

30 April 2013

Our reference: MIN/48286/2013

Anna Soubry MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
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Office

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Dear Anna,

Thank you for your letter of 19 April on behalf of your constituents about EDM 1174 and the continued detention of Farshid Fathi Malayeri in Tehran.

I remain deeply concerned by the ongoing persecution of Iran's religious minorities, including widespread denial of the freedom to worship and condemnation of Christian churches in Iran. The call by the Supreme Leader in October 2011 to prevent the spread of Christianity in Iran exposed the disturbing and dangerous view of Iran's leadership towards Christianity, and wider freedom of religion. We are aware of other Christian pastors and worshippers currently in prison, and therefore seek to urge Iran to release all those imprisoned on the basis of their faith.

I am aware of the plight of Pastor Fathi and his arrest on 26 December 2010. His imprisonment and harsh treatment on the basis of his religion is shocking. My officials discussed this case, amongst others, with the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran, Dr Ahmed Shaheed, on 24 January.

I have spoken out on many occasions about the mistreatment of Christians and other religious minorities in Iran. I and the Foreign Secretary called for the release of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, who was sentenced to death for apostasy. Whilst we welcomed his release in September and again in December last year, we were clear that he should never have been imprisoned in the first place. Similarly, we do not believe that Pastor Fathi should be in prison.

The British Government has put considerable effort into pressing Iran to address its dire human rights record. We have played a leading role in introducing EU sanctions against 87 Iranian individuals and entities responsible for serious human rights violations. The UK has supported the mandate and work of Dr Shaheed, whose most recent report highlights the persecution of religious minorities in Iran. We welcomed the extension of his mandate at the UN Human Rights Council this month. The UK voted in support of the annual UN General Assembly resolution that passed on 27 November 2012 by an overwhelming majority, highlighting the depth of international concern about Iran's human rights record.

We will continue to speak out and urge the Iranian Government to end the persecution of individuals based on their faith. Iran voluntarily signed up to Article 18

of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The UK and the international community expect Iran to live up to this by upholding the right to freedom of religion and belief as the article sets out, and will continue to call Iran to account where it fails to do so.

Warm regards
Alistair

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