Home Office

Country Information and Guidance

Iran: Christians and Christian Converts

December 2014

Preface

This document provides guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling claims made by nationals/residents of Iran as well as country of origin information (COI) about - Iran. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the guidance contained with this document; the available COI; any applicable case law; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

Within this instruction, links to specific guidance are those on the Home Office's internal system. Public versions of these documents are available at https://www.gov.uk/immigration-operational-guidance/asylum-policy.

Country Information

The COI within this document has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the Common EU [European Union] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information (COI), dated April 2008, and the European Asylum Support Office's research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology, dated July 2012.

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve the guidance and information we provide. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this document, please email: cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office's COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's website at http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/

It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy.

IAGCI may be contacted at:

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration,

5th Floor, Globe House, 89 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1PN.

Email: chiefinspectorukba@icinspector.gsi.gov.uk

Website: http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews

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Section 1: Guidance

Updated: 10 December 2014

1.1 Basis of Claim

1.1.1 Fear of ill-treatment amounting to persecution at the hands of the Iranian authorities due to :

- their religion; or
- their conversion to Christianity; or
- because they actively seek to convert others to Christianity.

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1.2 Summary of Issues

- Is the person's account a credible one?
- Are Christians at risk of mistreatment or harm in Iran?
- Are those at risk able to seek effective protection?
- Are those at risk able to internally relocate within Iran?

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1.3 Consideration of Issues

Is the person's account a credible one?

1.3.1 Decision makers must consider whether the material facts relating to the person's account of their religious beliefs or activities and of their experiences as a Christian reasonably detailed, internally consistent (e.g. oral testimony, written statements) as well as being externally credible (i.e. consistent with generally known facts and the country information). Decision makers should take into account all mitigating reasons why a person is inconsistent or unable to provide details of material facts such as age; gender; mental or emotional trauma; fear and/or mistrust of authorities; education, feelings of shame; painful memories, particularly those of a sexual nature, and cultural implications.

See also:

- Country Information

and the Asylum Instruction on:

- Considering Protection (Asylum) Claims and Assessing Credibility

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Are Christians at risk of mistreatment or harm in Iran?

Those born into the Christian religion

1.3.2 The Iranian Constitution recognises Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians as protected religious minorities. However the state does discriminate against them on the basis of religion or belief, as all laws and regulations are based on unique Shi'a Islamic criteria. It is difficult for many Christians to live freely and openly in Iran. Such discrimination is prevalent throughout Iran.

Christian Converts

1.3.3 Christians who have converted from Islam are at risk of harm from the state authorities, as they are considered apostates - a criminal offence in Iran. Sharia law does not allow for conversion from Islam to another religion, and it is not possible for an individual person to change their religious affiliation on personal documentation. Christian converts face physical attacks, harassment, surveillance, arrest, detention, as well as torture and ill-treatment in detention. The country guidance case of SZ and JM (Christians – FS confirmed) Iran CG [2008] UKAIT 00082 (12 November 2008) found that conditions for converts to sacrament-based churches may be such that they could not reasonably be expected to return to Iran. This remains the case.

Evangelical/House Churches

1.3.4 Members of evangelical/house churches are subject to harassment, arrest, close surveillance and imprisonment by the Iranian authorities. Christians who can demonstrate that in Iran or in the UK they have and will continue to practise evangelical or proselytising activities because of their affiliation to evangelical churches or who would wear in public outward manifestations of their faith such as a visible crucifix, will attract the adverse notice of the authorities on return to Iran and will be at risk of persecution.

1.3.5 In cases where it is found that the person will be discreet about their religion on return, the reasons for such discretion need to be considered in the light of HJ (Iran). A person should not be expected to conceal aspects of their religion, their conversion or their activities relating to the conversion of others if they are not willing to do so. However, if the person would choose to conceal aspects of his or her religion or religious activities for reasons other than for a fear of persecution then the person would have no basis for their claim for international protection.

1.3.6 Since President Rouhani's election in 2013, imprisonment of Christians has increased. The attitude and treatment of the Iranian authorities towards 'ordinary' Christians may result in ill-treatment which in individual cases may reach the level of persecution, torture or inhuman and degrading treatment. Where Christians can demonstrate that they have come to the attention of the authorities previously for reasons other than their religion, then that in combination with their religion, may put them at real risk of persecution. Each case will need to be considered on its facts.

See also:

- Country Information
- Caselaw

and the Asylum Instruction on:

- Considering Protection (Asylum) Claims and Assessing Credibility

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Are those at risk able to seek effective protection?

1.3.7 As the person's fear is of ill treatment/persecution at the hands of the state, they would be unable to avail themselves to the authorities for protection.

See also:

- Country Information

and the Asylum Instruction on:

- Considering Protection (Asylum) Claims and Assessing Credibility

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Are those at risk able to internally relocate within Iran?

1.3.8 As this category of claim concern's a fear of ill treatment by the state authorities, relocation to a different area of the country to escape this threat is not viable.

