



Written by [James Heiser](#) on October 6, 2011

Iranian Christian Pastor Facing False Charges

After months of threatening the execution of Youcef Nadarkhani (left), the Iranian government is backing away from putting the Christian pastor to death, and is claiming that news stories of the plan to execute him were “unsubstantiated.”

As [reported previously for The New American](#), Nadarkhani has been imprisoned for his faith since October 2009, and was sentenced to death in 2010 for apostasy from Islam. However, according to [a story from the International Business Times](#), the government is claiming that there was never a plan to execute the man who was once the pastor of a 400-member congregation:



“Youssef Nadar-Khani [sic] has been charged with a crime and is in a prison based on an arrest warrant issued against him,” Gilan Province Judiciary Chief Mohammad-Javad Heshmati said on Wednesday, according to Iran state news agency Press TV.

“There has been no execution order. No conviction at all has been issued yet and it is up to the court to finally decide the verdict after studying his case,” he added.

Since news of Nadarkhani’s looming execution spread, Iran has been loudly decrying the pastor as “a convicted rapist and extortionist,” and the Fars News Agency said over the weekend that Nadarkhani was to be executed for Zionism and threats to national security.

The tactic of raising false accusations against a Christian pastor is hardly unique to the case of Nadarkhani, and a news media which thrives on salacious details has passed along the false charges of the Islamic regime running Iran with the credulity they would never extend if the circumstances were reversed, and an imam were faces charges in a Western country. As Dave Bohon [wrote previously](#) for *The New American*:

Nadarkhani has been imprisoned since October 2009, when he was arrested while trying to register his church. While he was found guilty and sentenced to death in 2010 for abandoning the Islamic faith, the Iranian Supreme Court “recently asked for a re-examination of his case to establish whether or not he had been a practicing Muslim adult before he converted to Christianity,” reported the CSW [British-based Christian Solidarity Worldwide]. “However, the court ruled he wasn’t a practicing Muslim, but is still guilty of apostasy because he has Muslim ancestry.”

While the real charge against Nadarkhani is his apostasy from Islam, the smokescreen of false charges — no matter how absurd — allows the Shiite regime in Tehran to sow confusion in the media coverage of the case. [CNSNews reports](#) that such trumped up charges are a common tactic employed against Christians:

Iran is not alone in using allegations of criminal activity as a cover for persecution, a ploy which



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veteran international religious liberty analyst and advocate Elizabeth Kendal attributes to some governments' concerns about jeopardizing international economic and diplomatic ties.

"It has long been the case that repressive regimes that want to repress internal dissent whilst maintaining their economic relationship with the West, will not risk the relationship by advancing overt persecution," she said on Tuesday.

Kendal said authorities in Uzbekistan plant drugs on problematic Christians and then hand down lengthy jail terms "for drug trafficking when in reality they are being removed from society and locked away purely on account of their faith and witness."

She cited as an example the case of Tohar Haydarov, sentenced last year to 10 years' imprisonment on drug dealing charges.

Kendal said the 27-year-old Uzbek was being punished for no other reason than because he is a convert from Islam — "but the authorities don't want to totally risk the U.S. relationship by locking him up for apostasy. And Haydarov is merely one of a multitude of Christians — Chinese, Vietnamese, Turkmen, Uzbek etc. — currently in prison on false charges."

Although Iran scarcely has a relationship with the West to jeopardize, international pressure may still be effective.

The willingness of Islamic regimes to trump up false charges to persecute Christians is hardly a new, or a limited, phenomenon; what is disheartening is the willingness of appeasers to update the old "moral equivalence" rhetoric they once used during the Cold War to blur the distinction between the Soviet Union and the United States to now draw a false equivalence between the theocratic tyranny of Islamic regimes and the flaws which exist within the legal framework of many Western nations. Confronting the implications of Sharia law for religious minorities living in Islamic states — and the drive by Muslims living in the West to create such a legal system for themselves (as was witnessed [earlier this year](#) in Great Britain) — Americans need to educate themselves concerning the threat which Sharia law poses for the entire notion of a separation of "Church" and "State" — a concept which is utterly alien to the core principles of Islam.

Regardless of whether or not Nadarkhani is ultimately executed by the Shiite sectarians ruling Iran, the persecution and imprisonment which he has already suffered sends a clear signal that the regime will not ignore the "crime" of those who follow their conscience and leave Islam.



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