally quashes dissenting voices, opinions or beliefs. This report details the violations throughout 2025 experienced by just one section of society - the Christian community.

The 12-day war with Israel was a pivotal moment in 2025, which impacted all Iranians but left minorities especially vulnerable to targeting and scapegoating. After the cessation of hostilities on 24 June, a group of United Nations (UN) experts issued a **statement** about the "intensified risk of [minorities] being scapegoated at this time of heightened political pressure", warning that any arrests "may be in violation [of] article 2 of the ICCPR [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] and article 2 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination... which prohibit discrimination and guarantee equal protection under the law, regardless of race, religion and belief, or national origin".

Over 50 Christians were arrested within the next month, a fact confirmed by a **statement** of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), which labelled those arrested as "Mossad mercenaries" who had been "trained abroad under the guise of the 'Zionist' Christian evangelisation movement".

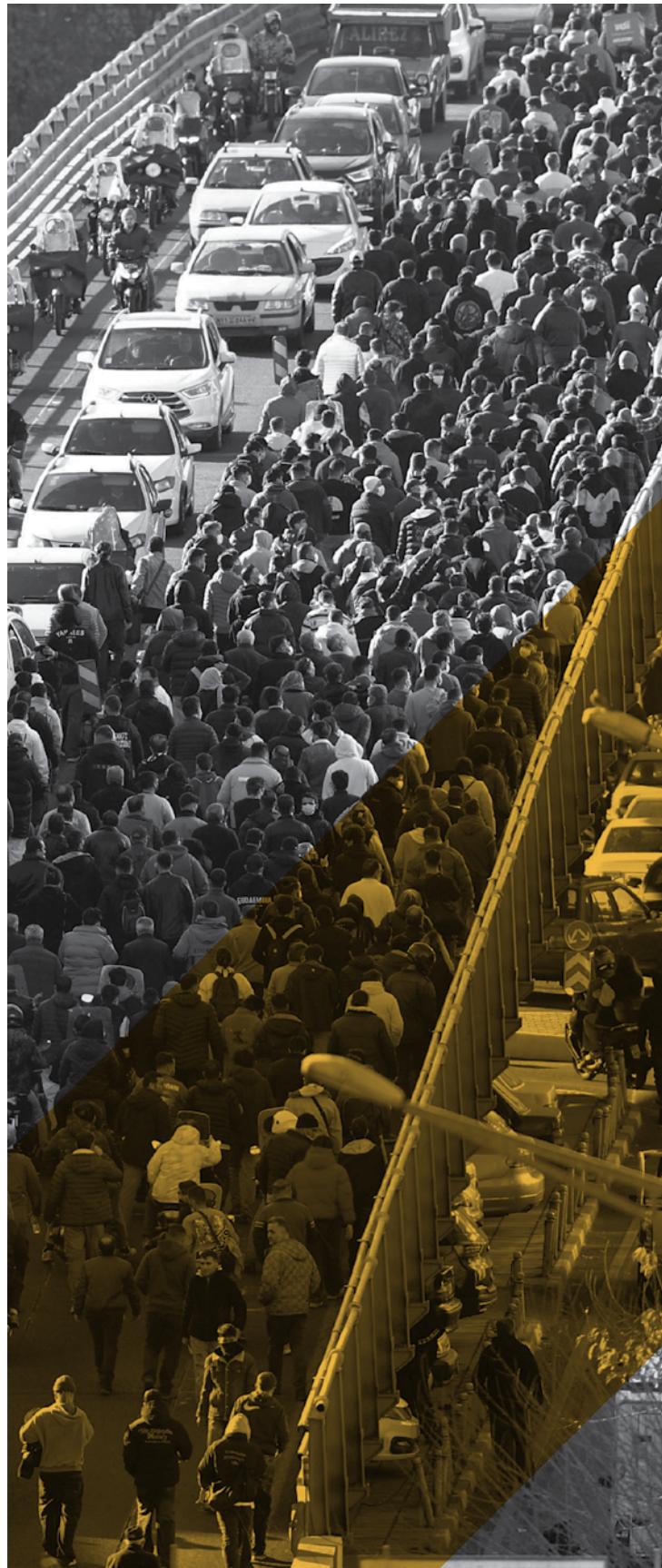


Such rhetoric was ramped up in August, when state media released a documentary-style **report** showing footage of some of the arrested Christians attending a gathering in Türkiye; screenshots of confiscated items including New Testaments; and alleged surveillance recordings of Bibles being “smuggled” into Iran. The forced confessions of some of the arrested Christians were also included in the report, during which they admitted to travelling abroad to receive religious instruction.

In stark contrast, in October a separate state media video report **warmly welcomed** the unveiling of a metro station in Tehran named after the Virgin Mary. It included an interview with an Armenian church leader in Iran, who **stated**: “Anyone who believes that religious minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran face pressure and lack freedom in practising their rituals will be surprised to witness this event, certainly.”

The contrasting reports show clearly how the two different types of Christians in Iran are viewed by the authorities. On the one hand, recognised Christians of Armenian or Assyrian descent are lauded in public; provided with political representation in the parliament; access to churches; and freedom to worship in their own ethnic minority languages – though not to open

**50+**  
**Christians were**  
**arrested within a**  
**single month**



# 280+ years of prison sentences in 2025

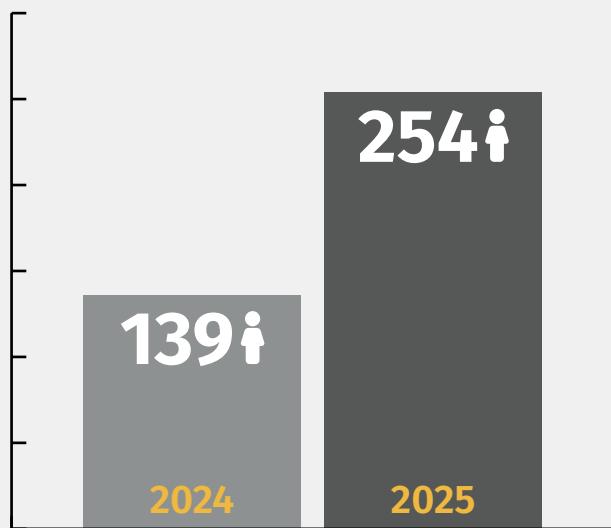
their doors to converts, or to preach in Persian. Indeed, it should be noted that at least five of the Christians who remained detained in Iran on charges related to their religious activities at the end of 2025 were ethnic Armenians. Unrecognised converts to Christianity, meanwhile, who are believed to **far outnumber** the recognised Christians, face vilification as alleged "security threats"; lack any **place to worship**; and are arrested for praying and worshipping together in their homes, in what are termed "illegal gatherings" of "**enemy groups**".

At least four trials involving Christians facing charges related to their beliefs or religious activities were postponed during the conflict, but **calls to temporarily release prisoners of conscience**, especially in detention centres close to conflict zones, were ignored. At least 11 Christians were among those detained in Tehran's Evin Prison when Israel **attacked** the facility on 23 June. After the strike, male prisoners were transferred to Greater Tehran Penitentiary and female prisoners to Qarchak Prison in Varamin, while Evin Prison underwent repairs. Rights organisations reported unsuitable conditions, including severe overcrowding in both prisons, prompting Amnesty International to initiate an urgent **appeal** on behalf of prisoners. Christians involved in the prison transfers confirmed the dire conditions, with one female prisoner saying they had been transferred in "such a disgraceful manner, handcuffed", and were "suffering without clean water, cooling, or heating, lacking hygiene and proper food, entangled and helpless".

Following the conflict, the sentencing and imprisonment of Christians resumed, with at least four Christians beginning prison sentences in the month of November alone, while Christians were sentenced to a combined total of over 280 years in prison across 2025.