See also:

- Country Information

and the Asylum Instruction on:

- Internal Relocation

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1.4 Policy Summary

- **Christianity is an officially accepted religion according to the constitution. However, Iran is an Islamic theocracy whose citizens do not enjoy religious freedom.**

- **The treatment of people born into the Christian religion (e.g. Assyrians and Armenians) by the state may result in ill-treatment which in individual cases may reach the level of persecution, torture or inhuman and degrading treatment, particularly if the person has come to the adverse attention of the authorities for reasons other than their religion. Each case will need to be considered on its facts.**

- **Members of Evangelical and house churches, and those who actively seek to evangelise others and engage in proselytising activities are at real risk of persecution in Iran and a grant of asylum is likely to be appropriate.**

- **The right of Muslims to change their religion is not recognised under Sharia law. The religious conversion of Muslims is illegal in Iran. Christians who have converted from Islam are at real risk of persecution in Iran, and a grant of asylum is likely to be appropriate**

- **Where a claim falls to be refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.**

See also the Asylum Instructions on:

- Non-Suspensive Appeals: Certification Under Section 94 of the NIA Act 2002
- Humanitarian Protection
- Discretionary Leave

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Section 2: Information

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 According to the U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom's, 2014 Annual Report, since his June 2013 election, President Hassan Rouhani had not delivered on his campaign promises of strengthening civil liberties for religious minorities. The numbers of Baha'is and Christians in prison for their faith increased over the past year. Physical attacks, harassment, detention, arrests and imprisonment intensified. Even some of the recognised non-Muslim religious minorities protected under Iran's constitution, for example, Jews, Armenian and Assyrian Christians and Zoroastrians faced harassment, intimidation, discrimination, arrests and imprisonment. Majority Shi'a and minority Sunni Muslims, including clerics who dissent, were intimidated, harassed and detained. Dissidents and human rights defenders were increasingly subjected to abuse and several were sentenced to death and even executed for the capital crime of "waging war against God." While anti-Semitic sentiment continued among Iran's clerical establishment, the level of anti-Semitic rhetoric among government officials had diminished since the election of President Rouhani.[1]

2.1.2 According to the World Watch List 2014, published by Open Door, an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide, Islam is the official religion and all laws must be consistent with the official interpretation of Sharia law.[2]

2.1.3 According to World Watch List 2014:

"…persecution of religious minorities had intensified in Iran since 2005. This was particularly aimed at the Baha'i, Dervishes -a Sufi religious order - and Christians, especially converts from Islam. According to the state, only Armenians and Assyrians can be Christians. Ethnic Persians are by definition Muslim, therefore ethnic Persian Christians are by definition apostates. This makes almost all Christian activity illegal in Iran, especially when it occurs in Persian languages - from evangelism to Bible training to publishing Scripture and Christian books or preaching in Farsi (…). Christians are seen as a particular threat to the regime as their numbers are growing and it is said that children of political and spiritual leaders are leaving Islam for Christianity.' [3]

2.1.4 The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, Dr Ahmed Shaheed stated in March 2014 that:

'in recent years, Christians, many of whom are converts from Muslim backgrounds, have faced persecution. At least 49 Christians were reportedly being detained in the Islamic Republic of Iran as at January 2014. In 2013 alone, the authorities reportedly arrested at least 42 Christians, of whom 35 were convicted for participation in informal "house churches", association with churches outside the Islamic Republic of Iran, perceived or real evangelical activity and other standard Christian activities. Sentences range from 1 to 10 years of imprisonment. The Christians most commonly prosecuted appear to be converts from Muslim backgrounds or those that proselytize or minister to Iranian Muslims. Iranian authorities at the highest levels have designated house churches and evangelical Christians as threats to national security.'[4]

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[1] U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2014: Iran, 30 April 2014 http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Iran%202014.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[2] Open Door, World Watch List 2014: Iran, January 2014 http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/iran.php [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[3] Open Door, World Watch List 2014: Iran, January 2014 http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/iran.php [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[4] UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 18 March 2014, paragraphs 39 and 40

2.1.5 He further noted that:

'While most cases involving Christians are tried in revolutionary courts for national security crimes, some Christians face charges in public criminal courts for manifestation of religious beliefs; for example, a court sentenced four Christians to 80 lashes each for drinking wine during communion in October 2013. Sources also reported that, although prosecutions for the capital offence of apostasy are very rare, officials routinely threaten to prosecute Christian converts for apostasy, which, while not found in any Iranian criminal law, has been prosecuted based on an Islamic law interpretation commonly used by Iranian Courts.' [5]

2.1.6 According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a Christian organisation working for religious freedom through advocacy and human rights, in the pursuit of justice, Iran's continuing insistence on classifying normal Christian behaviour in national security terms is giving rise to confused and convoluted verdicts of questionable legality, for example a group of Christians convicted in Shiraz in 2013 was found guilty of acting against "cultural national security". [6]

2.2 Religious demography

2.2.1 According to the Statistical Centre of Iran's 2011 National Population and Housing Census, the population was 75.2 million. Muslims constitute 99 percent of the population; 90 percent are Shia and 9 percent are Sunni (mostly Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast and northwest, respectively). There are no official statistics available on the size of the Sufi Muslim population, however, some reports estimate between 2 and 5 million people practice Sufism.[7]

2.2.2 The U.S. Department of State reported in its 2013 International Religious Freedom Report that:

'Groups, together constituting the remaining 1 percent of the population, include Bahais, Christians, Jews, Sabean-Mandaeans and Zoroastrians. The two largest non-Muslim minorities are Bahais and Christians. Bahais number approximately 300,000 and they are heavily concentrated in Tehran and Semnan. According to UN figures, 300,000 Christians live in the country, although some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) estimate there may be as many as 370,000. The Statistical Centre of Iran reports there are 117,700. The majority of Christians are ethnic Armenians concentrated in Tehran and Isfahan. Unofficial estimates of the Assyrian Christian population range between 10,000 and 20,000. There are also Protestant denominations, including evangelical groups. Christian groups outside the country estimate the size of the Protestant Christian community to be less than 10,000, although many Protestant Christians reportedly practice in secret. There are from 5,000 to 10,000 Sabean-Mandaeans. The Statistical Centre of Iran estimates there are 25,271 Zoroastrians, who are primarily ethnic Persians, however, Zoroastrian groups report 60,000 members.'[8]

