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IRAN

House Churches and Converts

Joint report from the Danish Immigration Service and the Danish Refugee Council based on interviews in Tehran, Iran, Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom, 9 September to 16 September 2017 and 2 October to 3 October 2017

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology.¹ The report is based on approved notes from meetings with carefully selected sources. Statements from sources are used in the report and all statements are referenced.

This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed in the report and should be weighed against other available country of origin information on house churches and converts, including control with the house churches and converts, follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and recent trial cases related to house churches and converts.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations or analysis. The information in the report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service or the Danish Refugee Council.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

¹ European Union: European Asylum Support Office (EASO), EASO Country of Origin Information report methodology, 10 July 2012.

Methodology

The report at hand is a product of a joint mission conducted by the Country of Origin Information Division, Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) to Tehran, Iran and Ankara, Turkey, from 9 September to 16 September 2017 and a follow-up visit to London, Great Britain from 2 October to 3 October 2017.

The purpose of the mission was to collect updated information on five issues recurring in cases regarding Iranian asylum seekers in Denmark:

- Judicial issues
- Relations outside of marriage in Iran and marriages without the accept of the family
- Issues concerning persons of ethnic minorities, (Kurds and Ahwazi Arabs)
- House churches and converts
- Recruitment to the war in Syria.

The present report focuses on house churches and converts, including control with the house churches and converts, follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and recent trial cases related to house churches and converts. The findings regarding the four other issues are reported in separate reports.

The terms of reference (TOR) for the mission were drawn up jointly by DIS and DRC, in consultation with the Danish Refugee Appeals Board as well as an advisory group on COI (“Referencegruppen”).² The terms of reference are included at the end of the report (Annex C).

In the scope of compiling this report, the delegation consulted 10 sources in Tehran, comprising representatives from the Iranian authorities, diplomatic representations, two sources with knowledge about Christians in Iran, an international organisation as well as a legal source. The Danish Embassy in Tehran provided valuable assistance in identifying some of the interlocutors based in Tehran relevant to the terms of reference. The Danish Embassy provided assistance during the mission to Tehran and an official from the embassy also participated in the meetings held in Tehran. Due to the limited access to sources in Iran, the delegation also sought to consult four sources outside of Iran, these being a consulting agency, an international organisation and a Christian advocacy organisation based in London and finally an anonymous source based in Ankara.

The sources interviewed were selected by the delegation based on their expertise, merit and experience relevant to the mission.

² The group consists of Danish Refugee Council, Amnesty International in Denmark, Danish Institute for Human Rights, Dignity, representatives of two Christian organizations (“Europamissionen” and “Åbne Døre”), the National Commissioner of Police and the Danish Bar and Law Society (representing asylum lawyers).

The sources consulted during the mission to Tehran, Ankara and London, are listed in Annex A, and all interviews were conducted in English.

The sources were asked how reference might be made in the report. Most sources requested varying degrees of anonymity for the sake of discretion and upholding tolerable working conditions. All sources are referred in the report according to their own request.

The interlocutors were informed about the purpose of the mission and the fact that their statements would be included in a public report. The notes from the meetings with the sources were forwarded to them for approval and amendment, allowing the opportunity to offer corrections of their statements. All sources, except one,³ have approved their statements. The source whose statements have not been approved did not revert with an answer before the report's finalisation, despite having been contacted several times. These notes have been included in the report in the forwarded form.

Two diplomatic sources consulted in Tehran provided background information to the report, but the notes from these meetings have not been included in the report, in accordance with the sources. In addition, the delegation met with the National Institute of Population Research in Iran which provided background information not directly linked to the TOR. Finally, the delegation paid a courtesy visit to the department for consular affairs in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Records from these two meetings are not included, either.

The report is a synthesis of the sources' statements, and does thus not include all details and nuances of each statement. In the report, care has been taken to present views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. All sources' statements relevant for the topics of the report have been extracted from the full meeting note with each of the particular sources and incorporated into the report, and are found in Annex B of this report.

Paragraphs in the meeting notes in Annex B have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The intention hereby is to make it easier to find the exact place of a statement in each note.

The research and editing of this report was finalised by the beginning of January 2018.

The report is available on the websites of DIS, <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/da/Ord-og-begreber/US/Asyl/Landerapporter/> and DRC, <https://flygtning.dk/nyheder-og-fakta/publikationer/rapporter> and thus available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the general public.

³ Deputy Director General of the High Council for Human Rights and Judicial Cooperation, Iran

1. House Churches and Converts

1.1 Control with the house churches and converts

It is difficult for the authorities to control house churches as they are dispersed, not structured and unknown.⁴ The closure of churches affiliated with the "Assembly of God" in 2013 has resulted in the spread of house churches, as people who were attending the Church services began to go to house churches instead.⁵ One source noted that house churches are quite common in Iran and their numbers are growing. According to the source, the increasing number of house churches show that they have space to operate, even though they are illegal.⁶ The authorities fear the expansion of the house churches phenomenon in Iran.⁷

The authorities use informers to infiltrate the house churches.⁸ The infiltrators are identified and selected by the authorities.⁹ To prevent infiltration and intervention, house churches organise themselves as a mobile group consisting of a small number of people.¹⁰ A source mentioned that the prevention of external infiltration is difficult, as the authorities use informers who pretend to be converts.¹¹ One source explained that it would be a strategy for the authorities to either monitor or arrest and release members of a house church to make an informant out of them. The authorities could use information on the person's background to put pressure on them.¹²

House churches are monitored by the authorities.¹³ If the authorities receive a report about a specific house church, a monitoring process will be initiated, one source noted. However, the authorities will not act immediately, as the authorities want to collect information about both the members and who is doing what in the community.¹⁴ Flourishing house churches are more in danger, as the authorities see these churches as a bigger threat.¹⁵ Whether the authorities will intervene depends on the activities of the house church and the size of the group.¹⁶ A source said that the house churches are systematically raided.¹⁷

There have not been any significant changes in the authorities' control with house churches recently.¹⁸

⁴ An anonymous source: 65; a source who is well-informed about Christians: 18; a Western embassy (1): 24

⁵ An anonymous source: 65; Middle East Concern: 104

⁶ A Western embassy (4): 45

⁷ A source in Iran who is well-informed about Christians: 18

⁸ An anonymous source: 73; Middle East Concern: 104

⁹ An anonymous source: 73; Middle East Concern: 104

¹⁰ An anonymous source: 66; a source who is well-informed about Christians: 18

¹¹ Middle East Concern: 104

¹² An anonymous source: 73;

¹³ Amnesty International: 50; a source who is well informed about Christians: 17; an anonymous source: 65

¹⁴ An anonymous source: 69, 73

¹⁵ Middle East Concern: 110; an anonymous source: 67, 69

¹⁶ Amnesty International: 50

¹⁷ A source in Iran who is well-informed about Christians: 17

¹⁸ A Western Embassy (3): 35; an anonymous source: 78; a Western embassy (1): 27

One source pointed out that there has been a change in the authorities monitoring of social media and online activities.¹⁹ Another source added that there is a widespread monitoring of telecommunication and electronic communication if a Christian has caught the interest of the authorities. Certain keywords serve as base for the electronic surveillance e.g. “church”, “Jesus”, “Christian” and “baptism”.²⁰ As it is well-known that the authorities are tapping phones, the house members are cautious and turn off their phones long before they reach their meeting place.²¹ Furthermore, the authorities are more alerted to activities threatening the established system.²²

There has been a change in the way the Iranian authorities look at Christians in general. The change started after the green revolution in 2009, as the Christians are perceived to bring ideas of freedom.²³

It is unknown to what extent the Iranian authorities have the capacity to monitor everybody. The authorities do not monitor everyone all the time; what the authorities want is to create a fear among people that they are being monitored all the time, a source highlighted.²⁴

1.2 Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

Neighbours, who have become aware of unusual activities around a house, can cause a house church to be revealed for the authorities.²⁵ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran added that otherwise, the authorities do not have the possibility to know about the house church as members are discrete about it.²⁶

It is unlikely that a family member will report to the authorities on a converted family member.²⁷ However, it occurs in cases where the family member is a government employee or whose professional and/or social status is affected by the Christian family member.²⁸ One source added that many families are loyal to the regime and have a Basij member within the family. If there are children in the family, they could also inform their teachers about activities in their homes, at school.²⁹

¹⁹ A Western Embassy (3): 35

²⁰ Middle East Concern: 103

²¹ An anonymous source: 66

²² A Western Embassy (3): 35

²³ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 2

²⁴ An anonymous source: 80

²⁵ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 7; a Western embassy (3): 39; an anonymous source: 74; a Western embassy (1): 26

²⁶ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 7

²⁷ Middle East Concern: 112; a Western embassy (1); 26; a foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 6

²⁸ Middle East Concern: 112

²⁹ An anonymous source: 75

The authorities are primarily targeting the house church leaders and secondary the members and converts.³⁰ Two other sources stated that the authorities target both the leaders of the house churches and the members.³¹