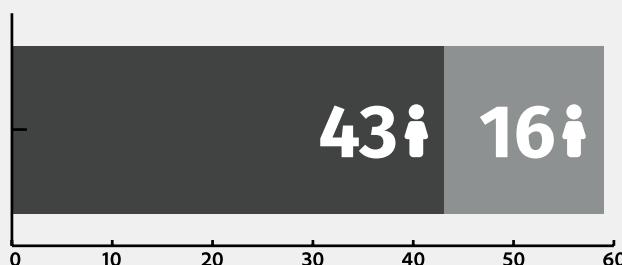
# 2025 in numbers

**≥254** Christians were arrested, nearly twice as many as in 2024.



**≥57** Christians served sentences of imprisonment, exile or forced labour, while **24** others paid fines to avoid imprisonment.

**≥43** Christians were still serving sentences at the end of 2025, while **≥16** others remained in pre-trial detention.

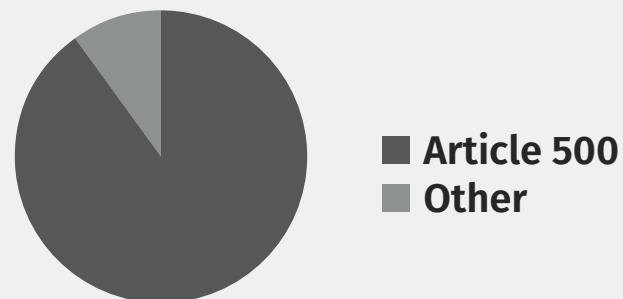


Christians were sentenced to a total of over **280** years in prison - a higher figure than 2024, despite involving fewer individuals, conveying a trend towards harsher sentences.

The sentences of the **≥73** Christians convicted in 2025 also included considerably harsher supplementary punishments, including a total of **249** years of social deprivation - such as to health, employment or education - and **9** years in exile.

**≥11** Christians were handed prison sentences of **10** years or more.

In the vast majority of cases (nearly **90%**), charges against Christians were brought under the amended **Article 500** (Article 500 bis) of the penal code, which criminalises "propaganda contrary to the holy religion of Islam".



**≥5** Christians faced charges under the new espionage law brought in following the 12-day war, resulting in combined sentences of over 40 years in prison.

Christians' personal property, including Bibles and other Christian literature, was ordered to be confiscated by the state in at least **2** cases, for the "research" purposes of the MOIS.

In an unpublicised case, an army officer's employment was terminated after 23 years of service because of his conversion to Christianity, while **≥5** Christian converts were referred by court order to "cult treatment clinics", with the stated aim of "returning them to the holy religion of Islam".

Severe mistreatment of Christian prisoners was another notable characteristic of 2025, including **denial of healthcare, psychological torture**, and a reported **beating**. Another shocking moment was the sentencing of a **pregnant Christian convert** to 16 years in prison, on International Women's Day. Meanwhile, an Iranian-Armenian Christian who received his second 10-year prison sentence in 2025 was **prevented from attending his mother's funeral** when she died two months after his re-arrest; one of the Christian converts sentenced alongside him suffered a stroke while being held in solitary confinement; and another **fractured her spine** after falling out of her prison bunk bed, then developed an infection after being returned to prison too soon. It was later reported that she was at risk of paralysis. In addition, a former asylum-seeker released after over 15 months in Evin Prison was reported to be in a "psychologically unstable state" after being forced to spend the final weeks of her detention in the infamous Ward 209, which is under the control of the MOIS.

The targeting of Christians involved in Bible distribution continued to be a theme in 2025, with at least 21 Christians receiving custodial sentences related to their alleged involvement in the distribution of Bibles in Iran, in addition to other forms of punishment, such as fines, exile, and social

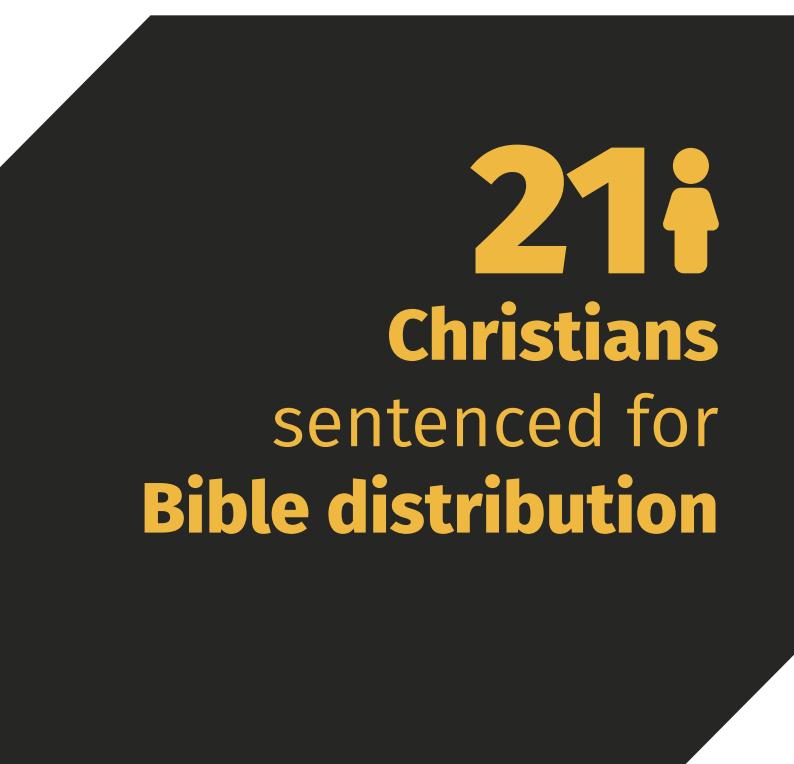
deprivation. One of our key recommendations is for Iran to reopen the Bible Society, whose "temporary closure" in 1990 remains in force more than 35 years later, and whose reopening would make it unnecessary for Christians to bring Bibles into Iran from abroad.

We call on the international community to hold Iran accountable for its failures to uphold its obligations under Article 18 of the ICCPR, whose definition of religious freedom includes freedom to adopt a faith of one's choosing and to practise it in public or private.

We also call for urgent measures to be taken to uphold the rights of all Iranians in accordance with international law, and specifically ask for the reopening of forcibly closed churches and for clarity on where Persian-speaking Christians may worship freely in their mother tongue, free from fear of arrest and prosecution.

We ask the United Nations, its Special Rapporteurs, and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran to include the situation of Christians (and particularly Christian converts) in all reporting on human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and encourage Member States to speak out against all violations of Iranian Christians' rights both in public and in private.

Finally, we ask countries hosting Iranian Christians who have claimed asylum to assess their cases with due diligence, recognising their well-founded fear of experiencing persecution if returned, given the ongoing harassment and severe mistreatment of individuals identified as engaging in ordinary Christian activity. This was demonstrated clearly in the **indictment** against five Christians **sentenced** to a combined over 50 years in prison in 2025, in which purported evidence of their alleged crimes included praying, performing baptisms, taking Communion and celebrating Christmas.



**21**  
**Christians**  
**sentenced for**  
**Bible distribution**

# Trends



## I

## Sharp increase in arrests after ceasefire

At the end of the conflict with Israel, the post-war security context provided the regime with justification for expanded domestic security crackdowns. Consequently, religious-freedom violations merged with broader security and ideological repression.

Reported violations of the rights of Iranian Christians clearly indicate that they were among those targeted and scapegoated as alleged security threats.

In the six-month period 1 January to the beginning of the ceasefire on 24 June, a total of 40 arrests of Christians had at that time been documented by the report authors. In the following month alone, at least 54 arrests were then **documented** in at least 19 cities throughout Iran. On 27 July, the targeting of nearly that precise number of Christians was confirmed in a **statement** by the MOIS to the Iranian Students' News Agency, announcing that 53 "trained elements" (referring to evangelical Christians) had been "neutralised".

## II

## Hate speech from government-linked sources

In March, the Persian New Year coincided with the commemoration of the death of Shia Imam Ali and the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Iran Wire [noted](#) a surge in hate speech against religious minorities, including 138 instances of hate speech directed against Christian converts or ethnic Christians. "The Islamic Republic has stoked sectarian tensions, a policy designed to keep various ethnic and religious minorities at each other's throats and less attentive to the human rights abuses of the Iranian government," the report stated.