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http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/120/75/PDF/G1412075.pdf?OpenElement [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[5] UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 18 March 2014, paragraph 41 http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/120/75/PDF/G1412075.pdf?OpenElement [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[6] Christian Solidarity Worldwide – Iranian Pastoer Haghnejad Pressured For False Confession Whilst In Solitary Confinement 20 August 2014 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1765 – Accessed 27/10/14

[7] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section I. Religious Demography, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[8] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013: Iran, 28 July 2014, Section I. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Legal/Policy Framework

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2.3 Legal framework

2.3.1 The U.S. Department of State in its 2013 International Religious Freedom Report stated that:

'The constitution and other laws and policies severely restrict freedom of religion. The constitution declares the "official religion is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'afari Shiism." The constitution states all laws and regulations must be based on undefined "Islamic criteria" and official interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). The constitution provides Sunni Muslims a degree of religious freedom and states that, "within the limits of the law," Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognised religious minorities with protected ability to worship freely and to form religious societies, as long as they do not proselytize. (…) The government does not recognise any other non-Islamic religion, and adherents of these other religious groups, such as the Bahais, do not have the freedom to practice their beliefs.' [9]

2.3.2 With regards to converts, the same report noted that 'the constitution does not provide for the rights of Muslim citizens to choose, change, or renounce their religious beliefs. The government automatically considers a child born to a Muslim father to be a Muslim and deems conversion from Islam to be apostasy, which is punishable by death.' [10]

2.3.3 In relation to evangelising by non-Muslims, the report states that 'non-Muslims may not engage in public religious expression, persuasion, or conversion among Muslims. Such proselytizing is punishable by death. The government restricts published religious material. Government officials frequently confiscate Christian Bibles and pressure publishing houses printing Bibles or unsanctioned non-Muslim materials to cease operations.' [11]

2.3.4 Under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Iran is obligated to safeguard freedom of religion. While Iran's constitution recognises Christianity and, to varying degrees grants them many of the rights found in the ICCPR, in practice the government does not uphold these international and constitutional protections for its Protestant community. Measures systematically undertaken by the Iranian government, which include restricting church attendance, forbidding the formation of new churches, closing churches, restricting the distribution of bibles and Christian literature, harassing and monitoring church groups, arresting, detaining and prosecuting church leaders, criminalizing evangelism and coercing Christians to return to Islam, are prohibited by the ICCPR.[12]

2.3.5 Christians' right to free expression in Iran, guaranteed under international law and also given in Article 24 of the Iranian constitution, is also routinely denied. Article 19 (2) of the ICCPR guarantees "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression," and the Human Rights Committee overseeing implementation of the ICCPR notes that free

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http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[9] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013: Iran, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Legal/Policy Framework http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[10] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013: Iran, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Legal/Policy Framework http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[11] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013: Iran, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Legal/Policy Framework http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[12] International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Executive Summary http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2014]

expression includes the right to express "religious discourse." As a corollary right, Article 18 of the ICCPR protects the right to "prepare and distribute religious texts or publications". [13]

2.3.6 Although the Iranian constitution provides for free expression, in practice the Iranian government violates this right. Christians are arrested, detained and prosecuted for evangelism and for distributing Christian literature. Persian-language Christian websites are blocked and the four Persian language Christian satellite stations are intermittently jammed. Access to the Bible is significantly curtailed and the publication and import of the Bible has been largely prohibited. There have been instances of security officials confiscating Bibles, and, in some cases, burning Bibles and arresting Christians for distributing Bibles. The government also severely restricts the use of Persian in churches, diminishing the accessibility of sermons to the largely Farsi-speaking population.[14]

2.3.7 Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights protects the right to work. As such, the state must prevent discrimination in the workplace. Among the most common forms of discrimination experienced by Iranian Christians is employment discrimination, both by the state and by private sector employers. Interviewees reported to the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHRI), an independent New York-based non-profit organisation that aims to promote human rights in Iran through research and international media advocacy, that they were dismissed from jobs or refused employment because of their faith. Employers appear particularly sensitive to converts. Employment application forms for both the private and public sector always require applicants to report their religion and family names often allow most Iranians to be able to instantly infer whether or not someone is from an ethnic Christian, Muslim or other background. Christians can also face obstacles starting a business or obtaining business loans and permits. In some instances, particularly in government, employment discrimination is codified in law. Iran's constitution requires that certain public officials be Muslim, including the Supreme Leader, the President, Judges and all MPs with the exception of the five slots designated for minority religious communities.[15]

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2.4 Christians: overview

2.4.1 The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom noted in its annual report that:

'Over the past year (2013), there were numerous incidents of Iranian authorities raiding church services, threatening church members and arresting and imprisoning worshippers and church leaders. Since 2010, authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained about 400 Christians throughout the country. As of February 2014, at least 40 Christians were either in prison, detained or awaiting trial because of their religious beliefs and activities. In January 2013, Saeed Abedini, an Iraninan-born American

[13] International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Executive Summary http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[14] International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Executive Summary http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[15] International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Executive Summary http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2014]

Pastor, was sentenced in a trial without due process to eight years in prison for "threatening the national security of Iran" for his activity in the Christian House Church Movement. Pastor Abedini had been in Iran since June 2012 to establish an orphanage and was arrested and imprisoned in September 2012. While in Evin prison, Pastor Abedini spent several weeks in solitary confinement and was physically and psychologically abused. In November 2013, he was transferred to the notorious Gohar-dasht, or Rajai Shahr, prison outside Tehran which is known for its harsh and unsanitary conditions.' [16]