The typical pattern of targeting is by arresting and releasing the house church leaders, as the authorities want to weaken the house church. Ordinary members of house churches also risk arrest in a house church.³² However, they will be released again on the condition that they stay away from proselytizing. If they stop proselytizing, the authorities will stop gathering information about them, a source added. One source mentioned that it would be possible for an arrested convert to pay his/her way out of an arrest. The source added that even if it is known that the person is a converted Muslim, it would be a question of the amount of money paid to be released.³³ Whether a house church member is targeted also depends on his/her conducted activities and if he/she is known abroad, the same source noted.³⁴ Ordinary house church members risk being called in for interrogation on a regular basis as the authorities want to harass and intimidate them, a source explained.³⁵

If a house church member is arrested for the first time, he/she will normally be released within 24 hours. If he/she has been detained in prison, he/she will receive his charge within 24 hours and come to court within ten days, a source mentioned.³⁶

A conversion and an anonymous life as a converted Christian in itself do not lead to an arrest,³⁷ but if the conversion is followed up by other activities as for instance proselytising and training others, the case differs;³⁸ the same applies if family members report the convert to the authorities.³⁹ One source highlighted that if a convert does not proselytize or promote a house church, the authorities will not know about him/her.⁴⁰ Middle East Concern, however, did not consider a life as an anonymous Christian as sustainable, as converts, in this case, have to lie about their faith and act against their religion.⁴¹ Amnesty International added that a conversion might be revealed to the surrounding community if the convert does not participate in Islamic events as many social norms and cultural activities are connected to Islam.⁴²

³⁰ A source who is well-informed about Christians: 18; an anonymous source: 67

³¹ Amnesty International: 51; Middle East Concern: 105, 109

³² An anonymous source: 67; Middle East Concern: 105

³³ A Western embassy (1): 26

³⁴ An anonymous source: 68, 69

³⁵ Middle East Concern: 109

³⁶ An anonymous source: 71

³⁷ International Organization for migration: 100; A Western embassy (3): 37; a Western embassy (4): 47; an anonymous source: 75, 77; a Western embassy (1): 30

³⁸ A Western Embassy (3): 37; an anonymous source: 77; a foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 8; a Western embassy (1): 30

³⁹ Middle East Concern: 112; an anonymous source: 75

⁴⁰ A Western embassy (3): 34

⁴¹ Middle East Concern: 125

⁴² Amnesty International: 57

Converts who tell their family about their conversion risk getting into trouble; they risk exclusion and threats from the family who might think that the converted family members will create a problem for them.⁴³ According to one source many converts do not tell their families about the conversion.⁴⁴

Several sources addressed the issue regarding Iranian converts returning from Europe. According to two sources, converted returnees who do not carry out activities related to Christianity upon return will not be of interest to the authorities.⁴⁵ Middle East Concern made the distinction whether the converted person was known before leaving Iran or not; returning will cause problems if the convert has been known by the authorities before leaving. If the opposite is the case, going back to Iran would not be problematic.⁴⁶ Converts who announce their conversion in public may face serious problems.⁴⁷

If the returned convert has been very outspoken about his/her conversion on social media, including Facebook, the authorities might become aware of it and arrest and interrogate the convert upon return.⁴⁸ A Western embassy (3) said that the subsequent process would depend on what the returnees inform the authorities about. The embassy did not consider that the converts would receive harsh punishment if they are not high-profiled and are not involved in propagating Christianity or activities perceived as a threat to national security.⁴⁹

Declaring conversion on Facebook in itself does not lead to persecution but likely to monitoring.⁵⁰ One source explained that a photo indicating a conversion posted on the internet would be evaluated by the authorities along with the profile and activities of the converted person. If the person did not have any previous affiliation with Christianity before leaving the country, he/she will not be persecuted.⁵¹

If a converted person uses the religion politically to for instance compare disadvantages of Islam with advantages of Christianity or another religion on social media, it could be a problem for him, a source mentioned.⁵² Most Iranians are not very religious, but they might see conversion as a way to come closer to Western values, and as a protest against the system, another source mentioned.⁵³ However, it was underlined that it would apply to a person who has made his/her own analysis of the two religions and not someone who has used “copy paste” phrases.⁵⁴

⁴³ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 6; a source in Iran who is well-informed about Christians: 14; a Western embassy (4): 47; an anonymous source: 83

⁴⁴ Amnesty International: 56

⁴⁵ International Organization for Migration: 100; an anonymous source: 82

⁴⁶ Middle East Concern: 122

⁴⁷ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 6; Deputy director General of the High Council for Human Rights and Judicial Cooperation: 88; International Organization for Migration: 100; A Western embassy (1): 29, 30

⁴⁸ A Western embassy (3): 36; Middle East Concern: 124

⁴⁹ A Western embassy (3): 36

⁵⁰ Middle East Concern: 124; an anonymous source: 82

⁵¹ An anonymous source: 81, 82

⁵² An anonymous source: 81

⁵³ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 2

⁵⁴ An anonymous source: 81

A baptism in itself will not have significance, according to two sources.⁵⁵ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran noted that it is doubtful whether it would make a difference for the authorities if the convert is baptized.⁵⁶ Middle East Concern source considered that a baptism, which is documented, could alert the authorities and prove to be problematic.⁵⁷

1.3 Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

Christian converts are typically not charged with apostasy;⁵⁸ convert cases are usually considered as national security matters⁵⁹ which are handled by the Revolutionary Court.⁶⁰ A source added that the authorities perceive activities related to conversion as political activities.⁶¹

Death penalty in cases related to conversion is not a common punishment.⁶² A Western embassy (4) highlighted that the implementation of the death penalty in Iran is related to drug and murder cases, and more rarely to high-profile political cases.⁶³ A Western embassy (1) noted that there has not been issued a death sentence for conversion the last 10 years.⁶⁴

The authorities are not filing cases against converts, and no one in Iran has been arrested solely because of a conversion, a Western embassy (4) stated.⁶⁵ Middle East Consultancy Service added that there is no legislation on apostasy in the Penal Code, however, many converts are prosecuted.⁶⁶

Organisers of house churches might risk accusations of “Crimes against God” which would carry the death penalty, a source stated. However, the source did not know of any cases where this accusation has resulted in actual execution of the accused.⁶⁷

As regards prosecution of house church members, one source stated that it would probably only be the leader of the House Church,⁶⁸ while another source said that this goes both for low profile cases and for house church leader.⁶⁹

⁵⁵ An anonymous source: 70; Amnesty International: 52

⁵⁶ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 9

⁵⁷ Middle East Concern: 123

⁵⁸ Middle East Concern: 113; Middle East Consultancy Services: 135

⁵⁹ Amnesty International: 53; Middle East Concern: 113; a Western Embassy (3): 37, 40

⁶⁰ Amnesty International: 58

⁶¹ A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran: 2

⁶² A Western embassy (1): 29; a Western embassy (4): 47, 48; Deputy Director General of the High Council for Human Rights and Judicial Cooperation: 88

⁶³ A Western embassy (4): 48

⁶⁴ A Western embassy (1): 29

⁶⁵ A Western embassy (4): 47

⁶⁶ Middle East Consultancy Service: 135

⁶⁷ A Western embassy (4): 48

⁶⁸ A Western embassy (3): 40

⁶⁹ Middle East Concern: 113

Group formation in Iran is punishable, a source noted. According to Article 498 of Iran's Islamic Penal Code, "forming a group composed of more than two people with the purpose of disrupting national security" can carry a 10-year prison sentence.⁷⁰ As an example where this accusation has been made, two sources highlighted a case from March 2017 where a Christian convert named Ebrahim Firouzi was issued a five years sentence for "forming a group for disrupting national security".^{71,72}

When highlighting recent trial cases, several sources mentioned the Naderkhani case.⁷³ Naderkhani was sentenced to death in 2012, but was later released. He has been rearrested in May 2017 and sentenced to ten years in prison for propagating house churches and "Zionist Christianity". His case has been appealed by his lawyer.⁷⁴

The Maryam Naghash Zargaran case was also mentioned.⁷⁵ Zargaran was released from Evin Prison on 1 August 2017, after serving more than four years in jail. She was sentenced by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court for "assembly and collusion against national security" in 2013. In connection with her release, she has been banned from leaving Iran for six month.^{76,77}

Another case pointed out for the delegation was the case concerning Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz.⁷⁸ In July 2017, Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment because he was accused that on 26 December 2014, at a Christmas celebration at his house in Tehran, he conducted "evangelism", illegal house church activity and other acts "against national security" and "insulting the sacred".⁷⁹

