**Baha’i to Begin One-Year Prison Sentence for Practicing His Faith**

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A Baha’i man, Sarang Ettehadi, has been summoned to begin serving his one-year prison sentence on charges of “propaganda against the state through participation in Baha’i worship and prayer groups.” Ettehadi told the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran that he had been instructed via a telephone call from the Evin Prison Courts on July 6, 2014, to appear to begin serving his sentence within a week. Ettehadi’s wife, Nasim Ashrafi, already began serving her sentence at Evin Prison on May 6, 2014.

“They called my father, who holds the deed that was used as my bail collateral, and asked that I turn myself in to start serving the sentence. I will definitely go, because my wife went to Evin on May 6 for her one-year sentence. At least if I go now, our sentences will end almost at the same time and then we can live together in peace,” the Baha’i citizen told the Campaign.

Intelligence agents arrested Sarang Ettehadi and his wife Nasim Ashrafi on July 11, 2012 at their home. Ettehadi spent 22 days and his wife 23 days at Evin Prison under interrogation before they were released on bail. Ettehadi was tried at Branch 28 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court under Judge Moghisseh on January 15, 2014. Although he was indicted for “propaganda against the state,” the judge added the charge of “membership in a Baha’i organization to undermine national security” and sentenced him to five years in prison. After his lawyer appealed the sentence, Branch 26 of the Tehran Appeals Court exonerated him of the charge of “membership in Baha’i organization,” but he was sentenced to one year in prison for “propaganda against the state.”

“During the interrogations, they told us, ‘You are not among Iranian citizens and you must leave Iran.’ The process for the interrogations and the sentence were not fair at all. Religious activities cannot be construed as propaganda against the state. I have never been involved in riots or armed activities against the state. All my activities have been peaceful, and I have never bothered the state. We hold our own ceremonies. But in the decisions for our cases, our statements and the law were ignored,” Ettehadi told the Campaign.

“The judge asked me, ‘Are you a member of the Baha’i community?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He asked, ‘What kinds of programs did you have?’ I said, ‘Prayer and worship sessions with fellow-believers.’ He said, ‘Did you invite Muslims, too?’ I said, ‘No.’ He said, ‘You had programs with Baha’is, so this was organizational work, and as the Baha’i organization is illegal, you are convicted of membership in illegal groups.’ I said, ‘But prayer and worship were not propaganda against the state.’ He said nothing. All he said was that the Baha’i organization is illegal,” the Baha’i citizen told the Campaign.

Ettehadi’s wife, Nasim Ashrafi, was tried separately on January 15, 2014, and was sentenced to one year in prison on charges of “propaganda against the state.” Security agents arrested her on the street on May 6, 2014, and transferred her to Evin Prison to begin serving her sentence. “Examples of ‘propaganda against the state’ provided for my wife [during the trial] were proselytizing the Baha’i faith and attracting Muslims through convening classes for the youth. However, only Baha’i youth participated in these classes and all that was taught in them were better studying and living skills,” he said regarding his wife’s prosecution.

“My wife suffers from severe spinal deviation and needs constant treatment. In March we got a letter from the courts to have her examined by the Medical Examiner. The doctors at the Medical Examiner’s Office also confirmed that Nasim needs treatment in a stress-free environment. We had hoped that with the confirmation from the Medical Examiner’s Office doctors, they wouldn’t come after her to enforce the sentence, but on May 6, 2014, when she was returning home from the lab, she was arrested on the street,” added Ettehadi.

The Baha’i community in Iran faces severe and systematic discrimination and persecution. They are routinely denied freedom of religion and are prosecuted for practicing their faith.