2.4.2 The U.S. Department of State reported in its annual report covering 2013 that:

'the government severely restricted religious freedom. Government rhetoric and actions continued to create a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shia religious groups, most notably for […] Christians, especially evangelicals […] Government-controlled broadcast and print media continued negative campaigns against religious minorities, particularly Bahais. All non-Shia religious minorities suffered varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, especially in employment, education, and housing.' [17]

2.4.3 The report further noted that:

'the government actively denied Christians freedom of religion. Christians, particularly evangelicals, continued to experience high levels of harassment and surveillance. The authorities arrested Christians disproportionately, including members of evangelical groups, according to human rights activists. The status of many of these cases was not known at the end of 2013. Authorities released some Christians almost immediately, but held others in secret locations without access to attorneys.' [18] According to the same report 'Christians of all denominations reported the presence of security cameras outside their churches, allegedly to confirm that no non-Christians participated in services.' [19]

2.4.4 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported in October 2014 that three Christians who had previously been given capital charges against them where now given each six-year sentences which according to CSW "are indicative of the surge in repression under the Rouhani presidency targeting religious and ethnic minorities. This has occurred despite his earlier promise to uphold the rights of religious minorities during the run up to elections last year".[20]

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2.5 Muslim converts to Christianity

2.5.1 The Danish Immigration Service report published in June 2014 reported on the obstacles Iranian converts face in Iran because of their conversion to Christianity, stating:

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[16] U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2014: Iran, 30 April 2014 http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Iran%202014.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[17] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[18] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[19] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[20] Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Three Christians face six year sentences in remote prisons, 20 October 2014, http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=2158 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

‘an international organisation in Turkey did not consider that there would be any issues if this is not made known. However, if a convert is active in informal church activities or proselytizing, problems may arise with the authorities. Additionally, if conversion comes to the knowledge of the authorities, an individual might lose his or her job. The source explained that at workplaces in Iran, there are offices of Herasat (representatives of the Ministry of Intelligence and State Security) that monitor the employees. They are also at universities, state organisations and schools. Private companies of a certain size will also have a Herasat office. If Herasat gets news of a person’s conversion, he or she could risk being dismissed from his or her job. Additionally, family members could also risk losing their jobs or be denied access to higher learning.’ [21] The same source noted that ‘in neighbourhoods of towns and cities, there are Basij connected to the local mosques and a person may be asked to attend mosque and this could especially be expected of men of a certain age. It was added that according to the Islamic rules, the religious obligations for girls and boys to start praying begin at the ages of nine and fifteen respectively, where congregational prayers in mosques are encouraged as part of communal activities. The expectation to attend mosques in neighbourhoods can be viewed as part of societal norms and may depend for instance on the mosque or Friday imam’s attitude and sensitivities.’ [22]

2.5.2 Amnesty International’s International Secretariat told the fact-finding mission that:

‘Converts would have to hide their faith in order to be employed in certain jobs. For many jobs it is necessary to fill out a form in which one’s religion is indicated. Overall, there is widespread discrimination against minorities with regard to access to education and employment. The impact of discrimination may vary depending on whether an individual is employed in a private company or a government position. However, even in privately owned companies, employers may be forced by the authorities to dismiss employees on the grounds of their religious faith.’ The same source further noted what may happen if a person is arrested on suspicion of being a convert: ‘By the time the case goes to court, or the accused may be released without charges, there will have been a substantial risk of ill-treatment or torture while in incarceration. It should not be underestimated what can happen from the time of arrest up until a court hearing. It was further explained that those who are arrested may be kept in secret detention centres which fall outside of the courts system. Both individuals detained in prison and secret detention centres frequently are denied access to counsel.’ [23]

2.5.3 According to Mansour Borji, Advocacy Officer at Article 18, and interviewed for the Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission:

‘If you are born Muslim and convert to Christianity, you are considered an apostate. However, there are no recent cases in court where an individual has been charged with apostasy. Mansour Borji referred to a recent case of a female Christian convert who has been imprisoned for a long time. According to the source, based on some religious ruling by Shiia clergy, this woman could have only two options: she could either recant her faith or she would die in prison […] Some Christian converts may risk maltreatment from their own family members and relatives but mostly, Christian converts are facing persecution at the hands of the state. The source found that family members would report on their own family if somebody has converted to Christianity, often with good

[21] Danish Immigration Service – Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran – June 2014, 1.1 Consequences of conversion, including obstacles with regard to education, employment and dealings with the authorities, http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b650394.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[22] Danish Immigration Service – Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran – June 2014, 1.1 Consequences of conversion, including obstacles with regard to education, employment and dealings with the authorities, http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b650394.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[23] Danish Immigration Service – Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran – June 2014, 1.1 Consequences of conversion, including obstacles with regard to education, employment and dealings with the authorities, http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b650394.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]

intentions hoping that an encounter with the authorities will have a 'deterrent' effect on them and make them forget about conversion. It could also happen that neighbours report on a convert, however, the source considered that the threat of persecution came mainly from the authorities.' [24]

2.5.4 Mansour Borji, Advocacy Officer at Article 18, further explained that:

'Christian converts are considered second class citizens who have no right to live a Christian life and who have to keep their religious conviction a secret. Converts have to balance between their belief to share their Christianity with others and the daily risk they may face if their faith is exposed to the authorities. Mansour Borji added that the question of the upbringing of children is also a concern for convert families in Iran. In school, children have to participate in religious education and learn about Islamic principles. In such situations the child of a Christian convert may not realize the security issues if he or she speaks about their situation at home where the family practices a Christian life. The source further referred to the fact that a Christian wedding between converts is not recognized by the Iranian authorities. The only way for converts to Christianity to marry legally in Iran is according to Islamic law.' [25]