The defamation of evangelical Christians, casting them as a foreign "Zionist" entity, facilitated their portrayal as security threats post the 12-day war. Following the ceasefire, a [report](#) on one website linked to the intelligence agencies of the Islamic Republic claimed: "These days, the mask has fallen from many of the claimants of patriotism, and it should not be forgotten that the most active enemies of Iran at this critical moment were elements affiliated with the evangelical Christian movement, who were happy about the attack on Iran and prayed for the victory of the 'Zionist' terrorists on virtual platforms and satellite networks."

## III

## IRGC's growing role in intelligence gathering and arrests

Whereas in previous years the MOIS was the main government body responsible for the monitoring and gathering evidence against Christians, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is now playing an increasing role in intelligence gathering and prosecutions, suggesting high-level state coordination of repression. The stated purpose of the IRGC is to defend the Islamic Republic, so the increasing role of the IRGC in arrests of Christians clearly indicates that the regime perceives them as a threat. Such an assessment is also clear from official statements, in which

house-churches have been labelled as [enemy groups](#). IRGC involvement in raids tends to be characterised by increased brutality. One example was a [raid](#) by at least 20 plainclothes IRGC agents in February, which targeted a gathering of Christians in a garden in Gatab, Mazandaran Province. The agents tore cross necklaces off several of the Christians, causing injuries; confiscated Bibles and musical instruments; and arrested one of those present. In December, a Christian convert who was also arrested and detained by IRGC agents [testified](#): "The way the IRGC act is very different from the MOIS. IRGC agents go to homes without a legal warrant and arrest people. They say obscene and offensive things and insult and humiliate them."



## IV

## Criminalisation of Bible possession and distribution

Globally, the Bible Society plays a key role in the translation, publishing and distribution of Bibles, and the presence of the Bible Society in Iran dates back to 1811, with the visit of Henry Martyn and revision of his Persian translation of the New Testament. However, since the forced closure and confiscation of the Bible Society's premises in Tehran in 1990, Christians have found it challenging to access printed Bibles and the Iranian authorities have criminalised importing and distributing Bibles.

A year after the Bible Society's closure, Iran's representative at the United Nations wrote to the UN's special rapporteur, saying the Bible Society had been "temporarily closed", pending investigation of "violations of the Islamic Republic's laws and regulations" – without specifying which – and adding that "when the situation of the accused becomes clear, the Society could continue its activities". Yet despite the passage of years, the Bible Society remains closed, and the Bible and other Christian books are frequently treated as illegal contraband and evidence of a crime.

At least 21 Christians received custodial sentences in 2025 related to their alleged involvement in the distribution of Bibles in Iran, in addition to other forms of punishment, such as fines, exile, and social deprivation. One example came in June, when it was reported that two Christian converts had been **convicted**, under Article 500 bis, of "propaganda activity of deviant Christian 'Zionist' beliefs opposed to the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran", for which they were given 10 years each in prison; and of "distributing smuggled goods" (Bibles), under Articles 22 and 24, for which they received two years and additional fines. They were tried in absentia and the only evidence produced against them was the Bibles and other Christian literature found in their homes.

Contempt for the Bible can also be seen in a reference to it to as a "prohibited book" in the indictment against two Iranian-Armenians and three Christian converts, who were **charged** with "propaganda" and "collusion" in June, and in November were **sentenced** to a combined total of over 50 years in prison. In several other court verdicts in 2025, the Bible was referred to as a "distorted", "deviant", "corrupt", or "misleading" book.

## V

## Widespread use of Article 500 bis

In 2021, Iran's parliament amended Articles 499 and 500 of the penal code to increase penalties and broaden the scope against those who could be charged respectively with membership of a group "aiming to perturb the security of the country" or of engaging in "propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran". Civil rights organisations, such as Article 19, accurately **foretold** that the provisions would be used to "choke the freedoms" and intensify the criminalisation of minorities. The UN Human Rights Committee subsequently called on the Islamic Republic to "**repeal or amend**" both articles. In last year's report, it was noted that over 70% of charges against Christians in the previous year had been filed under Article 500 bis. In 2025, that figure rose to nearly 90%.



## VI

## Training abroad monitored and included in chargesheet

Due to the lack of freedom to worship in the Islamic Republic of Iran and associated fear of arrest and prosecution for meeting together, Christian converts have often relied on opportunities to gather in neighbouring countries for worship, prayer and theological training from Iranians in the diaspora to better understand the Bible and Christian doctrine and practice. However, it is well-known that Iranian intelligence agencies have sought to infiltrate such gatherings and gather intelligence through informants. In 2025, participation in such events was included in the charges brought against Christian converts and used to criminalise Christian activities held outside the country. For example, in July, Judge Ashkan Ramesh of the Varamin Revolutionary Court **convicted** five Christian converts under Articles 500, 500 bis, and 514 of the Islamic Penal Code in relation to their participation in Christian courses in Türkiye, amongst other accusations brought against them.

Christian asylum-seekers from Iran are also at risk of prosecution for their religious activities while abroad if they return or are forcibly returned to Iran, as seen in the case of **Laleh Saati**, whose two-year prison sentence was based on “evidence” including photographs and videos of her Christian activities and baptism while seeking asylum in Malaysia. **Mehran Shamlou**, **Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh** and **Amir-Ali Minaei** are other examples of Christians now imprisoned, having returned to Iran from abroad.

**Nearly 90% of charges against Christians in 2025 were brought under Art. 500 bis**

The possibility of arrest and prosecution for Christian activities overseas needs to be seriously taken into consideration by immigration authorities assessing the asylum claims of Iranian Christians and the risk of their return.

## VII

## Heavier prison sentences

The penalties for convictions under Articles 499 bis and 500 bis were increased when these articles were amended and signed into law in 2021 and they have since been applied to Christians, resulting in heavier prison sentences – a maximum of 10 years, up from five years, “if they received financial or organisational help from outside the country”. The five Christian converts in Varamin mentioned above were each handed prison **sentences** of seven years and six months under Article 500 bis, while at least 11 Christians were sentenced to prison terms of 10 years or more in 2025, with most convicted under Article 500 bis.



## VIII

## Mistreatment of detained Christians

Article 10.1 of the ICCPR states: "All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person", but a concerning trend in 2025 was the frequency of reports regarding the mistreatment of Christian prisoners, including **denial of healthcare, psychological torture**, and even physical abuse. One Christian convert went on **hunger strike** in April to protest mistreatment after being refused access to a telephone. He had also been **physically assaulted** by a prison officer after requesting specialised medical care for a heart condition.

Another detained Christian, who received his second 10-year sentence in 2025, was **prevented from attending his mother's funeral** when she died two months after his re-arrest, while one of the Christian converts sentenced alongside him suffered a stroke while being held in solitary confinement and was returned to his cell after just two days of treatment in hospital, still complaining of lack of movement in his left-side.

In October, a Christian convert **fractured her spine** after falling from her prison bunk bed and only received necessary surgery after fellow prisoners protested on her behalf. She later developed an infection after being returned from hospital too soon, and was said to be at risk of paralysis.

Meanwhile, another female Christian prisoner of conscience was **denied access to medical care** following a fall in which she broke two fingers, and on her release after over 15 months in Evin Prison was **reported** to be in a "psychologically unstable state" after being forced to spend the final weeks of her detention in the ward controlled by the MOIS. In December, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom **named** Evin Prison, where most Christian prisoners are held, among five facilities worldwide where religious prisoners of conscience are most mistreated.

# 2025 INCIDENTS

108  
DETAINED



692  
INDIVIDUALS  
AFFECTED\*



254  
ARRESTED



73  
SENTENCED



57  
ENDURED  
IMPRISONMENT



\* Defendants directly affected by a Christian's detention

# Timeline

*The following incidents have all been reported either publicly or from trusted sources from inside Iran. However, many more go unreported, either because no-one raises awareness – arresting authorities frequently issue threats against publicity – or because those involved request confidentiality.*

## January

On **4 January**, Catholic convert Ghazal Marzban was **released** from Evin Prison in Tehran after serving one-third of her six-month sentence for “propaganda against the regime by chanting slogans”. The remainder of her sentence, including 74 lashes, will be enforced should she commit another “offence” within the next five years.



