

The following article, written by Adelle Banks for Religion News Service, appeared in The Washington Post, On Faith on September 10, 2012 at www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/activists-hail-release-of-christian-pastor-in-iran-teen-in-pakistan/2012/09/10/c2d1cc86-fb8e-11e1-98c6-ec0a0a93f8eb_story.html

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Religious rights activists are hailing the release over the weekend of an Iranian pastor accused of apostasy and a Pakistani girl who was charged with blasphemy.

Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani was released Saturday (Sept. 8) after a six-hour hearing, reported the American Center for Law and Justice, which worked to garner American support for the minister's release. The Christian convert had faced possible execution.

"Your prayers, your advocacy, and your voice has been heard," read an online announcement from ACLJ.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom welcomed Nadarkhani's release "after being unjustly imprisoned for three years because of his faith," said its chair, Katrina Lantos Swett.

“USCIRF calls on the government of Iran to comply with its own laws and international standards of human rights and release all other prisoners of conscience,” she added.

Meanwhile, a teenage girl in Pakistan had been accused of burning pages of the Quran. The Associated Press reported that Rimsha Masih was released Saturday, not long after a Muslim cleric from her neighborhood was charged with planting incriminating evidence against her.

“Her parents were with her when she was freed from the jail, and she has been taken to a safer place,” said one of her lawyers, Tahir Naveed Chaudhry.

USCIRF also cheered the teenager’s release, calling it “an important and encouraging development that underscores the urgency of Pakistan reforming its blasphemy law.” Said USCIRF Executive Director Jackie Wolcott: “The law victimizes all Pakistanis — Christians, other religious minorities, and Muslims.”

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