Middle East Concern informed the delegation about a case from 2016. On 26 August 2016, security officials from the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) raided a picnic in Firuzkuh in the Alborz Mountains, north-east of Tehran. The MOIS officials took five men away; the men included Mohammad Dehnavi, Hadi Asgari, Amin Afshar Naderi and Ramiel Bet Tamraz, who were members of Tehran Pentecostal Assyrian Church before it was shut down by Iran's Ministry of Interior in March 2009. Dehnavi, Asgari and Naderi are converts to Christianity. Bet Tamraz is ethnic Assyrian. On 10 October 2016, Ramiel Bet Tamraz and Mohammad Dehnavi were released after submitting bail equivalent to \$33,000 each. At that time, they had not been informed of any charges against them. Mohammad Dehnavi was released after signing an

⁷⁰ Amnesty International: 55

⁷¹ Middle East Consultancy Services: 132; Middle East Concern: 119

⁷² Farsi Christian News Network, 'Iran Court Confirms Five Years Prison Sentence for Christian Convert', 31 March 2017, <https://fcnn.com/en/?p=931>

⁷³ Amnesty International: 59; Middle East Concern: 121; an anonymous source: 79

⁷⁴ Amnesty International: 59; Middle East Concern: 121

⁷⁵ Middle East Consultancy Services: 137; a Western embassy (3): 42

⁷⁶ Center for Human Rights in Iran, 'Christian Convert Released From Prison in Iran Slapped With Travel Ban', 22 August 2017, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/08/christian-convert-released-from-prison-in-iran-slapped-with-travel-ban/>

⁷⁷ Center for Human Rights in Iran, 'Hospitalized Christian Convert Returned to Prison Without Treatment', 31 May 2016, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/05/maryam-naghash-zargaran/>

⁷⁸ A source who is well-informed about Christians: 23; Middle East Concern: 115

⁷⁹ Farsi Christian News Network, 'Iran: Christians face long prison sentences', 10 July 2017, <https://fcnn.com/en/?p=1370>

agreement that he would not attend a house church. The men have since been charged with 'acting against national security' and 'organizing and creating house churches'.⁸⁰

In May 2017 Naderi was sentenced to 15 years and Asgari to 10 years. The legal representative of these men has filed an appeal to overturn the sentences. Naderi was finally released on bail on 25 July 2017. Asgari remains in detention and unable to raise the bail demanded for his conditional release. He has faced intense pressure during interrogation.⁸¹

House church members or leaders who are out on bail, are sometimes encouraged by the authorities to leave the country if they have a prominent profile.⁸²

Another Revolutionary Court case mentioned by the sources includes the Sina Dehghan case from May 2016. Dehghan was charged of conducting teachers protest campaign and blasphemy through writings online and sentenced to death by execution. He was arrested in October 2015 and the court decision was declared by the Revolutionary Court of Arak in May 2016.⁸³ The sentence has been upheld by the country's Supreme Court.^{84, 85} Further it was highlighted for the delegation that since June 2017, Judge Mashallah Ahmadzadeh of Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran has issued long prison sentences to at least 11 Christian converts and the former leader of the Assyrian Pentecostal Church in Iran.^{86, 87}

⁸⁰ Middle East Concern: 116

⁸¹ Middle East Concern: 117

⁸² An anonymous source: 72; Middle East Concern: 107

⁸³ Farsi Christian News Network, 'Iran: Death Sentence for a Christian Convert', 02 September 2016, <https://fcnn.com/en/?p=392>

⁸⁴ Middle East Consultancy Services: 136

⁸⁵ Independent, 'Iranian man sentenced to death for 'insulting Islam' through messaging app', 30 March 2017 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/iranian-man-sina-dehghan-death-sentence-insult-islam-muslim-line-messaging-app-arak-prison-amnesty-a7658466.html>

⁸⁶ Center for Human Rights in Iran, '11 Christian Converts Issued Long Prison Sentences in Iran in Less Than Two Months in Sham Trials', 20 July 2017, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/07/11-christian-converts-issued-long-prison-sentences-in-iran-in-less-than-two-months/>

⁸⁷ A Western Embassy (3): 43

Annex A: Consulted sources

1. A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran
2. A source in Iran who is well-informed about Christians
3. A Western embassy (1)
4. A Western embassy (2)
5. A Western embassy (3)
6. A Western embassy (4)
7. Amnesty International
8. An anonymous legal source
9. An anonymous source
10. Deputy Director General of the High Council for Human Rights and Judicial Cooperation, Iran
11. Deputy Director General, General Directorate of Human Rights and Women, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran
12. International Organization for Migration
13. Middle East Consultancy Services
14. Middle East Concern

Annex B: Meeting notes

Meeting with a foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran

Tehran, 11 September 2017

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

1. Regarding the authorities control, with house churches, the source assumed that they were under surveillance but did not have any specific information on this subject, as the source did not have any contact with house churches. The source stated that house church leaders will not use ordinary communication channels that can lead the authorities to track them.
2. There has been a change in the way the Iranian authorities look at Christians in general. The paranoia started after the green revolution in 2009, as the Christians are perceived to bring ideas of freedom. Since the country has opened more up, the authorities have cracked more down on thoughts of freedom. Most Iranians are not very religious, but they might see conversion as a way to come closer to Western values, and as a protest against the system. Activities related to conversion are cracked down by the authorities as the authorities see it as a political activity.
3. The congregations in Iran are much separated. They used to have common services but the authorities would not allow it, so now they do not do it anymore. It has been decided from authorities that mass cannot be held in Farsi. Armenian churches hold services in Armenian and Protestants in English.
4. Second generation children from e.g. Iranian father and European mother are not allowed to be Christians and cannot come to services.
5. If there is a big service in one of the recognized churches, the authorities will check the people attending. Sometimes the authorities send people to the recognized churches to ask to be baptized so they can check out if the church proselytizes by offering baptism. There is a general paranoia within recognized congregations towards newcomers. It would be too dangerous for the established churches to allow him/her in. Converts who have returned from abroad would therefore only have the house churches to turn to.
6. Converts who return from Europe after a rejected asylum claim, and tell their families that their asylum claim was conversion, will probably get in trouble. Even if you keep a low profile upon return, you might have a problem with your family who might think you will create trouble for the family. They would probably not report it to the authorities. The source did not have any specific information on families in Iran who got into troubles, because of a family member being openly converted in Europe.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

7. As regards who will report a house church, the source informed the delegation that a neighbour might do it; otherwise, the authorities do not have a possibility to know about the house churches. It is the only way the authorities will know of it, because people are very discrete. The source had heard that the authorities would try to target the leaders and give them hard sentences, but the ordinary members could also risk imprisonment.
8. If you are doing missionary work in Iran, you risk getting into trouble.
9. The source has information on three people from the Catholic congregation who got arrested. They were children of Catholics but were born in Iran and were therefore officially Muslim. The source does not know whether it makes a difference to the authorities, if you are baptized in Iran or not. If you return to Iran as a baptized, you can have a problem, if you announce it in public.
10. This year (2017), some nuns from The Catholic Church were ransacked and their laptops were taken. The official reason was the missionary work. Now the nuns are scared and do not dare to perform mass.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

11. The source was not aware of any court cases or formal charges against Christians.

Meeting with a source in Iran who is well-informed about Christians

Tehran, 13 September 2017

Situation for Christians in general

12. According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, "the official religion of Iran is the Twelver Ja'fari school of [shī'ī] religion" (Art. 12). The following Article, Art. 13, states that: "Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christians Iranians are considered the only recognized religious minorities. They may exercise their religious ceremonies within the limits of the law. They are free to exercise matters of personal status and religious education and they follow their own rituals". It is true that "on paper" there is a certain degree of "freedom of worship" since those forming part of the minorities can participate freely to the services held in authorized places of cult, but there is absolutely no "freedom of religion" since Iranians are all considered as Muslims and they cannot opt to change religion or not to have a religion. Conversion is considered as a very serious crime. Therefore, the activity of Christian minorities has to be addressed and focused exclusively to their fellow Christians, both in regards to cult and religious services and also the social/philanthropic activity.
13. It is not allowed to have Christian services in Farsi, since Farsi is the mother language of Iranians, and Iranians are Muslims. Using Farsi would be regarded as a proselytism activity. However, as from 2012, there is an on-going project of an official translation – authorised by The Ministry of Islamic Guidance

and Culture, Ershad – of the “Catholic Jerusalem Bible” into Farsi. These bibles are easily available in the bookshops. Also, the “University of Religion and Denominations” in Qum, which offers studies on all religion, in 2015 translated the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” into Farsi. Only these official translations are allowed and tolerated in circulation and in places of worship.

14. Iran – like all Middle East countries – is experiencing a Christian exodus. People opt to leave the country not because they being “persecuted” in the very strict meaning of the word, but because perhaps they want to find better jobs, enjoy a better standard of living and want more civil rights. Sometimes they “camouflage” these personal desires and aspirations behind the fact that Christians are being mistreated in Iran. It is also true though, that converted Iranians risk being sent away from their families, leaving them homeless. Sometimes then they opt to leave the country and claim political asylum in Europe or elsewhere.
15. On 25 February 2017 the Lazarists’ property in Isfahan was totally confiscated and occupied by Secret Service agents.
16. In September a thorough police search was conducted in property of the Filles de la Charité sisters in Isfahan. The authorities confiscated all the Bibles in Farsi, their computers and telephones, and they interrogated the sisters about receiving Iranian citizens in their compound.