Ghazal Marzban

On **9 January**, four Christian converts arrested at a Christmas gathering near Isfahan in 2021 were charged under Article 500 bis. In **March**, two of the Christians, brothers Mahmoud and Mansour Mardani-Kharaji, were informed that they had been **sentenced** to four years in prison, fined around \$1,500 each, banned from membership of any groups for five years after their release, and must spend the first two of those years outside the bounds of their home province of Isfahan. The charges against the other two Christians were dropped. The two brothers **began serving their sentences** on **16 December** and **20 December**, respectively, in Isfahan’s Dastgerd Prison.



Mansour Mardani



Mahmoud Mardani

On **10 January**, a Christian convert from Tehran serving a sentence of three years and seven months for “propaganda activities against the regime through establishing a house-church”, Amir-Ali Minaei, was **denied conditional release** from Evin Prison, after MOIS agents accused him of failing to “cooperate”. On **19 March**, it was reported that Mr Minaei, who has a heart condition, had been **assaulted** by a prison guard after requesting a referral to a cardiologist. On **12 April**, he began a **hunger strike** after being denied access to a telephone. He **ended** it two days later after receiving reassurances.



Amir-Ali Minaei

Also in **January**, two Christian converts from Tabriz were convicted, in an unpublicised case, of “propaganda against the state” under Article 500 bis. One has filed an appeal against a five-year prison sentence and deprivation of social rights for 15 years; the other was fined 250 million tomans (nearly \$2,000) and sentenced to deprivation of social rights for six years.

## February

On the morning of **6 February**, Iranian-Armenian Christian Joseph Shahbazian and Christian converts Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh and Aida Najaflou were **arrested** at their homes in the Tehran region, and taken to Evin Prison. Mr Shahbazian and Mr Gol-Tapeh, who are both in their sixties, were previously “pardoned” and released after a combined six years in prison on charges related to their leadership of house-churches. Mr Gol-Tapeh **refused to eat** following his re-arrest, and on **17 March** was found facedown in his cell, having **suffered a stroke**. He was rushed to the nearby Bani-Hashem Hospital, where he was treated and provided with a range of exercises to help him seek to regain movement in the left-hand side of his body. Two days later, he was returned to the general ward of Evin Prison. On **9 April**, Mr Shahbazian’s 79-year-old mother **passed away**, and on **12 April** his wife, Lida, was **arrested**. Neither was permitted to attend Mr Shahbazian’s mother’s **funeral** on **14 April**. On **13 May**, Mrs Shahbazian was **released on bail** equivalent to \$50,000, after weeks in **solitary confinement**. Ms Najaflou, however, remained in detention, as she **could not afford the \$130,000 bail** set for her. On **10 June**, Mr and Mrs Shahbazian, Mr Gol-Tapeh, Ms Najaflou and one other Christian whose name has not been made public were **charged** with “gathering and collusion” and “propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran”. Ordinary Christian acts such as praying, performing baptisms, taking Communion and celebrating Christmas were cited as evidence of their alleged crimes. Ms Najaflou faced two additional charges – “propaganda activity against the Islamic Republic of Iran in the cyberspace” and “propaganda in favour of groups or organisations opposed to the Islamic Republic of Iran” – due to allegedly posting on social media in support of the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement and against the former leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah. Their first court hearing, which lasted over three hours, **took place** on **6 September** at the 15th Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, under notorious judge Abolqasem Salavati. On **31 October**, Ms Najaflou, who has arthritis, suffered a **spinal fracture** after falling out of her prison bunk bed. She was sent to Taleghani Hospital in Tehran, but denied proper medical treatment and returned to prison the same day – on a stretcher and still in severe pain. This decision provoked protests from other political and religious prisoners in the women’s ward, prompting prison authorities to eventually transfer her to another hospital, Shahid Tajrish, where she was operated on. A week later she was returned to prison, but on **16 November** she was **rushed back to hospital** after her wound became infected. Ms Najaflou was returned to Evin Prison six days later, but on **7 December** her lawyer **warned** she may be at risk of paralysis.

On **9 December**, it was reported that the five Christians had been **sentenced** to a total of over 50 years in prison. The court also ordered the confiscation of the Christians’ personal property, including Bibles and other Christian literature, for the “research” purposes of the MOIS. On **21 December**, Ms Najaflou was **temporarily released** on a three-month medical furlough after submitting bail equivalent to over \$75,000.



Lida Shahbazian



Joseph Shahbazian



Nasser Navard G-T



Aida Najaflou

On the evening of **6 February**, at least 20 plainclothes IRGC officers raided a gathering of around 80 Christians in Gatab, Mazandaran Province, confiscating Bibles and musical instruments, and **arresting** Christian convert Somayeh Rajabi. The agents conducted **body searches**, with those wearing cross necklaces singled out and officers forcibly tearing them off, injuring several individuals. Emergency medical personnel who attempted to assist the injured were blocked by the agents. A day after her arrest, Ms Rajabi was permitted a brief phone call to her family, informing them that she had been transferred to a prison in Sari. She was later transferred to Mati Kola Prison in Babol. On **8 March**, she was **released on bail** of over \$40,000, after being charged with "gathering and collusion" and "propaganda against the regime". On **15 April**, Ms Rajabi and six others were summoned to offer their final defence at the prosecutor's office of Babol, which is the final step before an indictment. At the time of writing, no further updates had been received.



Somayeh Rajabi

On **15 February**, three Christian converts from Tehran – Mehran Shamlou, pregnant Narges Nasri and Abbas Souri, who was previously arrested in 2020 and **sentenced** to exile in 2022 – were **charged** with "membership of opposition groups", "propaganda against the system" and "propaganda activities contrary to Islamic law through foreign relations," under Articles 499, 500 and 500 bis, respectively. On **8 March**, they were **sentenced** by notorious Revolutionary Court judge Iman Afshari to a total of over 40 years in prison. Ms Nasri received the stiffest sentence – 10 years for "propaganda activities contrary to Islamic law", five for membership of an "opposition group" (house-church) and one year for "propaganda against the state" – for posting on social media in support of the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement. Mr Souri received a total of 15 years in prison – 10 years for "propaganda activities" and five for membership of an "opposition group" – while Mr Shamlou received an eight-year sentence for the first charge and two years and eight months for the second. All three were also sentenced to years of deprivation of social rights – 15 years each for Ms Nasri and Mr Souri, and 11 years for Mr Shamlou – while Ms Nasri and Mr Souri were fined \$3,500, and Mr Shamlou \$2,750. Ms Nasri and Mr Souri were also banned from membership of any group, residing in their home province of Tehran, or leaving Iran for two years after their release. On **23 April**, their **appeal was rejected**, and on **7 May** they were **summoned** to begin their sentences or forfeit bail equivalent to more than \$20,000 each. The Christians had already fled the country, but on **3 July** Mr Shamlou was deported from Türkiye and flown back to Mashhad, where he was **arrested at the airport**. He was transferred first to Greater Tehran Penitentiary, and then to Evin Prison. On **4 September**, it was reported that his application for a retrial had been **rejected** by Iran's Supreme Court.



Mehran Shamlou



Narges Nasri



Abbas Souri

Multiple Christian converts were arrested in **February** in various locations throughout Iran: two were arrested in Lorestan, one man being provisionally released after 10 days in detention, the other after 12. A female Christian convert was arrested in Shiraz and kept detained for three weeks before being released on bail, while in Mashhad a married couple was arrested and detained for over six weeks, being eventually released on bail. It is not yet known what charges these individuals, none of whose cases have been reported, might face. Meanwhile, an unnamed female Christian convert - a widow with two children, one with special needs - was arrested in Karaj. Following a court hearing in the summer, she was sentenced to two years in prison for "propaganda against the state" under Article 500 bis. The sentence was later reduced to 16 months, and she was released on parole in **October**.