2.5.5 From apostasy charges that threaten the lives of converts to the imprisonment of church members involved in proselytising, authorities have engaged in a pattern of human rights abuses that effectively criminalises faith and manifestations of it. The ICHRI reveals that interrogators, prosecutors and courts consistently refer to standard Christian practices as evidence of criminal activity or a criminal act itself. Membership in a house church, evangelical activities and participation in a Christian conference are all seen by authorities as criminal acts and security officers routinely confiscate standard Christian items such as Bibles, religious literature and crosses during arrests. Consequentially, many Iranian Christians, namely converts, including most of the individuals interviewed for the "Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran" Report, have fled the country seeking protection from past or future persecution. [26]

2.5.6 The Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre stated in its July 2014 report, focusing on apostasy in Iran, that:

'Under Iranian law, a Muslim who leaves his or her faith or converts to another religion can be charged with apostasy. In addition, any person, Muslim or non-Muslim, may be charged with the crime of "swearing at the Prophet" if he or she makes utterances that are deemed derogatory towards the Prophet Mohammad, other Shi'a holy figures, or other divine prophets. Both apostasy and swearing at the Prophet are capital offences. While the latter has been specifically criminalized in the Islamic Penal Code, the former has not been explicitly mentioned as a crime. Nevertheless, provisions in the Islamic Penal Code and the Iranian Constitution state that Shari'a, or Islamic religious law, applies to situations in which the law is silent. As a result, the Iranian judiciary is empowered to bring apostasy charges based on its interpretation of Shari'a law […] Cases of apostasy and swearing at the Prophet are rare occurrences in Iran. Nevertheless, a diverse group of individuals has been charged with these religious crimes. Muslim-born converts to Christianity, Bahá'ís Muslims who challenge the prevailing interpretation of Islam, and others who espouse unconventional religious beliefs have been targeted and prosecuted by the Iranian state. In some instances,

[24] Danish Immigration Service – Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran – June 2014, 1.3 Consequences of conversion with regard to a convert's relation to family and social network, http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b650394.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[25] Danish Immigration Service – Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran – June 2014, 1.4 Practicing a Christian Life as Converts in Iran and possible restrictions, http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b650394.html - [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[26] Iran – The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 2013 http://www.iranhumanrights.org/mwg-internal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=eVh226d33H [Accessed 27 October 2014]

apostasy cases have clear political overtones, while others seem to be primarily of a religious nature.' [27]

2.5.7 The U.S. Department of State reported in its annual report covering 2013 that:

"Muslim converts to Christianity faced harassment, arrest, and sentencing. Many arrests took place during police raids on religious gatherings, which also included government confiscation of religious property".[28] The whereabouts of three church leaders remain unknown after they were arrested during a raid on a prayer meeting in August 2013.[29]

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2.6 Christians: Evangelical and House churches

2.6.1 The U.S. Department of State stated in its annual report covering 2013 that:

'Christians, particularly evangelicals, continued to experience high levels of harassment and surveillance. The authorities arrested Christians disproportionately, including members of evangelical groups, according to human rights activists. The status of many of these cases was not known at the end of 2013. Authorities released some Christians almost immediately, but held others in secret locations without access to attorneys.' [30]

2.6.2 The report continued by stating:

'The government enforced the prohibition on proselytizing by closely monitoring the activities of evangelical Christians, discouraging Muslims from entering church premises, closing churches, and arresting Christian converts. Authorities pressed evangelical church leaders to sign pledges they would not evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services. Meetings for evangelical services remained restricted to Sundays. Reports suggested authorities regarded the act of allowing Muslims to visit a Christian church as proselytizing. Some Christian advocacy groups reported the government pressured Armenian, Assyrian, and evangelical churches to cancel all services in the Farsi language. Members of evangelical congregations were required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which had to be provided to the authorities. Security officials posted outside congregation centres subjected worshippers to identity checks.' [31]

2.6.3 Reporting on the first 100 days in office of President Rouhani, CSW found that 'church gatherings and Christians meeting in each other's homes to worship remain targets for the Iranian authorities and are constantly monitored; members are arrested and even forced to close. The crackdown on churches and groups has continued under President Rouhani.' [32]

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[27] Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, Apostasy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 30 July 2014, Executive Summary, http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/1000000512-apostasy-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[28] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[29] Christian Solidarity Worldwide, President Rouhani – 100 days in office, 12 November 2013, http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=1906 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[30] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[31] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[32] Christian Solidarity Worldwide, President Rouhani – 100 days in office, 12 November 2013, http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=1906 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

2.6.4 In August 2014, Human Rights Watch reported that 'Iranian security and intelligence forces consider proselytizing by Christians a security threat and has systematically targeted those involved—especially those not affiliated with Iran's indigenous Christian communities, such as Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans.' [33]

2.6.5 The Danish Immigration Service noted in its June 2014 report of their fact-finding mission that:

'it is mainly the Evangelical churches that are seen as a threat to the regime and consequently are of interest to the authorities. Some of these churches are based on U.S funding and the authorities therefore make a link between activities of Evangelical churches and relations to foreign bodies and thus to espionage and undermining of Islam in a political sense. Although it is hard for the authorities to pin such accusations on individuals, there is a threat of such a charge, and there is a public consensus, including the judiciary and law enforcement authorities, that conversion to Christianity and evangelical networks are politically motivated and linked to Iran's relations with the West.' [34]

2.6.6 According to the ICHRI, in 2005, the Iranian government ramped up its repression of Christian house churches, Persian-language Protestant churches and converts. It has further intensified its efforts since 2010, under the rationale that evangelicals are a deviant form of Christianity, different from state-recognized Christianity and that the house church movement is linked to "Western powers" and "Zionists" who are waging a soft war against the regime. As such, Iranian government, judiciary, security and intelligence agencies have increasingly treated Protestant converts as a national security threat. Indeed, since 2005 authorities have arrested and prosecuted Protestants most often for security crimes against the state.[35]

