



Iranian pastor Yousef Nadarkhani released from prison

On 8 September 2012, according to the Iranian court decision, Yousef Nadarkhani, 35-year-old evangelical pastor, was released from prison. In June 2009, he was arrested for evangelism in Rasht city (northwest of Iran). His arrest was preceded by his appeal to the authorities, in which he disputed a law of the Gilan province. According to this law, all schoolchildren, including Christians, were obliged to study the Qur'an. On 22 September 2010, the Iranian court sentenced the pastor to death.

Yousef Nadarkhani lodged an appeal to the Supreme Court of Iran. In June 2011, the court ordered to postpone execution and referred his case back to Gilan for a review. The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, was to decide the pastor's fate.

There was a great international response to this case. More than one million signatures in support of Yousef Nadarkhani were gathered all over the world. In September 2011, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia addressed Ayatollah Khamenei with a request to grant a pardon to the pastor. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, addressed the same request to the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

On 26 June 2012, Metropolitan Hilarion once again raised the question on Yousef Nadarkhani's case during the meeting with Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, Secretary General of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, who had arrived in Moscow to take part in the meeting of the Joint Russian-Iranian Commission for Orthodoxy-Islam Dialogue. "We know that the decision on Nadarkhani's case now depends on the Supreme Leader of the country, Ayatollah Khamenei, who is to deliver an official verdict," – Metropolitan Hilarion said. Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri had assured Metropolitan Hilarion that as soon as he returned to Iran he would address the request of the Russian Orthodox Church to Ayatollah Khamenei.