Also in **February**, an unnamed Christian convert from Karaj received an eight-month prison sentence for “propaganda against the state” under Article 500 bis and a fine of 142 million tomans (around \$1,100) for possession of forbidden goods (Bibles) under Articles 22 and 40 of **the Law on Combating the Smuggling of Goods and Foreign Exchange (2013)**. An appeal hearing in **July** was unsuccessful, and he started serving his sentence in Evin Prison that month. In **November**, he was released to serve the remaining 200 days under house arrest with an ankle tag.

## March

On **1 March**, the six-year prison sentence of Christian convert Mina Khajavi – for “acting against national security by promoting ‘Zionist’ Christianity” – was reduced to two years. On **20 October**, the 61-year-old from Tehran was **released** from Evin Prison, having completed her reduced sentence, including time spent in pre-trial detention. Ms Khajavi had not fully recovered from an ankle fracture when she began her prison sentence in January 2024, and was denied the opportunity for further treatment during her incarceration.



Mina Khajavi

Also in **March**, **photographs** emerged showing the deterioration of a once renowned hospital founded by and named after Christian missionaries. The “Missionary Hospital” in Kerman, southeastern Iran, is recognised as a national monument. One **report** suggested part of the hospital had been deliberately destroyed, and that it had become a dwelling place for rough sleepers and addicts.



*The “Missionary Hospital” in Kerman*

## April

On **16 April**, Christian converts Mehdi Rahimi and Kia Nourinia were **sentenced** by a Tabriz Revolutionary Court to 12 years in prison on charges related to their possession of multiple copies of the Bible. They were convicted under Article 500 bis of “propaganda activity of deviant Christian ‘Zionist’ beliefs opposed to the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, for which



Kia Nourinia



Mehdi Rahimi

they were given 10 years; and of “distributing smuggled goods” (Bibles), under Articles 22 and 24, for which they received two years and fines of over \$1,000 each. They were also told they must pay the court 10 times the value of the Bibles in their possession. Judge Hassan Fathnezhad also sentenced them to 15 years of deprivation of social rights. The two Christians fled the country after their arrests in November 2024, so were tried in absentia, with the only evidence against them being the Bibles and other Christian literature found in their homes. In his verdict, the judge described the Bibles and other confiscated Christian literature as “deviant” and “misleading”. He added that the confiscated books, as well as the Christians’ mobile phones and other electronic devices, would be given to the MOIS for their “research”.

Also in **April**, Laleh Saati, a Christian convert from Tehran serving a two-year prison sentence for “acting against national security by connecting with ‘Zionist’ Christian organisations”, was **denied access** to specialised medical care and a furlough despite badly breaking two of the fingers on her left hand. On **31 May**, she was **released** after over 15 months in Evin Prison, on the condition she refrain from speaking with any media or other contacts abroad. Ms Saati was also informed that a two-year travel ban would now come into force. She spent the final weeks of her detention in Ward 209 and as a result was said to be in a “psychologically unstable state”.



Laleh Saati

## May

On **9 May**, an **open letter** from an Armenian Christian serving a 10-year prison sentence in Evin Prison, Hakop Gochumyan, was published, protesting his “unfair” imprisonment on “unfounded” charges, following the rejection of his second application for a retrial. Mr Gochumyan has been in prison since August 2023, when he and his wife Elisa, who is the Iranian-Armenian daughter of a renowned former church leader, were arrested while holidaying in Tehran. In his letter, Mr Gochumyan said the charges against him were “completely unfair and false” and that the indictment contained “fictitious statements”.



Hakop Gochumyan

Also in **May**, a married couple, both Christian converts, were arrested in Tehran and detained for four weeks, in an unpublicised case, before their release on bail. Separately in **May**, five Christian converts from Mashhad who had been arrested in December 2024 received prison sentences under Article 500 bis for “propaganda against the state”. One was sentenced to five years, later reduced to two years; another three years (18 months of which is suspended); another three years and six months; another two years (to be served under house arrest with an ankle tag); the sentence of the remaining convert is unknown. They are presently serving their sentences in Mashhad, though their case has not been reported.

Mashhad, Iran



# June

In **June**, at least three trials involving Iranian Christians charged in relation to their religious faith and activities were **postponed** amid the conflict with Israel, while **concerns were expressed** for detained Christians, including at least 11 in Evin Prison. On **24 June**, these prisoners were among those **transferred** after a strike on the prison. The men were sent to Greater Tehran Penitentiary, where they were held in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions with as many as 40 prisoners in each cell. Female prisoners were transferred to Qarchak women's prison, where they were held in a gymnasium owing to a lack of space elsewhere. One of the Christian prisoners, Aida Najaflou, **said** they had been transferred in "such a disgraceful manner, handcuffed", and were "suffering without clean water, cooling, or heating, lacking hygiene and proper food, entangled and helpless".

More than 50 Christians were reported to have been arrested in just one month following the end of the conflict on **24 June**, across at least 19 different cities: Tehran, Rasht, Orumiye, Kermanshah, Varamin, Amol, Lahijan, Shiraz, Mashhad, Garmsar, Hamedan, Miandoab, Isfahan, Karaj, Takestan, Borujerd, Anzali, Neyshabur, and Nowshahr. There was also a notable uptick in hate speech against Christians. On **3 July**, 11 UN rapporteurs sent an official communication to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, warning that religious minorities faced "intensified risk of being scapegoated at this time of heightened political pressure", and that their arrests "may be in violation article 2 of the ICCPR and article 2 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ... which prohibit discrimination and guarantee equal protection under the law, regardless of race, religion and belief, or national origin". On **27 July**, the MOIS admitted arresting 53 Christians, accusing them of involvement in "anti-security" activities. The statement said the Christians, who were labelled "Mossad mercenaries", had been "neutralised", and claimed they had been "trained abroad" by churches in the United States and Israel, and had acted "under the guise of the 'Zionist' Christian evangelisation movement". On **16 August**, state media released a video report showing footage of some of the arrested Christians attending a gathering in Türkiye; screenshots of some of their confiscated items, including New Testaments and other Christian literature; and alleged surveillance recordings of Bibles being "smuggled" into the country. The forced confessions of some of the arrested Christians were also included in the report, during which they admitted to travelling abroad to



receive religious instruction. By the end of 2025, at least 16 of the arrested Christians had been sentenced, and at least one had fled the country. On **27 October**, one of the Christians was sentenced by a Tehran Revolutionary Court to seven years and six months in prison under Article 500 bis and an additional three years and seven months under the new espionage law, Article 8, whose official title is "Countering the Hostile Actions of the Zionist Regime Against Peace and Security". On **30 November**, at least five more of the arrested Christians were sentenced under Article 500 bis and Article 8 to a combined more than 40 years in prison. Two of the Christians, none of whom have been named, were given 10-year sentences under Article 500 bis, with one of them sentenced to an additional five years under Article 8. A third Christian received a sentence of seven years and seven months under Article 500 bis, and three years and seven months under Article 8, as well as fines and 10 years' deprivation of social rights. The fourth was sentenced to five years under Article 500 bis and five years' social deprivation, and the fifth was sentenced to five years' social deprivation. The five Christians were fined the equivalent of over \$100,000 in total. Their property was also confiscated by the Tehran Revolutionary Court "in the interest of the state". Another of the arrested Christians, Nayereh Arjaneh, is now in Semnan Prison, serving a 10-year sentence on charges of "promoting deviant propaganda and teachings contrary to Islamic law" and "providing financial and material support to groups affiliated with 'Zionist' Christianity". This second charge came in relation to a donation she had made to her house-church, equivalent to just \$14, for which she was also fined three times the value. Ms Arjaneh was acquitted of a separate charge of "insulting religious sanctities". Her husband, Qasem Esmaili, meanwhile, was sentenced to three years and six months in prison; however, at the time of writing his sentence has not yet been enforced due to his cancer diagnosis and ongoing chemotherapy treatment. Ms Arjaneh and her husband were arrested at their home in Garmsar on **7 July**, after which Ms Arjaneh spent nearly 40 days in detention, before being released on bail of 500 million tomans (around \$4,000). On **7 October**, she was summoned again for interrogation and detained for a further three days until her bail—raised by the prosecutor to 2 billion tomans (over \$15,000)—was secured. She was then temporarily released on bail for a second time. She was sentenced on **15 October** and began serving her sentence on **23 December**.