2.6.7 According to Christian rights advocates, the government has not granted a licence for the establishment of a new church organisation or allowed the construction of any church building, ethnic Orthodox, Protestant, or other, since the 1979 Revolution. It has required recognised churches to limit attendance to pre-existing church members, excluding recent converts. It will not permit Christians to gather in informal house church groups for services, holidays or bible studies. It has placed restrictions on the days of the week that church services are permitted, thereby reducing the ability of Iranians to partake in Christian services. The government aggressively closes house churches, disburses congregations, and arrests church leaders, charging them with crimes on the basis of their efforts to organise a church. It has also stopped Christians from attending international religious conferences, in violation of Article 12 of the ICCPR, which guarantees free movement and the right to leave one's own country. These and other limitations severely undermine the ability of Christians to freely form and join congregations and practice their faith.[36]

2.6.8 CSW reported in August 2014 that it has learned that Pastor Abdolreza "Matthias" Ali-Haghnejad, who faces charges of "Moharebeh" (warring against God), was briefly held

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[33] Human Rights Watch, Locked up in Karaj: Spotlight on Political Prisoners in One Iranian City, 18 August 2014, Religious Minority Activists and Community Leaders, http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1408476534_iran0814-forupload-1.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[34] Danish Immigration Service – Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran – June 2014, 1.2.1 Charges used against Christian converts over time, http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b650394.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[35] Iran – The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 2013 http://www.iranhumanrights.org/mwg-internal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=eVh226d33H [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[36] Iran – The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 2013 http://www.iranhumanrights.org/mwg-internal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=eVh226d33H [Accessed 27 October 2014]

in solitary confinement. Meanwhile, another Christian, Fatemeh Torkajouri, has been tried in absentia. Pastor Haghnejad, a leader of the Church of Iran denomination in Karaj, is reported to have spent a week in solitary confinement in a Ministry of Intelligence and National Security detention centre in Karaj, where he faced pressure to falsely confess that his church is involved in anti-government political activity. He was initially detained after Iranian security forces raided his home in Karaj and was charged with "Moharebeh" following a two-hour interrogation by Judge Mohammad Yari of the Sixth Branch of the Revolutionary Tribunal. CSW has also learned that the trial in absentia of Fatemeh Torkajouri on charges of "action against national security" took place in Tehran on 6 August 2014. A verdict is yet to be issued; however, her family is reported to be facing increasing pressure from the Iranian authorities to ensure her return.' [37]

2.6.9 Church groups are routinely subjected to state monitoring and harassment in Iran. This monitoring takes both open and covert forms. The Ministry of Intelligence, Police or Revolutionary Courts would summon church leaders for questioning and try to coerce them into providing information about church activities, services, education programs and the names and backgrounds of church members. Christians also reported to the ICHRI that intelligence officers told them they were following them and tapping their phones. The information gathered by the Ministry of Intelligence then becomes the basis for arrests, prosecutions and the closure of churches. The Christian community in Iran, and in particular, Protestant converts, also face systematic discrimination in almost all walks of life. Article 26 of the ICCPR provides that: 'All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law.' Yet the Iranian government has failed to protect Christians from discrimination in many key areas, including employment, education and access to justice. In some areas, including marriage and family life, as well as in Iran's Penal Code, Iranian law blatantly discriminates between Muslims and Christians.[38]

2.6.10 Over the last few years, state officials and clerics who influence state policy have increasingly spoken out against the growth of evangelicalism and house churches, articulating a rationale for state repression. Since Iran's constitution recognises Christians as a religious minority with certain rights and Christians are afforded certain protections under traditional Islamic jurisprudence as a "people of the book," Iranian officials and clerics try to differentiate evangelicals and house churches from Christianity. They claim that evangelicals and house churches are a deviant form of Christianity, different from state-recognised Christianity.

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2.7 Christians: other

2.7.1 Iran Focus reported in September 2014 that 'Iran's traditional Christian communities, such as Orthodox Armenians and Assyrians, are protected under the Islamic Republic's constitution as so-called People of the Book. Their daily lives are subject to various legal restrictions, however, their schools and church activities are closely watched, and they cannot lead most public institutions.' [39] Iran Focus further noted that in March 2014 'Armenian Christian Sevada Aghasar was released from Tehran's Evin Prison on bail.

[37] Christian Solidarity Worldwide – Iranian Pastoer Haghnejad Pressured For False Confession Whilst In Solitary Confinement 20 August 2014 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1765 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[38] Iran – The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 2013 http://www.iranhumanrights.org/mwg-internal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=eVh226d33H http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[39] Iran Focus, A Christian prisoner in Iran, 30 September 2014, http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29845&catid=5&Itemid=110 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

Aghasar was arrested in Karaj on 21 August 2013 after plain-clothes security authorities raided his office while he was inside with two converts from Islam […] No charges have been filed yet against Aghasar.' [40]

2.7.2 According to a publication about Protestants and Christian converts in Iran, written by the ICHRI, the majority of Christians in Iran are ethnic Christians, which refers to Armenians and the Assyrians (or Chaldeans) who possess their own linguistic and cultural traditions. The ICHRI states that most ethnic Christians are members of their community's Orthodox church, but some are also Catholics or Protestants. According to ICHRI, non-ethnic Christians are for the most part members of Protestant churches. Sources similarly indicate that non-ethnic Christians are mostly Protestants and Evangelicals. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) states that many non-ethnic Christians are converts from Islam and ICHRI also says that most, though not all non-ethnic Christians are converts who came from Muslim backgrounds.[41]

