

Ambassador H.E. Alireza Yousefi,
Embassy of Iran to Norway,
PO Box 4049 AMB,
0244 Oslo
NORWAY

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern about three Iranian converts to Christianity; Mina Khajavi, Anooshavan Avedian, and Yasser Akbari. These individuals were all subjected to prosecution and arrest due to their peaceful religious gatherings, which the court, incorrectly and without satisfactory evidence or reasoning, claimed to be a threat to national security. They have all been sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, of which Mr. Akbari has already served three.

The Supreme Court of Iran ruled in 2021 that the promotion of Christianity and the formation of house churches are not criminalized in law and are not to be deemed a threat to national security. The majority of converted Christians in Iran lack official places for worship and are forced to gather in private homes instead. As peaceful gatherings in house churches are religious ceremonies, they are not to be counted as sects covered by Articles 498, 499, and 500 of the Iranian Penal Code, referring to the illegal practice of becoming members of anti-state groups, and of promoting deviant and proselyting propaganda against the Islamic State of Iran.

As the said articles do not define clearly and in unequivocal terms, the illegal content of which an insult, action, or propaganda against the Islamic State of Iran would consist, religious minorities in Iran are currently facing the risk of being incorrectly accused of the criminal activities mentioned above.

I would like to humbly request Your Excellency's intervention to:

- secure the immediate and unconditional release of Mrs. Mina Khajavi, Mr. Anooshavan Avedian, and Mr. Yasser Akbari
- ensure that Articles 498, 499, and 500 of the Islamic Penal Code are re-drafted so as not to be misused to unjustly accuse religious minorities of criminal activities
- ensure that Iranian courts respect every citizen's fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief, as described in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a signatory

Sincerely,