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

17. “House Churches” in Iran, belonging especially to Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Assembly of the Lord and other Christian denominations, are continuously under the spotlight of the Iranian authorities. They are systematically put under surveillance and also systematically raided. Unfortunately, this phenomenon has expanded also to registered and authorised churches. In the last four years there has been a tighter grip on traditional churches.
18. The authorities are mainly after the leaders of these house churches and then after the members and converted Iranians of the community. It is difficult for the authorities to crack down on house churches, as they are not structured and keep on moving from place to place. Sometimes they meet in parks and gardens around Tehran. The authorities fear the expansion of the “house churches” phenomenon in Iran.
19. Usually, converts present a baptism certificate both to try to form a part of a Christian community in Iran or to claim political asylum abroad, based on persecution for your religion. Lately, a recognized Church has questioned the process and the quality of preparation Muslim Iranians undergo, before receiving baptism in Europe or elsewhere.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

20. On 20 February 2017 the two Christian converts Anusheh Rezabakhsh (Veronica) and Soyeyl Zargarzadeh Sani (Agostino) were arrested in Urmia.⁸⁸ On 23 July 2017, 9 Iranian converts belonging to the Latin Catholic Church, were arrested by the Secret Service/Police in a park in Tehran. Three of them – Mehdi Amini, Saeid Saberi and Milad Poshtivan – remain in prison. At the moment it is unknown where they are kept, what accusation are being brought against them and if they are in need of any legal assistance. Two of those interrogated and released managed to flee out of the country.
21. These converts did not get baptised in Iran. They received baptism when they travelled to other countries, where changing religion is not a crime. When these converts return to Iran, they are not welcomed in the recognized congregation in Iran since this will provoke severe problems not only for the Congregation but especially to the priest responsible of the Church. It is not the first time that priests are thoroughly scrutinised and threatened because of suspicion that they are welcoming Iranian Muslims or Iranian converts to their community.
22. It is mainly evangelic Christianity that people convert to. The Iranian authorities wonder who is supporting the evangelic groups and suspect it to be USA. There are no precise figures on the Christian converts – some estimate 100.000 while others estimate around 300.000.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

23. In July a Pentecostal pastor, Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment because he was accused that on 26 December 2014, at a Christmas celebration at his house in Tehran, he conducted “evangelism”, illegal house church activity and other acts “against national security” and “insulting the sacred”.⁸⁹

Meeting with a Western Embassy (1)

Tehran, 11 September 2017

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

24. Regarding the Iranian authorities’ control with the house churches, the Western Embassy (1) assumed that the authorities did not have control with the house churches. Most of the house churches in Iran are unknown to the public. According to the Western Embassy’s (1) knowledge, there are

⁸⁸ Citizen Go, ‘Iran: Release the Christian converts Anoushe Reza-Bakhsh and Sohail Zagarzade-sani!’, 04 April 2017, <http://citizengo.org/en/pr/47043-iran-release-christian-converts-anoushe-reza-bakhsh-and-sohail-zagarzade-sani>

⁸⁹ Farsi Christian News Network, ‘Iran: Christians face long prison sentences’, 10 July 2017, <https://fcnn.com/en/?p=1370>

approximately 30.000 house churches in the country. Most of them (approx. 80%) are affiliated with the Pentecostal church.

25. The Christian community in Iran is one of the smallest and least active among the non-Muslim communities in the country.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

26. Typically, the Iranian authorities become aware of the specific house church when they receive a hint by for instance angry neighbours. It is rather unlikely that family members, close relatives or someone you know will report your participation in a house church to the police. The source added it can happen that the police show up at a house church without making a case out of it. If the authorities intervene, the owner of the apartment will be warned. If the police find a person in a house church who is already known by the authorities, he or she can risk being arrested. However, paying you out of an arrest would be possible if you are only participating in a house church and are not proselytizing. It was added that even if it is known that the person is a converted Muslim, it would be a question of the amount of money paid to be released.
27. Asked if there have been changes in the authorities control with house churches and converts recently, the source replied that it has been at the same level for the last couple of years.
28. Besides house churches, there are the sects and religious communities; most of them have religious gatherings. According to the source's opinion, these sects and religious communities do meet more often and more openly than the Christian converts. There is not necessarily a threat against religious minorities as long as nobody reports them to the Iranian authorities. The overall rule is keeping away from proselytizing. Not even Jehovah's Witnesses proselytize in Iran.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

29. The source informed it is very common that former Muslims and now Christian converts will claim they are Muslims to avoid problems with the authorities. Formally, saying the Islamic creed means a person will be considered as a Muslim. If you refuse to do so, you can risk death sentence; but there has not been issued a death sentence due to conversion the last 10 years.
30. If you are actively withstanding your religion, you will face problems, but if you are practicing your religion in private, you will not have problems with the authorities.
31. According to the source's knowledge, the last trial case involving a Christian convert was the Ibrahim Firouzi case. Firouzi was sentenced to 5 years in prison in 2015 due to accusation of distribution of 12.000 Bibles.

Meeting with a Western Embassy (2)

Tehran, 10 September 2017

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

32. The Embassy did not have knowledge about the control with the house churches and converts. Additionally, the source stated that Islam is a point that Muslims feel strong about. Conversion is a big issue both formally and emotionally. It would create a big problem with the authorities. The Catholic churches are not allowed to preach in Farsi anymore so it seems there is a decrease of tolerance from the authorities.

Meeting with a Western Embassy (3)

Tehran, 12 September 2017

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

33. In Iran, converting from Islam to another religion is forbidden by law.
34. If you are not proselytizing or promoting the house church, the authorities will not know about you.
35. The source did not consider that the Iranian authorities are monitoring the house churches more today than earlier. The authorities are more monitoring social media and online activities. Furthermore, the authorities are more alerted to activities threatening the established system.
36. As regards Iranian asylum seekers in Europe, who have converted to Christianity and have announced it on social media (their Facebook pages), the source said it is difficult to say whether the authorities will become aware of it. If the converted persons have made a lot of noise about it, they might be arrested and interrogated upon return to Iran. The subsequent process depends on what the returned persons tell the authorities.
37. The source informed there is an understanding of claiming conversion to Christianity in asylum cases. With regard to the question if the conversion is real, the Western Embassy (3) stated, the converted persons can easily deny it. If they are not high profiled and are not involved in propagating Christianity or activities perceived as a threat to national security, the source did not consider that the converted persons will receive harsh punishment.
38. The Western Embassy (3) did not have any specific information about cases involving Christian converts returning to Iran.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

39. House churches are under surveillance, but not all house churches are known. If neighbours to a specific house church notice activities around the house church, there might be a risk that the neighbours will report it to the authorities.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

40. Some Christian converts have been sentenced to prison, but the accusation from the authorities' side is that they were acting against national security. It would, probably, only be the leader of the House Church who would be prosecuted.

41. The Western Embassy (3) stated it rarely hears about Christian converts being arrested, persecuted and sentenced.

42. As regard recent trial cases, the source mentioned the Maryam Naghash Zargaran case. Zargaran was released from Evin Prison on August 1, 2017, after serving more than four years for accusation of engaging in Christian missionary activities. In connection with her release, she has been banned from leaving Iran for six month. Zargaran was arrested in November 2012 and accused of seeking to buy property in northern Iran for a Christian orphanage.⁹⁰

43. The source added that in less than two months, since June 2017, Judge Mashallah Ahmadzadeh of Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran has issued long prison sentences to at least 11 Christian converts and the former leader of the Assyrian Pentecostal Church in Iran.⁹¹

44. For information about cases related to Christian converts, the source referred to the news agencies, Mohabat News and Human Rights Activists' News Agency.