2.7.3 According to ICHRI, the experiences of ethnic and non-ethnic Christians in Iran are entirely different. The ICHRI states that authorities have granted ethnic Christians some rights to religious practice, such as holding their church services, running religious schools and celebrating their major religious holidays, though they are not permitted to hold Persian language services. According to the UN Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Christian religious practice, in general, is monitored and heavily regulated. For example, Muslim converts to Christianity cannot enter Armenian or Assyrian Churches, as all churchgoers must register with the government and authorities often place cameras in churches.[42] In April 2014, security forces reportedly raided an Easter service in a private home in southern Tehran and detained six individuals: Ehsan Sadeghi, Nazy Irani, Maryam Assadi, Ali Arfa'e, VahidSafi and Amin Mazloomi.[43]

2.7.4 The ICHRI indicates that Protestants face far more aggressive government restrictions and human rights abuses than ethnic Christian groups. The ICHRI states that this is largely due to the use of the Persian language for church services and literature, their commitment to proselytizing, which may facilitate conversion, as well as potential affiliations with church networks located abroad. The BBC reports that evangelical Christians are not recognised and face heavy discrimination. According to the report by the UN Special Rapporteur, the Christians most commonly prosecuted appear to be converts from Muslim backgrounds or those that proselytize or minister to Iranian Muslims. Iranian authorities at the highest levels have designated house churches and evangelical Christians as threats to national security. The UN Special Rapporteur adds that in recent years, Christians, many of whom are converts from Muslim backgrounds, have faced a similar pattern of persecution.[44]

2.7.5 The U.S Department of State noted in its annual report covering 2013 that 'authorities also harassed and repressed the Sabean-Mandaean religious community in ways

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[40] Iran Focus, Christian prisoner in Iran protests harsh treatment with hunger strike, 4 April 2014, http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29299:christian-prisoner-in-iran-protests-harsh-treatment-with-hunger-strike&catid=5&Itemid=110 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[41] UNHCR Refworld Iran: Teachings, Interpretations and Knowledge of Christianity among Non-Ethnic Christians – 18 March 2014 http://www.refworld.org/docid/533925814.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[42] UNHCR Refworld Iran: Teachings, Interpretations and Knowledge of Christianity among Non-Ethnic Christians – 18 March 2014 http://www.refworld.org/docid/533925814.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[43] United Nations – Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran- 27 August 2014 https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/A-69-356%20SR%20Report%20Iran.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2014]

[44] UNHCR Refworld Iran: Teachings, Interpretations and Knowledge of Christianity among Non-Ethnic Christians – 18 March 2014, http://www.refworld.org/docid/533925814.htm [Accessed 27 October 2014]

similar to its harassment of other minority religious groups, including often denying members of the community access to higher education and government employment.'[45]

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2.8 Prison conditions for religious minorities

2.8.1 The U.S. Department of State stated in its annual report covering 2013 that 'prison authorities reportedly withheld proper medical care from some Christian prisoners, according to human rights groups.' [46] The report further highlighted the case of four Christians who in October 2013 were sentenced to 80 lashes each for drinking wine during communion and possession of a satellite antenna, according to a human rights organisation.[47]

2.8.2 The UN Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran reported in March 2014 under the heading 'Religious minorities' that:

'former detainees report being subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment and prolonged solitary confinement to coerce confessions to accusations or admissions about other people. Many detainees also reported being held largely incommunicado, without access to a lawyer. Some prosecutions reportedly failed to meet international standards, marked by limited access to case files and the right to present a defence. Under the law, religious minorities, including recognized Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, also face discrimination in the judicial system, such as harsher punishments than Muslims for certain crimes, and are barred from serving as judges.' [48]

2.8.3 The Danish Immigration Service report published in June 2014 following their fact-finding mission interviewed an international organisation in Turkey that observed that 'there have been reports of torturing of converts while in detention and it is considered that the authorities want to intimidate those detained, either to stop their activities or to coerce them to co-operate.' [49]

2.8.4 CSW reported in June 2014 that 'Pastor Behnam Irani, who was sentenced in 2011 to six years imprisonment on political charges, was beaten in prison and transferred to an unknown location.' [50] According to the same article:

'during the first few months of his imprisonment in Ghezal Hesar, Pastor Irani was held incommunicado in a small cell, where guards repeatedly woke him from sleep as a form of psychological torture. He was moved to a cramped room where inmates could not lie down to sleep, before being transferred to a crowded, filthy cell, which he shares with 40 criminals, many of whom are violent. He has been subjected to physical and psychological pressure, and has suffered regular beatings from cell mates and prison

[45] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[46] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[47] U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, 28 July 2014, Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom, Government Practices http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222289 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[48] UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 18 March 2014, paragraphs 36 http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/120/75/PDF/G1412075.pdf?OpenElement [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[49] Danish Immigration Service – Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran – June 2014, 1.2.2 Iranian legislation and cases against converts, http://www.refworld.org/docid/53b650394.html [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[50] Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Pastor Irani beaten in prison and taken to unknown location, 9 June 2014, http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=2076 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

authorities, as well as death threats.' [51] In June 2014, CSW reported that two Iranian Christians had reportedly been tortured in Gohardasht prison and violently beaten in Ahwaz Prison respectively.[52]

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[51] Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Pastor Irani beaten in prison and taken to unknown location, 9 June 2014, http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=2076 [Accessed 27 October 2014]
[52] Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Christian prisoners beaten and tortured in prison, 14 May 2014, http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=2056 [Accessed 27 October 2014]

