

Imprisoned Iranian Women Refuse to Deny Their Faith

Open Doors Launches Campaign Urging Iran to Release Christians Now

SANTA ANA, Calif., Nov. 5 /Christian Newswire/ -- On August 9 two Christian women appeared before an Iranian judge who asked them to deny their faith and return to Islam.

Maryam Rostampour, 27, and Marzieh Amirzadeh Esmaeilabad, 30, have been held in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran since March 5. They were originally accused of "acting against state security" and "taking part in illegal gatherings," according to Compass Direct News.

When both women refused to recant their faith, the judge sent them back to their prison cells "to think about it," according to a source who spoke with family members.

"When they said, 'Think about it,' it means you are going back to jail," said the source, according to Compass. "This is something we say in Iran. It means: 'Since you're not sorry, you'll stay in jail for a long time, and maybe you'll change your mind.'"

The source said the first goal of judges in such cases is usually to make "apostates" deny their faith through threats or by sending them back to prison for a longer time.

The women re-appeared in court on Oct. 7. The anti-state charge was dropped but they still face "apostasy" and "propagation of the Christian faith" charges.

Also, the women have undergone intense interrogations which have reportedly included sleep deprivation and other psychological pressure. They share a cell with over 20 other women and both have deteriorating health. Marzieh suffers from spinal pain, an infected tooth and intense headaches and is especially in need of medical attention, which has not been provided. Evin prison has received criticism for its human rights violations and executions in recent years.

On Oct. 26, the U.S. State Department designated Iran, along with seven other countries, as "Countries of Particular Concern" for their religious repression. The Islamic Republic reportedly imprisoned, harassed and intimidated people based on their religious beliefs, while government-controlled broadcast and print media intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities, the report said. Iran is ranked No. 3 on Open Doors' World Watch List of countries where Christians suffer the most severe persecution.

The Open Doors USA advocacy department is launching a campaign asking people to send a respectful message to Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Khazaei, who is Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations in New York City. The email messages will be sent to the government in Iran as well. The letters will ask for the immediate release of Maryam and Marzieh.

A sample email letter to send is located at the Open Doors USA website at www.OpenDoorsUSA.org. Please do not refer to Open Doors in your email.

"Maryam and Marzieh are suffering in an Iranian prison simply for refusing to recant their belief in Jesus Christ...they truly are modern heroes of the faith," says Open Doors USA President/CEO Dr. Carl Moeller. "We must speak out against this injustice. Join our campaign urging the Iranian government to release these women."

Pray for Maryam and Marzieh Sunday, Nov. 8, during the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

An estimated 100 million Christians worldwide suffer interrogation, arrest and even death for their faith in Christ, with millions more facing discrimination and alienation. Open Doors supports and strengthens believers in the world's most difficult areas through Bible and Christian literature distribution, leadership training and assistance, Christian community development, prayer and presence ministry and advocacy on

behalf of suffering believers. To partner with Open Doors USA, call toll free at 888-5-BIBLE-5 (888-524-2535) or go to our Website at www.OpenDoorsUSA.org.