## July

On **16 July**, five Christian converts from Varamin and Pishva were sentenced by Judge Ashkan Ramesh of the Varamin Revolutionary Court to a combined total of more than 40 years in prison on "propaganda" charges related to their religious activities. Morteza Faghanpour-Saasi, Hessamuddin Mohammad Junaidi, Abolfazl Ahmadzadeh-Khajani, and two others whose names were not made public, were sentenced to seven and a half years each in prison for "propaganda contrary to Islamic law due to connections abroad" and an additional seven months for "propaganda against the system". Mr Faghanpour-Saasi received an additional 17-month sentence for allegedly insulting Iran's Supreme Leader. The charges were brought under Articles 500 bis, 500, and 514, respectively, and related to their participation in Christian training courses in Türkiye, attendance of church meetings in their homes and online, and other online activities. Mr Faghanpour-Saasi was physically **tortured** by intelligence agents of Evin Prison's Ward



Nayereh Arjaneh



Morteza F-S



Abolfazl A-K



Hessamuddin M-J

209 during his six months in pre-trial detention. On **30 September**, the Christians' appeals were **rejected** by the 36th Branch of the Tehran Appeal Court. That same day, they were taken to a civil court to face separate charges of "insulting Islamic sanctities". On **4 November**, Mr Faghanpour-Saasi returned to Evin Prison to **begin his sentence**. At least one of the other Christians has fled the country.

Also in **July**, an unnamed female Christian convert was arrested in Isfahan and was still being held in detention at the end of 2025. It is not known what charges she faces.

## August

In **August**, an unnamed married couple, both Christian converts, were arrested in Karaj and charged with "propaganda against the state" under Article 500 bis. In **October**, the man was sentenced to two years in prison and deprived of social rights for five years. He is presently serving his sentence in Evin Prison. His wife was fined 10 million tomans (around \$75) and deprived of social rights for three months.

## September

In **September**, five Christian converts were summoned to the state prosecutor in Bonab, north-east Iran, in another unpublicised case. One man was released in **October**, two were released in **December**, and the other two remained detained at the end of the year. It is not yet known what charges they might face.

Also in **September**, three Christian converts were arrested in Mazandaran, including a married couple. One Christian was released after questioning, but the husband and wife were both charged with "propaganda against the state" under Article 500 bis and attended a court hearing in **December**, though their cases have not been reported. A decision was pending at the end of 2025.



## November

On **16 November**, three Christian converts from the Karaj region – Hossein Mohammadi, Zahra Gholami, and **Teymur Hosseini** – submitted themselves to **begin prison sentences** in Ghezel Hesar Prison on "national security" charges related to their involvement in a house-church. Mr Mohammadi, Ms Gholami, and Mr Hosseini, an Afghan refugee, were sentenced in 2024 to two years in prison for "forming" and "membership"

of a "group or association [house-church] with the aim of disrupting national security". The Christians' appeals and application for a retrial with the Supreme Court were both rejected in 2025. A fourth Christian, whose name was not made public, received a one-year sentence on the charge of "aiding and abetting" others in the alleged crimes. However, as this Christian did not appeal against his sentence, it was reduced by one-quarter to eight months, and he was released on **16 December**, having begun serving his sentence in **April**.



Hossein M



Zahra Gholami



Teymur Hosseini

On **29 November**, an Armenian church in Isfahan, Vank Church, [cancelled its popular Christmas celebrations](#) due to purported "restoration work" - for the second time in four years. The move was seen by some as a reaction to growing interest in Christianity in Iran – and opposition to the regime – at a time when Iranians from non-Christian backgrounds may be drawn into the celebrations.

## December

In **December**, two Christian converts from Hamedan, both single men, were arrested while visiting another city and remain detained at the time of writing, in another case that has not been reported.

Also in **December**, two single mothers, both Christian converts, were arrested in Hamedan and another convert was arrested in Mashhad, and all three remain detained at the time of writing. Two related Christian converts were also arrested in Shiraz and detained for five days, before being released unconditionally. None of their cases were reported publicly.

## End of 2025

Evin Prison, Tehran



# Prisoners List

*This table shows the public cases of Christians charged with offences related to their faith and detained or serving sentences of exile or forced labour in 2025. Some unpublicised cases have also been included, with individuals identified only by their first name, or a pseudonym\*. It should also be noted that at the end of 2025 many more Christians were still awaiting verdicts, the decision of an appeal court, a summons to serve their sentences, or had fled the country to avoid imprisonment. Supplementary punishments, such as internal exile, deprivation of social rights and travel bans, are not included in this list.*

NAME OR ALIAS	LOCATION	DETENTION BEGAN	RELEASED	CONVICTION BASED ON	SENTENCE
<b>Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh</b>	Lakan Prison, Rasht	May 2022		Article 500 bis	<b>5 years (OP)*</b>
<b>Ahmad Sarparast</b>	Lakan Prison, Rasht	May 2022		Article 500 bis	<b>5 years (OP)</b>
<b>Qasem* S.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Dec 2022	Mar 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>3 years</b>
<b>Hakop Gochumyan</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Aug 2023		Article 500 bis	<b>10 years</b>
<b>Masih* S.</b>	Central Prison, Mahshahr	Dec 2023	Dec 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>5 years</b>
<b>Mohammad* P.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Dec 2023		Articles 499 and 500	<b>10 years</b>
<b>Amir-Ali Minaei</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Dec 2023		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years 7 months</b>
<b>Mina Khajavi</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jan 2024	Oct 2025	Articles 498 and 499	<b>6 years</b>
<b>Laleh Saati</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Feb 2024	May 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>2 years</b>
<b>Hossein Seyed-Mehdi</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Apr 2024	Jan 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>2 years</b>
<b>Soheil* S.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	May 2024		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years</b>
<b>Siroos* S.</b>	Adel Abad Prison, Shiraz	May 2024	June 2025	Article 498	<b>6 years (acquitted on retrial)</b>
<b>Hamid* P.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jun 2024		Articles 498 and 499	<b>5 years</b>

Name or Alias	Location	Detention began	Released	Conviction based on	Sentence
<b>Hami* S.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jun 2024	Sep 2025	Unknown	<b>3 years</b>
<b>Parham* S.</b>	Dastgerd Prison, Isfahan	Jun 2024	Mar 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>2 years (ET)†</b>
<b>Davood* F.</b>	Dastgerd Prison, Isfahan	Jun 2024		Article 500 bis	<b>8 years (reduced to 3 years) (ET)</b>
<b>Eskandar* R.</b>	Adel Abad Prison, Shiraz	Jun 2024		Article 498	<b>6 years</b>
<b>Shahram* N.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Oct 2024		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years (OP)</b>
<b>Bahar* N.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Oct 2024		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years (ET)</b>
<b>Nasrin* T.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Oct 2024		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years</b>
<b>Ghazal Marzban</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Nov 2024	Jan 2025	Article 638	<b>6 months, 74 lashes (suspended)</b>
<b>Alireza N.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Jan 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years (ET)</b>
<b>Amir N.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Jan 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years (ET)</b>
<b>Hossein S.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Jan 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years (ET) (reduced to 6 months)</b>
<b>Nasser Navard Gol-Tapeh</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Feb 2025		Articles 500 bis and 610	
<b>Joseph Shahbazian</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Feb 2025		Articles 500 bis and 610	<b>16 years</b>
<b>Aida Najaflou</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Feb 2025		Articles 500bis and 610, and Article 8 ‡	<b>18 years</b>
<b>Helen* G.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Feb 2025	Oct 2025	Article 500	<b>2 years (reduced to 18 months) - released conditionally</b>
<b>Javad* H.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Apr 2025	Dec 2025	Article 498	<b>1 year</b>
<b>Arash* M.</b>	Bushehr Prison	Jun 2025		Unknown	<b>1 year</b>
<b>Sam* F.</b>	Khoramabad Prison	Jun 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>5 years (reduced to 2.5 years) (ET)</b>
<b>Parsam* N.</b>	Khoramabad Prison	Jun 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>3.5 years, (reduced to 21 months) (ET)</b>
<b>Soheila* Y.</b>	Khoramabad Prison	Jun 2025	Jun 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>\$3,125 fine</b>
<b>Mobin* M.</b>	Khoramabad Prison	Jun 2025	Jun 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>\$1,000 fine</b>
<b>Mehran Shamloui</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jul 2025		Articles 499, 500 & 500 bis	<b>10 years</b>
<b>Mahshid* N.</b>	Qarchak Women's Prison, Tehran	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>6 months</b>
<b>Mahan* A.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>23 months (ET)</b>
<b>Arastoo* P.</b>	Vakilabad Prison, Mashhad	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>5 years</b>