⁹⁰ Center for Human Rights in Iran, 'Christian Convert Released From Prison in Iran Slapped With Travel Ban', 22 August 2017, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/08/christian-convert-released-from-prison-in-iran-slapped-with-travel-ban/>

⁹¹ Center for Human Rights in Iran, '11 Christian Converts Issued Long Prison Sentences in Iran in Less Than Two Months in Sham Trials', 20 July 2017, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/07/11-christian-converts-issued-long-prison-sentences-in-iran-in-less-than-two-months/>

Meeting with a Western Embassy (4)

Tehran, 12 September 2017

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

45. Most house churches are evangelist and they are very active in searching for members. The organisers of the house churches are monitored by the authorities. But house churches are quite common in Iran and their numbers are growing. The fact that house churches exist, means they have space to operate. It is however very important to keep these activities under the radar as house churches are illegal in Iran.
46. The source added that formally, there is no problem with the Catholic Church in Iran, as it is one of the recognized churches. However, recently it has been reported that the church has been subject to more pressure, raids and control, and that some of its members have been arrested for taking part in trying to spread Christianity. There has also been a worrying increase in the confiscation of Church properties.
47. The authorities are not filing cases against converts, and no one in Iran has been arrested just because of a conversion, if the change has not led to other activities like for instance proselytizing. For the convert, it is the relation to his family and community which might be problematic.
48. The implementation of the death penalty in Iran is related to drug and murder cases, and more rarely high profile political cases. Most of the implemented cases are related to drug cases. The source stated that organisers of house churches might risk accusations of “Crimes against God” which would carry the death penalty but the source did not know of any cases where this accusation has resulted in actual execution of the accused.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

49. As an example of a case of conversion from Islam, in which the death penalty has been sought, the embassy referred to the Taheri case.⁹²

⁹² Mr. Taheri (founder of the *Erfan e-Halgheh*) was initially sentenced a five-year prison sentence for blasphemy in 2011, while further investigations against him were going on. He was ultimately convicted of “spreading corruption on earth” in 2015 and sentenced to death, but acquitted on appeal in 2016. He was not released, and in late 2016, was charged with “spreading corruption on earth” for the same activities that formed the basis of his 2011 conviction. On 27 August 2017, a Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced Ali Taheri to death for “spreading corruption on earth” for establishing the spiritual group Erfan-e Halgheh. (Amnesty International, ‘Urgent Action, PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE SENTENCED TO DEATH’ 31 August 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7024/2017/en/>)

Meeting with Amnesty International

London, 3 October 2017

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

50. The authorities will monitor house churches. Whether the authorities will intervene depends on the activities of the house church group, and the size of the group.
51. According to Amnesty International the authorities both target house church leaders and the members.
52. Whether it makes a difference for the authorities if a convert is baptized or not, the source did not assume that baptism was the key issue; it is rather the convert's connections, including those abroad. The source did not have a specific example in this regard.
53. On the question about returned converted Iranian asylum seekers, the source stated they might be interrogated and added that Iran for the last two years, has been sensitive about Iranian nationals with ties abroad. The source assumed it would be an issue if Iranian nationals have claimed that they have converted abroad. Generally, many of this type of cases tend to be related to national security offenses, meaning people face prosecution for conversion to Christianity under national security and other criminal offenses when, in fact, the issue is the denial of freedom of religion.
54. The source assumed the Iranian authorities are very active in monitoring Iranians, also those abroad.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

55. According to Amnesty International the authorities will react if someone reports a house church member and convert. There are certain sentences related to group formation in Iran. In the Islamic Penal Code, "forming a group composed of more than two people with the purpose of disrupting national security" (Article 498) can carry a 10 year prison sentence.
 56. It is difficult to say how the authorities discover that a person has converted; many converts do not even tell their families about it.
 57. As regards situations that might attract attention and reveal the conversion, the source mentioned if the parents are converted and for instance ask the teachers in their children's school not to teach their children about Islam, they would be revealed. Another example was converts traveling from Iran to Turkey to participate in Christianity related workshops. Frequent travel activity to Turkey might also attract the authorities' attention, particularly when combined with other activities such as attending
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house churches. A third situation that might be looked upon with suspicion by the surrounding community as for instance the workplace, is when a convert does not participate in Islamic events. Islam permeates the Iranian society, and many social norms and cultural activities are connected to Islam. Not participating in these events would also raise a question mark towards your religion.

58. Regarding converts prosecuted by the authorities, the source mentioned that the person concerned is not always informed about the charges until after interrogations are completed, which can take months; usually, Christian converts cases are handled by the Revolutionary Court as these cases are considered national security matters. It is not only related to converts but in general for people prosecuted for security offences that the offences are not specified until they are formally charged. It is not uncommon that people do not know exactly what they are charged of, and in cases where the court does not issue a written verdict, they may not know the content of the verdict. In this regard, the source added that a lawyer has to be appointed and recognized by the court; if the lawyer is not recognized, he/she will not have access to the electronic database where the client's files are. Some lawyers are blacklisted by the authorities from taking on specific cases, e.g. lawyers who have advocated for international human rights standards. Furthermore, the lawyer has to be settled in Iran.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

59. As regards Christian converts the source mentioned the Nadarkhani case. Naderkhani was sentenced to death in 2012, but was later released. He has been rearrested in May 2017 and sentenced to ten years in prison for propagating house churches and "Zionist Christianity". His case has been appealed by his lawyer.
60. When asked about recent death sentences issued in other conversion cases, Amnesty International mentioned the Mohammad Ali Taheri case. Taheri, who is founder of the spiritual group, Erfan-e Halgheh, was arrested in 2011 and sentenced to death for "spreading corruption on earth" in August 2017 on charges of founding a spiritual group.⁹³ In October 2017, the Supreme Court of Iran overturned the death sentence and sent the case back to the lower court for further investigations (on the charge of "spreading corruption on earth").

⁹³ Amnesty International, 'Urgent Action, PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE SENTENCED TO DEATH' 31 August 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7024/2017/en/>

Meeting with an anonymous legal source

Tehran, 13 September 2017

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

61. In general, converts – conversion being illegal and punishable according to Iranian law and punishments ranging from death penalty to imprisonment – have been persecuted and punished in Iran from the beginning of the Iranian revolution in 1979. Such persecutions have forced some Christians to go underground and create house churches where they can safely practice Christianity.
62. The source stated that to the best of his knowledge, there have been acts of violence, persecution, imprisonment to prevent conversion of Muslims to other religions as well as to threaten the house churches to stop converting Muslims. The source was not aware of any specific cases.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

63. To the sources understanding, some previously prosecuted house church members have, after being released from prison, found refuge outside Iranian borders due to constant fear for themselves and their families.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

64. The source stated that such issues being sensitive matters are not openly discussed in the Iranian official news media.

Meeting with an anonymous source

Ankara, 15 September 2017

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

65. After 2013 when all the churches under the 'Assembly of God' closed down in Iran, the house churches started spreading, and they are difficult for the government to control. House churches are mostly established in cities like Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan. The monitoring authorities include the Ministry of Intelligence, the intelligence unit of Sepah as well as the intelligence unit of the Ministry of Interior. The agencies all have their own monitoring teams in neighbourhoods, and these units will share information on religious minorities. There is no coordinated monitoring of the house churches between the different intelligence agencies in Iran.
66. The authorities monitor neighbourhoods and identify informants who can enter the churches. Later they may raid the house and arrest the members. For this reason, the house churches organize

themselves with a small number of people, who change places and meet in the houses of different members. The churches are organized in a pyramid model where regular members will not know the leader of the house church. The ordinary members meet with proselytizers. As it is well known that the authorities are tapping phones, the house church members are cautious and turn off their phones long before they reach their meeting place; the source added that these are the general security rules for which the members are expected to follow; however, for sure there might be members who do not follow these rules.

67. Church pastors are more targeted than ordinary members of house churches. The authorities are concerned that pastors will expand the movement, and that is why they are more interesting. The typical pattern of targeting is by continuously arresting and releasing the pastors. The authorities want to send the message that they are monitored, and that the authorities have the power to arrest them.
68. Regarding ordinary members of house churches, and newly converted Christians, they could be arrested in a raid on a house church. However, they would be released again on the condition that they will not proselytize. If they stop proselytizing, the authorities will stop gathering information about them. If the person is an influential person in the community, the authorities could arrest him to warn him and letting him know that he is monitored.
69. Whether some house churches are more targeted than others, the source mentioned that the considered strength and impact the church may have on a community is important, and not so much who is funding the church or other factors. The authorities monitor the house church until they know who is doing what in the community. Whether a member is being targeted depends on what he has been doing and if this specific person is known abroad. Newly converted are not targeted however they could risk arrest with the purpose of getting information on the house church and to demoralize the rest of the group.
70. Whether it would make a difference if the convert is baptized or not, the anonymous source mentioned that for the last 10 years, it has not been possible to be baptized in Iran. However, the source added, baptism might have occurred, as there might be some exceptional cases. If the convert has been baptized abroad and is returning to Iran, the baptism in itself would not have any significance. If the convert leads a silent life, it would not be a problem to be a convert. However, if the convert starts training others, it would become a problem.
71. If a house church member is arrested, and it is the first time, he would normally be released within 24 hours. If he has been detained in prison, he will receive his accusations within 24 hours and come to court within ten days. In that case, he will normally be released on bail. Bail involves family members. The amount of bail is set by judge who takes advice from an expert to evaluate the amount of for instance a title deed. The process might take some time and could take up to one month. This one month period is for someone who is convicted and imprisoned to serve his/her sentence. In that case the period is longer as it is harder for the families to access the prison judge who should refer the case for the bail process. For arrests and releases before trial and conviction the time would be less.