Annex A: Map

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF
IRAN
CASPIAN SEA
TURKMENISTAN
AZERBAIJAN
ARMENIA
TURKEY
IRAQ
KUWAIT
SAUDI ARABIA
BAHRAIN
QATAR
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
OMAN
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
PERSIAN GULF
GULF OF OMAN
GILĀN
MĀZANDARĀN
TEHRĀN
SEMNĀN
ZANJĀN
KORDESTĀN
HAMADĀN
MARKAZĀ
KERMĀNSHĀH
LORESTĀN
ĪLĀM
ESFAHĀN
KHORĀSĀN
YAZD
KHUZESTĀN
KERMĀN
FĀRS
HORMOZGĀN
SĪSTĀN VA BALŪCHESTĀN
National capital
Provincial capital
City, town
Airport
International boundary
Provincial boundary
Main road
Secondary road
Railroad
Tehran
Baghdad
Kuwait
Manama
Doha
Abu Dhabi
Mashhad
Esfahan
Shiraz
Kermān
Tabriz
Mosul
Basrah
Dubayy
Ra's al Khaymah
Bandar-e Abbās
Zāhedān
Bam
Yazd
Qom
Karaj
Rasht
Sari
Amol
Gorgan
Bojnūrd
Sabzevar
Torbat-e Heydarīyeh
Tayyebāt
Gonābad
Birjand
Zābol
Zaranj
Chābahār
Bandar-e Lengeh
Lār
Jahrom
Fīrūzābād
Bandar-e Būshehr
Borāzjān
Yasūj
Sanandaj
Kermānshāh
Khorramābād
Dezfūl
Ahvāz
Bandar-e Māh-Shahr
Shahr-e Kord
Gomsheh
Ardakān
Bīrjand
Kashmar
Torbat-e Jām
Ashkabad
Mary
Tedzhen
Krasnovodsk
Nebit-Dag
Astārā
Ardabīl
Zanjān
Qazvīn
Sāqqez
Mahābād
Orūmīyeh
Khoy
Marand
Tabrīz
Mīānduāb
Mānsūrī
Mālāyer
Borujerd
Arāk
Najafābād
Shūsh
Dārīūn
Masjed-e Solaymān
Al Kūt
Al Amārah
Al Basrah
Karbalā
Al Hillah
As Samawah
An Nāṣirīyah
Al Ḥufūf
Ad Dammām
Ra's al Khaymah
Dubayy
Jask
Bandar Bahesht
Nīkshahr
Gwādar
Īrānshahr
Mīnāb
Bandar-e Lengeh
Jīroft
Sīrjān
Kashān
Qom
Sāvah
Hamadān
Qasr-e Shīrīn
Khānsār
Gonbad-e Qābūs
Shāhrūd
Sāmnān
Dasht-e Kavīr
Dasht-e Lūt
Zarand
Rafsanjān
Mārv Dasht
Sīrjān
Bam
Jīroft
Khāf
Tayyebāt
Herāt
Kandahar
Zābol
Zaranj
Chābahār
Bandar-e Lengeh
Bandar-e Abbās
Bandar-e Būshehr
Bandar-e Māh-Shahr
Bandar-e Anzalī
Bandar-e Torkeman
Bandar-e Pahlavī
Bandar-e Chābahār
Bandar-e Lengeh
Bandar-e Bahesht
Bandar-e Abbās
Bandar-e Būsheh

Annex B: Caselaw

SZ and JM (Christians – FS confirmed) Iran CG [2008] UKAIT 00082 (12 November 2008)

The then Asylum and Immigration Tribunal found that:

“Conditions for Christians in Iran have not deteriorated sufficiently to necessitate a change in the guidance in FS Iran CG [2004] UKIAT 00303 Iran. For some converts to sacrament-based churches the conditions may be such that they could not reasonably be expected to return and their cases must be considered on HJ (homosexuality: reasonably tolerating living discreetly) Iran [2008] UKAIT 00044 * grounds.

It remains to be seen whether the proposed inclusion of apostasy in the amended criminal code will make a material difference. The amendments to the code are part of a wholesale change in the criminal law and not solely aimed at converts. The proposals are still before Parliament.

'Proselytising' and 'evangelising' are not terms of art and distinctions should not be drawn between them.”

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* see subsequent Supreme Court Judgement in HJ

Supreme Court. HJ & HT v SSHD [2010] UKSC31 7 July 2010

The Supreme Court hereby established the test which should be applied when assessing a claim based on fear of persecution because of an applicant’s sexual orientation which is as follows:

(i) Is the applicant gay or someone who would be treated as gay by potential persecutors in the country of origin?

(ii) If yes, would gay people who live openly be liable to persecution in that country of origin?

(iii) How would the applicant behave on return? If the applicant would live openly and be exposed to a real risk of persecution, he has a well-founded fear of persecution even if he could avoid the risk by living discreetly.

(iv) If the applicant would live discreetly, why would he live discreetly? If the applicant would live discreetly because he wanted to do so, or because of social pressures (e.g. not wanting to distress his parents or embarrass his friends) then he is not a refugee. But if a material reason for living discreetly would be the fear of persecution that would follow if he lived openly, then he is a refugee.

FS and others (Iran, Christian Converts) Iran CG [2004] UKIAT 00303 (17 November 2004)

The then Immigration Appeal Tribunal found that:

“Conclusions […] 153. The evidence shows that those Christians who are not converts from Islam and who are members of ethnic minority Churches are not persecuted, at least as a general rule. They are accepted but nonetheless suffer from societal discrimination and a second class status in the eyes of the state and its institutions, such as the substantive laws

and the administration of justice, the Majlis, public sector employment and university entrance. The attitude towards them of the state in its various manifestations may vary over time, as may the attitude of Muslims where they live, but at present those Christians do not face a real risk of persecution even though they face real discrimination. Persecution after the Revolution had given way to discrimination. […]”

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