Name or Alias	Location	Detention began	Released	Conviction based on	Sentence
<b>Yavar* B.</b>	Vakilabad Prison, Mashhad	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>5 years</b>
<b>Matin* K.</b>	Vakilabad Prison, Mashhad	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years</b>
<b>Hatef* H.</b>	Vakilabad Prison, Mashhad	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years</b>
<b>Nayeb* J.</b>	Vakilabad Prison, Mashhad	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years</b>
<b>Salar* A.</b>	Vakilabad Prison, Mashhad	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years</b>
<b>Arsahm* A.</b>	Vakilabad Prison, Mashhad	Jul 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>3 years</b>
<b>Amin* T.</b>	Adel Abad Prison, Shiraz	Aug 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years (ET)</b>
<b>Touraj* S.</b>	Adel Abad Prison, Shiraz	Aug 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>5 years (ET)</b>
<b>Peyman* J.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Aug 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years (ET)</b>
<b>Raheleh* D.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Aug 2025	Aug 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>\$105 fine</b>
<b>Simin* S.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Sep 2025		Article 498	<b>10 years (reduced to 6 years)</b>
<b>Hossein Mohammadi</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Nov 2025		Article 498	<b>2 years</b>
<b>Zahra Gholami</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Nov 2025		Article 498	<b>2 years</b>
<b>Teymur Hosseini</b>	Ghezel Hesar Prison, Karaj	Nov 2025		Article 498	<b>2 years</b>
<b>Morteza Faghanpour-Saasi</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Nov 2025		Articles 500 bis, 500 and 514	<b>9 years 6 months</b>
<b>Hani* M.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Nov 2025	Nov 2025	Article 500 bis	<b>\$120 fine</b>
<b>Mahmoud Mardani</b>	Dastgerd Prison, Isfahan	Dec 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>4 years</b>
<b>Mansour Mardani</b>	Dastgerd Prison, Isfahan	Dec 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>4 years</b>
<b>Nayereh Arjaneh</b>	Semnan Prison	Dec 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>10 years</b>
<b>Nader*</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Dec 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years 1 day</b>
<b>Afshin* P.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Dec 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years 1 day</b>
<b>David* A.</b>	Evin Prison, Tehran	Dec 2025		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years 1 day</b>
<b>Shahab S.</b>	Central Prison, Karaj	Unknown		Article 500 bis	<b>2 years (ET)</b>

\*OP - Released from prison to serve remainder of sentence as forced labour

† ET - Serving sentence at home, having been fitted with an electronic tag

‡ Article 8 of “the law countering the hostile actions of the Zionist regime against peace and security”

# Criminal law provisions commonly applied to Christians

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*Christians are typically prosecuted under articles of the penal code that relate to “national security” and are open to interpretation. As they are charged with allegedly committing “security”-related crimes, they are tried in Revolutionary Courts. The articles most frequently used against Christians to criminalise the peaceful expression of their religious beliefs are listed below.*

**498**

Anyone, with any ideology, who establishes or directs a group, society, or branch, inside or outside the country, with any name or title, that constitutes more than two individuals and aims to perturb the security of the country, if not considered as “mohareb”<sup>1</sup>, shall be sentenced to two to 10 years’ imprisonment.

**499**

Anyone who joins, as a member, any of the groups, societies, or branches aforementioned in Article 498, shall be sentenced to three months to five years’ imprisonment, unless it is proved that he had been unaware of its aims.

**499**  
BIS

Anyone who insults Iranian ethnicities or divine religions or Islamic schools of thought recognised under the Constitution, in the real or virtual sphere, with the intent to cause violence or tensions in the society, shall be sentenced to up to five years’ imprisonment, or 10 years if they received financial or organisational help from outside the country.

**500**

Anyone who engages in any type of propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations, shall be sentenced to three months to one year of imprisonment.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Islamic Penal Code defines mohareb as: “Any person resorting to arms to cause terror, fear or breach public security and freedom will be considered as mohareb and to be ‘corrupt on the Earth’.*

**500**  
BIS

Anyone who engages in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam, through mind-control or psychological indoctrination, or making false claims, shall be sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment, or 10 years if they received financial or organisational help from outside the country.

**513**

Anyone who insults the sacred values of Islam or any of the Great Prophets or Shi'ite Imams or the Holy Fatima [Muhammad's daughter], if considered as "Saab ul-nabi" [defamation of the Prophet], shall be executed; otherwise, they shall be sentenced to one to five years' imprisonment.

**610**

When two or more individuals collude and conspire to commit crimes against the national or foreign security of the country or prepare the facilities to commit the aforementioned crimes, unless they are regarded as mohareb1, shall be sentenced to two to five years' imprisonment.

### ***Article 8 of The Law "Countering the Hostile Actions of the Zionist Regime Against Peace and Security":***

Any action such as security, military, political, cultural, media, propaganda, direct and indirect economic and financial assistance knowingly aimed at confirming or strengthening and consolidating the Zionist regime is prohibited. The perpetrator is sentenced to the fifth-degree of imprisonment.



700

650

600

550

500

450

400

350

300

250

200

150

100

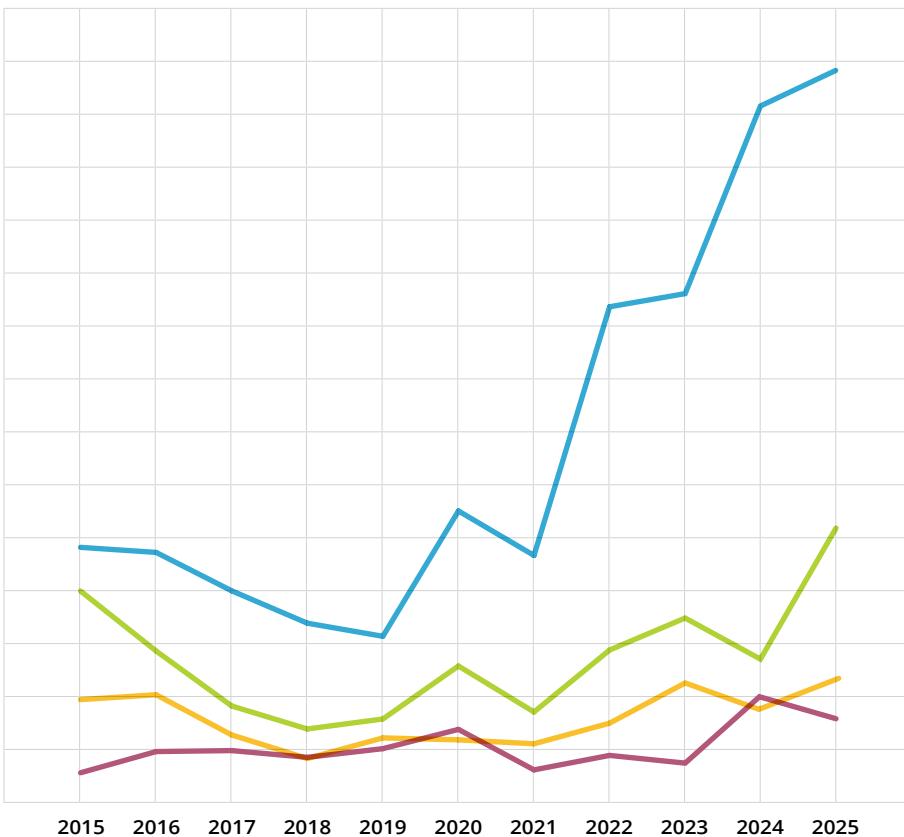
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2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