72. When a house church member or leader is out on bail, it would be possible for him to leave the country. It was emphasized that the authorities in most cases would want them to leave, if they are well known people. Another option for a house church leader would be to stop the activities and announce in public that it has stopped. However, if the person is a government employee, the authorities would not like the person to leave the country.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

73. The authorities do not act immediately if neighbors or others have reported on a house church. The authorities will monitor the church and collect information on its members. This information will focus on possible weak points of a person, for instance if the person is a gay, has a weakness, or has been involved in political activities in the past. It would be a strategy from the authorities to arrest and release someone to make an informant out of them. A profile for the informer could be information on the person's background which can be used to put pressure on them; a divorced woman, weak ties with the person's own community, threats against the persons children etc.

74. If neighbours are reporting on a house church, the process of monitoring would be initiated. The authorities have specialized agents who will find their ways into the churches.

75. Converts who do not proselytize, and who are not members of a house church, are not targeted by the authorities but could be in a vulnerable situation if they are reported to the authorities by a family member, if for instance they are seen reading the Bible. It was mentioned that many families are loyal to the regime and have a Basij member within the family. If there are children in the family, they could also inform about activities in their homes, at school.

76. If a convert is proselytizing in his work place, he could be reported to the security police at the work place (Hirasat).

77. If the authorities detect a convert who has activities outside his house, i.e. if he/she starts proselytizing or otherwise try to disseminate Christianity, they will start monitoring the person. However, the authorities will not take any action, if the convert is just reading the Bible in his home. The authorities would not target a Christian believer if he/she is not active in proselytizing.

78. As regards possible changes in the authorities' control with house churches and converts recently, it was mentioned that there have been no significant changes since 2013. The situation for a convert becomes serious, if he is disseminating information about Christianity in the Iranian society. The security apparatus limits its power to randomly checks in order to scare people and sending a message that they are surveilled.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

79. Leaders of house churches are known to the authorities and kept under surveillance. The example of Naderkhani from 'Church of Iran' was mentioned. He has been under surveillance, and has also been

arrested several times. He has only been released again because of pressure from the international community.

80. The Iranian authorities are aware of different connotations related to conversion, and that some Iranians converted to obtain asylum. It is said that Iran has agents abroad to monitor on Iranian citizens. However, it is unknown to what extent the Iranian authorities have the capacity to monitor all. The authorities do not monitor everyone and all the time; what the authorities want is to create a fear among people that they are being monitored all the time.
81. If a convert has been baptized in Turkey and return to Iran, and he/she does not undertake any Christian activities, it is less probable that he/she might face any problems. Only if the person would use the religion politically to for instance compare disadvantages of Islam with advantages of Christianity or another religion on social media, it could be a problem for him. However, it was underlined that it would require the person to make a personal analysis of the two religions and not just someone who used “copy paste” phrases.
82. The authorities could interrogate a convert on return, if it has come to the authorities’ attention that he converted. It was underlined that this would require some additional information related to that person as for instance if he was a previous member of a house church in Iran. The authorities would consider his case in a holistic way. It was mentioned that a photo indicating his conversion posted on the internet would be evaluated along with his profile and activities. It was further underlined that if the person did not have any previous affiliation with Christianity before leaving his/her country of origin; for instance his/her Facebook is closed for the public and photos on Facebook was sometimes posted in short while and later taken off and the person does not carry out any further activities relating to Christianity upon return to Iran; the person would not be of interest to the authorities.
83. The convert could face problems with his own family and be excluded from his family and threatened by them. If the person’s family is working for the authorities – Basij or others – it could also become a problem. According to the anonymous source, this is based on mere speculation and not any cases known to the source.

Meeting with Dep. Director General of the High Council for Human Rights and Judicial Cooperation, Iran

Tehran, 12 September 2017

84. Initially the Dep. Director General explained that the Council for Human Rights deals with all issues related to Human Rights in Iran and outside Iran. It is a government institution and comprises representatives and members from all branches in Iran, i.e. the legislative bodies, the executive bodies and the judiciary. The Council is the focal body for all matters relating to human rights issues, including policy making and policy implementation, as well as international policy, including the Universal

Periodic Review (UPR). The Council holds dialogues with a number of countries and exchanges best practices on human rights through these bilateral dialogues.

85. The Dep. Director General underlined that Iran is an Islamic country which does not expel refugees. He referred to the situation for one million Afghans who are registered with UNHCR in Iran. In addition to this number, another two million live as illegal foreign nationals in Iran, as they are not registered. However, Iran provides the necessary facilities to this group, including education. The Deputy Director General compared the situation with European countries which have closed their borders, whereas Iran's borders are open.

Freedom of religion

86. According to the Iranian Constitution, there are three recognized religions in Iran (*in addition to Islam*). These are Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism. All together these groups comprise less than 150,000 people out of 80 million. There are 3-500 places of worship for these religious groups. For Christians who comprise around 100,000 people, there are registered 400 churches in Iran, some of which are recognized as UNESCO monuments. The government is providing subsidy to renew and construct churches. In comparison, the Dep. Director General mentioned that in the Netherlands there are more than one million Muslims, but only one mosque, constructed in the right way with minarets etc.
87. As regards conversion to Christianity, the Dep. Director General was of the opinion that Iranians convert for asylum. After they have obtained a status, they will still participate in Muslim ceremonies. According to the Dep. Director General European asylum systems push people to convert in order to be accepted.
88. If Iranians are returning to Iran after having used conversion as a motive to obtain asylum in Europe or another country, they will not be faced with laws and regulations for conversion. As regards public conversion the system will react, but the numbers are limited, and the Iranian system tries to be flexible in such cases. It was emphasized that nobody has been executed in Iran due to conversion.
89. House churches are illegal if not registered. The representative of religious minorities in the Parliament has expressed that he is not interested in house churches. The Dep. Director General similarly found that house churches are unnecessary as Christians can just go to the registered churches. It is not a big issue in Iran according to the Dep. Director General. House churches should register and obtain a license, which according to the Dep. Director General, is a normal requirement also in other countries.

Meeting with the Deputy Director General, General Directorate of Human Rights and Women, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran

Tehran, 13 September 2017

Human rights in general

The Dep. Director General emphasized that Iran has a dialogue with EU countries and other countries on human rights. However, human rights are exploited for political reasons, according to the Dep. Director General. There are double standards for human rights in the region. In some regional countries which are considered allies of United States and European countries, even some basic rights are not observed, while they are not under human rights monitoring system. These double standards cause confusion about the real intention behind stances of western countries on human rights. It has to be accepted that no country is perfect with regard to promotion and protection of human rights, thus no country is immune to critics.

House Churches and Converts

90. The Dep. Director General emphasized that according to the Iranian Civil Code, there are no restrictions on a person's choice of religion – an Iranian is free to opt for any religion. The Dep. Director General pointed at the adoption of restrictive rules against migrants in Europe, and the consequences of such rules, which according to him lead to migrants trying to justify their claims of asylum in such a way that they can obtain asylum. In this process, they feel obliged to resort to claims based on conversion to Christianity to justify their case. These claims are baseless, according to the Dep. Director General. Conversion has its laws and regulations in the Islamic jurisprudence and sharia, but there are no cases of apostasy and conversion in the judicial system of Iran. According to him, the monitoring of Iran by the UN creates an ill-informed view that the Iranian asylum seekers are telling the truth about the country.
91. There are many Iranians who after long time did not find what they wanted in Europe, and who return to Iran. These Iranians are welcomed back. The Iranian administration is not curious and would not enquire about their backgrounds.
92. According to the Dep. Director General some Iranians who seek asylum in Europe pretend to be converted to justify their request, but they are really Muslims and do still observe their Muslim practices. Asked about the consequences if someone genuinely converted, the Dep. Director General found that it would not make a problem to him. The authorities are not scrutinizing people and do not make any investigations into people's belief. The Dep. Director General further referred to the fact that there has been no specific procedure for investigating returnees.
93. Some Muslim countries follow the jurisprudence of Sharia with regard to apostasy. The Iranian society is tolerant, and it is not a priority to implement strict measures. It is hard to say though how the family of a converted would react – it is a personal question. Some families would not accept it.

Meeting with International Organization for Migration

Tehran, 11 September 2017

94. International Organization for Migration in Iran (IOM) informed that the organization has a huge case load from Europe. European countries receive many cases from Iran, including Iranian nationals and Afghans.
95. Today Iranian asylum seekers are less qualified, skilled, educated and experienced, compared to former asylum seekers from Iran.
96. It is hard to motivate the Iranian asylum seekers in Europe to return on a voluntary basis. The source explained that it only engages in voluntary repatriations; voluntary return of Iranian nationals is a must for the Iranian government.
97. From January 2017 until May 2017 IOM has assisted 40 Iranian asylum seekers with voluntary return from Denmark to Iran.
98. With regard to the root causes to migration from Iran, IOM informed the delegation that many are seeking a better life, but there are different “push and pull” factors. Most Iranian asylum seekers in the Scandinavian countries are well-educated. From 2004 until 2010 the main reason to migration was economically related. Today, the Iranian migrant is seeking better options abroad. However, IOM underlined that it is hard to identify the main cause of migration. If they return, the authorities check them in the systems.
99. With regard to returning, when exiting the country illegally, IOM informed, it is possible to return, but returnees will be questioned about how they exited the country and through which channels. Sometimes they will be called in several times.

