

26 October 2006



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Suepfall

Dear Isabel,

RE: MR THOMAS YADEGARY

I wish to now advise of an update I have received today from Amnesty International's Iran Research team, International Secretariat, London, with regard returns of Christian converts to Iran.

Amnesty International is constantly assessing the human rights situation and our current position is to oppose the return of proven converts as any such return would be unsafe. Within the Refugee Status Appeals Authority (RSAA) decision, which declined Mr Yadegary refugee status, it acknowledged the genuineness of his conversion to Catholicism.

Amnesty International believes it is not now safe for Mr Yadegary to be returned to Iran, and any such return would see New Zealand in breach of its international human rights obligations.

Amnesty International therefore supports Mr Yadegary's immediate removal from prison and for him to be provided with a "complementary form of protection", which would allow him to reside and work in New Zealand until such time as it is safe for him to return home.

Amnesty International has documented throughout 2006 several cases of arrests of evangelical Christians in connection with their religious activities. Most were converts.

One of the most recent cases Amnesty International has engaged in is that of Christian converts Fereshteh Dibaj (28) and her husband Reza Montazemi (35). On October 5 this year both were released on bail following the payment of a US\$25,000 bail, the pair having been detained since September 26.

While welcoming the release Amnesty International still holds concerns for the couple, as the charges against them have not been made public and they could be rearrested at any time.

Harassment faced by such converts can and does range from:

- a ban on state or parastatal employment under Gozinesh rules ¹

¹ *Gozinesh* or "selection". In law and practice, the *gozinesh* process impairs - on grounds of political opinion, previous political affiliation or support or religious affiliation - equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation for all those who seek employment in the public and parastatal sector and, reportedly in some instances, in parts of the private sector.

It contravenes Article 23 of Iran's constitution, which states that "The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief" as well as international human rights treaties to which Iran is a state party.

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AI is a movement of 1.8 million people in over 150 countries who contribute time, money and expertise to the promotion of human rights, and to international campaigning against serious human rights violations including torture, "disappearances", killings and the imprisonment of people for who they are or what they believe.

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