### **ESCALATION OF RIGHTS VIOLATIONS 2015-2025**

- Christians Arrested
- Christians Detained
- Christians Sentenced
- Individuals Affected  
(Dependents directly affected by a Christian's detention)



# Recommendations

## *To the Government of Iran:*

- I** Immediately and unconditionally release Christians and other religious or belief minorities detained on charges related to their beliefs or religious activities.
- II** Drop all charges against Christians related to ordinary church activities, such as baptism, Communion, gathering for prayer or Bible study – whether conducted in Iran or overseas.
- III** End the criminalisation of house-church organisation and membership, and permit the registration of official places of worship for Christians of all ethnic and language groups in addition to the Armenian and Assyrian communities, permitting Christians of all linguistic and ethnic backgrounds to worship freely and collectively.
- IV** Return all places of worship, properties and material confiscated from Christians and other religious or belief minorities on alleged “national security” charges, and publicly clarify where Persian-speaking Christians may worship freely in their mother tongue, without fear of arrest and prosecution.
- V** Reopen churches forcibly closed for welcoming converts and conducting services in the Persian language, and churches closed on public health grounds during the Covid-19 pandemic but subsequently prevented from reopening.
- VI** Reopen the Bible Society, allow it to operate freely, and permit the printing and distribution of Bibles within Iran, ensuring unrestricted access to Bibles and other Christian literature.
- VII** Take concrete steps to ensure the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for every citizen, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic background, including to adopt a faith of their choosing, in line with Article 18 of the ICCPR.
- VIII** Amend Article 13 of the Constitution to provide legal recognition and freedom to worship to all religious or belief communities.
- IX** Cease using provisions such as Articles 498, 499, 500 and 513 of the penal code and Article 167 of the Iranian Constitution to unjustly detain minority-faith or belief adherents.

X

Repeal the Note to Article 48 of the Criminal Procedures Regulations, thereby guaranteeing access to legal counsel for all individuals charged with national security-related crimes, along with the right to select a lawyer of their choice.

XI

Uphold Article 10.1 of the ICCPR – “All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person” – and hold accountable state authorities responsible for violations.

XII

Grant unhindered access to the country for the UN Special Rapporteurs on FoRB and the situation of human rights in Iran, and the Independent Fact-Finding Mission, to investigate the nation’s compliance with international human rights law.

## ***To the International Community:***

I

Hold Iran accountable for failures to fulfil its obligations under international law, including to promote, protect and fulfil FoRB for all its citizens, and raise these concerns consistently in bilateral and multilateral dialogues.

II

Ensure fair and informed asylum procedures for Iranian Christians seeking international protection, recognising their well-founded fear of persecution if returned, in light of ongoing harassment, arrest and mistreatment linked to Christian religious activity.

III

Support documentation and monitoring efforts relating to violations of freedom of religion or belief in Iran, including by civil society and UN mechanisms.

## ***To the United Nations, its Special Rapporteurs and Fact-Finding Mission:***

I

Systematically include the situation of Christians (particularly Christian converts) in all reporting on human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

II

Urge the government of Iran to provide clarification on its investigation into the closure of the Bible Society, and to indicate under what conditions it may be permitted to reopen.

III

Call on the government of Iran to provide a list of any new churches built since 1979 and a current list of churches allowed to operate in the Persian language.

## Appendix

# FoRB in national and international law

Iran is home to diverse historically established religious and ethnic groups. The rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation, are protected by laws, both national and international. However, since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 the government has imposed a homogeneous Iranian identity with a Shi'a belief system, and repressed other cultures, traditions, religions and beliefs, when considered a threat to the Islamic Republic and its values. Article 1 of the Iranian Constitution institutes a theocracy, with Article 12 establishing the Twelver Ja'fari school of Shi'a Islam as the nation's official religion. Therefore, all Iranian laws must be derived from, and consistent with, Islamic law.

According to

## Article 13 of the Constitution



*"Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognised religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education."*

*No other religious or belief minorities are recognised by law or afforded rights under the Constitution, and the Christian community in Iran is restricted in the eyes of the authorities to ethnic Armenians, Assyrians, and a small expatriate community.*

These groups are relatively free to practise their faith, though face legal and societal discrimination and are not permitted to hold services or possess religious materials in Persian (the national language), and can face imprisonment if they promote Christianity among people from a Muslim background or encourage them to attend church services.

Meanwhile, Christian converts from a Muslim background are numerically the largest Christian community in Iran but are not recognised by the state and are frequently targeted by the authorities and, in some cases, by their extended families and the wider society. Unable to attend existing churches belonging to the Armenian and Assyrian communities, converts either gather in informal meetings in private homes, known as "house-churches", or are forced to remain isolated and disconnected from other Christians. In either case, their freedom to collectively express their faith is violated.

With converts constituting the largest – albeit unrecognised – Christian community in Iran, the issue of "apostasy" is a central concern. Apostasy has never been codified by the Islamic Republic, and differences in interpretation of Islamic law regarding apostasy contribute to a lack of certainty and consistency in how converts from Islam are treated. In 2022, a retired Iranian judge involved in approving the penal code remarked: "Apostasy was supposed to be included in our criminal code, but it was left out for fear of international pressure."

The mistreatment of the Christian community, whether of the recognised Christian ethnic groups or the unrecognised Christian convert majority, violates Iran's obligations under the ICCPR, which it ratified without reservation in 1975 and is obliged to uphold, along with other international treaties to which it is a signatory.

**Since  
1979**  
**Iran has enforced  
a homogeneous  
Shi'a identity,  
marginalising other  
faiths and beliefs.**

## **Specific articles of the ICCPR violated through the mistreatment of Christians include:**

**Article 7:** "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

**Article 9.1:** "Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law."

**Article 9.2:** "Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him."

**Article 9.3:** "Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release."

**Article 10.1:** "All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person."

**Article 14.1:** "All persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals. In the determination of any criminal charge against him, or of his rights and obligations in a suit at law, everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law."

**Article 14.2:** "Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall have the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law."

**Article 14.3:** "In the determination of any criminal charge against him, everyone shall be entitled to the following minimum guarantees ... (d) To be tried in his presence, and to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing."

**Article 17.1:** "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation."

**Article 18.1:** "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

Everyone has the right to **adopt** a religion or belief of **his choice**.

**Article 18.2:** *"No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice."*

**Article 18.3:** *"Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others."*

**Article 18.4:** *"The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."*

**Article 19.1:** *"Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference."*

**Article 19.2:** *"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."*

**Article 21:** *"The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."*

**Article 26:** *"All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."*

“Apostasy was left out of the criminal code — for fear of international pressure.”

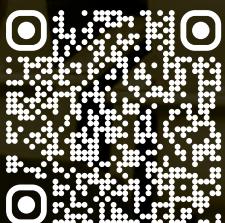
**Article 27:** *"In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language."*

By failing to fulfil the civil and political rights of all its citizens, the Islamic Republic also contravenes

**Article 2.1** of the ICCPR, whereby: *"Each State Party ... undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognised in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."*

*Furthermore, the arrests reportedly include ... members of ethnic and religious minorities – all of whom are facing intensified risk of being **scapegoated** at this time of heightened political pressure... The disproportionate impact of the above measures - in particular the recent arrests of ethnic and religious minorities - may be in violation of article 2 of the ICCPR and article 2 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination [ratified by Iran in 1968], which prohibit discrimination and guarantee equal protection under the law, regardless of race, religion or belief, or national origin... This has been concurrent with a sharp increase in reported hate speech within Persian social media and in Arabic media linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran, accusing whole minority communities of being traitors, using dehumanising language such as 'filthy rats', and implicating them in the hostilities.*

Excerpts from an official communication by 11 UN experts  
to the Islamic Republic of Iran  
on 3 July 2025



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