House Churches and Converts

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

100. Regarding the return of Christian converts to Iran, IOM said, as long as the converted persons keep it private, they do not risk persecution. IOM added that Iranian asylum seekers will claim anything; they create an alibi for themselves when they claim conversion to Christianity.
101. The source explained that conversion has to be documented in the form of for instance a certificate of baptism. There are many Christians in Iran, and as long as they do not announce it in public, they will not face problems.
102. Regarding the families to persons claiming conversion to Christianity in their asylum cases, the source stated that the families know that asylum seekers will do whatever it takes to obtain a legal status in a European country.

Meeting with Middle East Concern

London, 2 October 2017

Background

MEC collects data from people inside the country as well as from people who have fled the country. The organisation has past cases and can identify trends and developments. People who are under surveillance and have left the country do not return. Sources inside Iran get information out via secure chat-apps and do not use ordinary e-mail. The source talks to the sources inside Iran once in a while. Sometimes it is family members to Christians who are both inside and outside of Iran although family members are often reluctant to talk to MEC after the Christian individual who had fled the country is no longer in Iran and in immediate danger – this is the case if the family of the Christian is not Christian. Based on the information that comes out, a lot of cross-checking and verification takes place. The organisation is doing advocacy work with politicians and need to be sure that the information is correct.

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

103. According to the source there is a widespread monitoring of telecommunication and electronic communication if you have caught the interest of the authorities. Certain keywords serve as base for the electronic surveillance; e.g. if you type “Church”, “Jesus”, “Christian”, “Baptism” on the internet it would be tracked by the authorities. If you for instance text the word “Jesus” to a Christian TV-show you risk getting a text-message back saying, “You are involved with something you should not be involved in”. There are also reports on people being followed in the streets.

104. According to the source, the authorities send people, who are seen as trustworthy, to infiltrate the house churches. After Churches were closed down in 2013 and Farsi Church services were banned, Christians (Christian Iranians from Muslim background) who were attending the Church services began to go to house churches instead. They are easily identifiable as the authorities required the closed churches to register their members with the authorities, so they must be very careful. It can be difficult for the house churches to prevent infiltration, as the authorities use infiltrators that pretend to be converts in order to dismantle the house churches and find information on members and leaders. The members of a house church can be five or ten but maximum 12 people and the larger it gets; the more difficult it is for the house church to control it. Introduction to a house church is mainly mouth to mouth based, so it is very much a trust issue.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

105. There is ongoing surveillance of ordinary house church members, which serves as intimidation to stop them from going to the house churches. The authorities furthermore tend to arrest the leaders to dismantle the church and discourage others from attending gatherings and house churches.

106. According to the source, internal relocation would be possible if you caught the attention of the authorities, though practically difficult because of the family, who would need to move with the person concerned, etc. However, Iran is a big country with 27 provinces and relocation is a possibility to remain out of immediate danger or arrest, temporarily but it is not a permanent solution. If you relocate you would be okay for a while, but if you carry on with your Christian activities and religious teaching, you are not safe. Leaving the country is the last resort, and most people want to stay in Iran because of family etc.
107. If a house church member or leader is arrested, usually the bail set in the case, is very high. The bail set can range from 20.000 to 200.000 USD. If someone who is out on bail flees, the authorities can then confiscate their property. According to the source, there are cases of people, who have been encouraged to leave Iran by the authorities, as a trial case with a death sentence will attract international attention. In these cases where the converts leave the country, the authorities can collect the bail; thereby leaving those who choose to flee nothing to come back to. Converts would often lose their jobs, without a reason given. If you are never formally charged, and the process before the court is put on hold – you would still have the case over your head.
108. Hadi Asgari who was an ordinary house church member is an example of a high set bail; he was ultimately sentenced 10 years imprisonment, but during his trial he was released on a bail amount of 50.000 USD.⁹⁴
109. As an ordinary member of a house church, you may risk being called in for interrogation on a regular basis to harass and intimidate you. You risk constant surveillance. The authorities cannot arrest everybody, but they may target anyone who has a network or lives as a Christian. However, if you are not in touch with other Christians, or if you are a new believer with no network, you would not be targeted, unless your family is highly religious.
110. The arrests of Christians have not decreased in recent years. There is a constant threat. If you are member of a flourishing house church, you could be more in danger, because the authorities see the flourishing house churches as a bigger threat.
111. Ordinary members of a house church may face problems. If you have a house church in a small town you risk being targeted, because you are more visible. It can also depend on the local authority though; often, local authorities and judicial clerks and judges perceive themselves as protecting the Islamic Republic of Iran by punishing and stopping Christians from attending Church.
112. Persecution initiating from a family member to a house church member, is not usual. If it occurs, it could be a family member who is employed by the government or whose professional and/or social status can be adversely affected because of the Christian family member, as a significant

⁹⁴ Reference to section “Recent trial cases related to House Churches and Converts”

employed/working population of Iran work in industries and/or institutions that are controlled and run by the Islamic government.⁹⁵ Being affiliated with a Christian convert, might for instance cost a job. Sometimes that person would have to report you for their own protection, as it would put them in danger to withhold information from authorities about house church members.

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

113. It is a general trend that the authorities charge people for being a threat to national security, rather than charge them for apostasy. This goes both for low profile cases, and if you are a house church leader.
114. Of recent trials related to converts, the MEC mentioned several cases.
115. On 26 December 2014, security officers raided Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz's house during a Christmas celebration and temporarily arrested all in attendance. The pastor was detained. Pastor Victor was charged verbally with 'conducting evangelism', misuse of the title 'doctor' (it was used as a code word when people wanted prayer for healing), illegal house church activities among other charges that amount to the charge of "acting against national security". He was released on bail (approx. \$110,000) on 1 March 2015.
116. On 26 August 2016, security officials from the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) raided a picnic in Firuzkuh in the Alborz Mountains, north-east of Tehran. The MOIS officials took five men away; the men included Mohammad Dehnavi, Hadi Asgari, Amin Afshar Naderi and Ramiel Bet Tamraz, who were members of Tehran Pentecostal Assyrian Church before it was shut down by Iran's Ministry of Interior in March 2009. Dehnavi, Asgari and Naderi are converts to Christianity. Bet Tamraz is ethnic Assyrian. On 10 October 2016, Ramiel Bet Tamraz and Mohammad Dehnavi were released after submitting bail equivalent to \$33,000 each. At that time, they had not been informed of any charges against them. However, the questioning during interrogation related to the activity of Bet Tamraz' father, Pastor Victor, as well as to individual Christian activity. Mohammad Dehnavi was released after signing an agreement that he would not attend a house church (a private Christian meeting in a home). The men have since been charged with 'acting against national security' and 'organizing and creating house churches', and Bet Tamraz faces additional charges related to the ministry of his father, Pastor Victor. Ramiel Bet Tamraz awaits his hearing.
117. In May 2017 Naderi was sentenced to 15 years and Asgari to 10 years, both with a 2-year travel ban. The judge also raised the amount of bail for Naderi and Asgari to 270 million Tomans for Naderi (approximately US\$80,000) and 170 million Tomans for Asgari (approximately US\$50,000). The legal representative of these men has filed an appeal to overturn the sentences. Naderi was finally

⁹⁵ The Islamic Republic of Iran, through nationalisation of oil and gas industries and other natural resources industries controls the economy and employment of labour. In early 2000, it was reported that 25% of employed labour was in the industries sector that is controlled by the government; this excludes military and police force

released on bail on 25 July 2017. Asgari remains in detention and unable to raise the bail demanded for his conditional release. He has faced intense pressure during interrogation.

118. On 24 June 2016, Eldar Gurbanov, Yusif Farhadov, Bahram Nasibov (Azerbaijani citizens, members of Baku Word of Life Church) and an Iranian Christian, Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh, were arrested and detained after attending a private gathering. On 23 August the men from Azerbaijan were charged with 'engaging in missionary activity' and 'propaganda' and Gol-Tapeh faced similar charges. All four were released on 29 October 2016. The three Azerbaijanis had submitted bail equivalent to \$80,000. Gol-Tapeh and legal representatives of the three Azerbaijani nationals attended a Revolutionary Court in Tehran on 23 May 2017. They were officially sentenced to 10 years in prison on 5 July 2017. They are awaiting an appeal hearing.
119. Ebrahim Firouzi, a Christian convert from Islam, was first arrested on 11 January 2011 and imprisoned for 10 months. He was arrested again in 2013 and has been imprisoned since that time. He has had his appeal rejected and he has not been allowed leave to visit his mother who is suffering with cancer. On 17 July 2017, he went on hunger strike to protest the persecution of Christians in Iran.
120. Mohammad Roghangir, Soroush Saraie, Seyed Bijan Farokhpour Haghighi and Eskandar Rezaei are Christian converts from Islam who have been imprisoned in Shiraz, Iran on account of their faith. Eskandar Rezaei was released on bail in October 2017. Roghangir has been serving his 6-year sentence since July 2014. He was charged with 'action against national security' and 'propaganda against the order of the system'. Haghighi is serving his 3-year sentence since January 2017. He was charged with 'actions against national security'. Saraie was initially arrested but then was released in November 2015. He was re-arrested in July 2017 and is in prison awaiting formal charges.
121. Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, Mohammadreza Omid, Yasser Mossayebzadeh and Saheb Fadaie were charged originally with acting against national security and have been given severe sentences for house church activities and 'promoting Zionist Christianity'. Each has been sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. On 6 July 2017, the lawyer for the defence received the verdict stating that the four men were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on account of house church activities and 'promoting Zionist Christianity'. In addition, Pastor Nadarkhani was sentenced to two years' exile in Nik Shahr and Omid was sentenced to two years' exile in Borazjan. The lawyer appealed against the verdict and received a notice that a hearing was to take place on 4 October 2017.

Converts

122. It could be a problem to return to Iran if you are a convert, and if you were a known Christian before leaving. If you were not known to the authorities before leaving, it would not be problematic to get back into Iran but once you begin to live in Iran and attend Church, you would be identified and perhaps targeted. The line between genuine converts and people who converted for other reasons is blurred, and that is a problem. Some churches abroad are too quick to baptize, which creates a problem for the genuine Christians. According to the source, you can tell who genuine converts are,

and who are not, by the intensity and continuance of their practicing Christianity. Knowledge of Christianity is not necessarily enough to assess whether someone is a genuine Christian; you would also have to consider someone's belief and feelings about religion. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that many Christians in Iran do not receive the necessary pastoral care and learning about Christian theology and even when their faith is strong, they may not have detailed theological knowledge.

123. When you return to Iran the authorities can see at the airport, when you left, and how long you have been away from Iran – that is the case if you had originally left Iran via the airport/by airplane and legally. If you had left Iran illegally, the government will not have an exact date of when you had originally left the country. As regards the baptism MEC informed the delegation when a person is baptized by a Church, there is hard evidence of the conversion to Christianity and a certificate is issued and there is often photos etc. That could alert the authorities and prove problematic when the individual is back in Iran.
124. If someone has announced his/her Christianity on Facebook while abroad, the person would probably be surveyed by the Iranian authorities. However, declaring your conversion on Facebook in itself does not mean that you will be persecuted but monitored, if returning to Iran. If you are open about your activities, an arrest or interrogation by the government upon return is not unlikely. But declaring you are a Christian when you return to Iran, will cage you into a life of no rights, and put you at risk. Being a Christian is considered a political opposition to the regime.
125. According to MEC, it does not make sense to talk of the concept “silent Christians”. People who are Christians are forced to educate their children in a Muslim way, and to change or lie about their religious identity. You cannot just be low-profiled but would have to act against your faith in so many ways; you would have to lie about your religion e.g. on job-applications, school-registration etc. where you are always asked about your faith and religion. You would have to celebrate Eid and other Muslim traditions, like going to the Mosque at burials. Otherwise it would be very odd. Islam is a community-religion integrated into the Iranian culture, so even if the major part of the Iranian population is not very religious, many customs and traditions in the country are Muslim. It would be noticed if you do not participate, and you would easily be stigmatized. If you die a Christian, you would not be able to get a Christian burial.

Meeting with Middle East Consultancy Services

London, 3 October 2017

126. Since the year 2000 Middle East Consultancy Services (MECS) has been serving the public and private sectors at local and international levels, including UK law firms, the UK Home Office, international clients as the Belgian Interior Ministry, the Dutch IND, UNHCR, and Australian, Dutch and Swedish solicitors. The primary objective of MECS is to provide research and analysis to enhance the quality of decisions made at senior levels of the public and private sectors, nationally and

internationally. MECS' reports cover the following areas of expertise: Research, Country Expert Reports, Nationality/ Ethnicity disputes and Authentication. Among the countries MECS covers is Iran.

House Churches and Converts

Control with the house churches and converts

127. House churches are prevalent due to the regime's restrictions.
128. MECS informed the delegation Christian converts might face arbitrary arrests, but are not always sentenced.
129. According to the source, Bibles and Christian worship are forbidden in Persian.

Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

130. In July 2017, four Christian converts were sentenced to 10 years in prison. They were accused of being Zionist Christians, threatening state security.⁹⁶
131. In March 2017, two converts (mother and son) were arrested and their religious paraphernalia was seized.⁹⁷
132. In March 2017, Iranian Christian covert Ebrahim Firouzi was issued a five year sentence for "forming a group for disrupting national security".⁹⁸
133. In December 2014, Committee of Human Rights Reporter (CHRR) stated that some of the Christian converts were arrested around Tehran on the Christmas day. The security forces, the CHRR stated, raided and entered to a house church in Rodehen city, east of the Tehran province, to arrest some of Christian converts. Half a dozen of them were released by CHRR. Two of them transferred to unknown places. CHRR reported that a group of pious Christians gathered to pray for the birth of Jesus Christ during Christmas, when a number of plainclothes officers with guns and handheld transceivers raided and pushed their way to the place unresentfully. They searched the place and confiscated computers, books, and leaflets, mobile phones. The security forces, CHRR stated, did not show any

⁹⁶ Center for Human Rights in Iran, 'Four Christian Converts Sentenced to 10 Years Imprisonment in Trial Lacking Due Process', 06 July 2017, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/07/four-christian-converts-sentenced-to-10-years-imprisonment-in-iran-in-trial-lacking-due-process/>

⁹⁷ Fox News, 'Iran arrests two Catholics in new wave of brutality against Christians', 08 March 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/03/08/iran-arrests-two-catholics-in-new-wave-brutality-against-christians.html>

⁹⁸ Farsi Christian News Network, 'Iran Court Confirms Five Years Prison Sentence for Christian Convert', 31 March 2017, <https://fcnn.com/en/?p=931>

respect for one of the neighbors who questioned officers' actions, they confiscated the mobile phone and identity document of this witness.⁹⁹

134. On 27 August 2014, the UN's Special Rapporteur reported that at least 49 Protestant Christians were detained, many for involvement in informal house churches. 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, Vahid Safi and Amin Mazloomi.¹⁰⁰

Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts

135. The source informed there is no legislation on apostasy in the Penal Code; however, many converts are prosecuted.

136. Of recent trials related to converts, the source mentioned several cases, including the Sina Dehghan case from May 2016. Dehghan was charged of conducting teachers protest campaign and blasphemy through writings online and sentenced to death by execution. He was arrested in October 2015 and the court decision was declared by the Revolutionary Court of Arak in May 2016.¹⁰¹ The sentence has been upheld by the country's Supreme Court.¹⁰² Another case from June 2015 is regarding Hesameddin Farzizadeh who was sentenced to death for apostasy by the Criminal Court of Meshkinshahr in Ardabil province. He was arrested in November 2014 in a raid on his house by the *lebas shakhsiha* (plain clothed agents). He was sentenced for his book *From Islam to Islam*. The charge of apostasy stems from the mentioned book, in which he examines the history of Shi'a Islam and raises questions about certain facets of Shi'a beliefs.^{103,104}

137. Maryam Naghash Zargaran was arrested on November 5, 2012 for conversion to Christianity and was sentenced to four years in prison by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court for "assembly and collusion against national security" in 2013. The sentence was upheld by the Appeals Court.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Iran Press News, 'Raiding a house church and arresting some of the Christians', 31 December 2014, <http://www.iranpressnews.com/english/source/181848.html>

¹⁰⁰ Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, 'Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran', 27 August 2014, <http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/A-69-356-SR-Report-Iran.pdf>

¹⁰¹ Farsi Christian News Network, 'Iran: Death Sentence for a Christian Convert', 02 September 2016, <https://fcnn.com/en/?p=392>

¹⁰² Independent, 'Iranian man sentenced to death for 'insulting Islam' through messaging app', 30 March 2017 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/iranian-man-sina-dehghan-death-sentence-insult-islam-muslim-line-messaging-app-arak-prison-amnesty-a7658466.html>

¹⁰³ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, 'Iranian Writer Sentenced to Death for Apostasy', 20 June 2015, <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/inside-iran/1000000588-iranian-writer-sentenced-to-death-for-apostasy.html>

¹⁰⁴ Human rights without Frontier, Iran, 17 September 2017, <http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Iran-FBL-2017.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Center for Human Rights in Iran, 'Hospitalized Christian Convert Returned to Prison Without Treatment', 31 May 2016, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/05/maryam-naghash-zargaran/>

Annex C: Terms of Reference

1. House Churches and Converts

1.1. Control with the house churches and converts

1.2. Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts

1.3. Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts