

The following article, written by Benjamin Weinthal, appeared in The Jerusalem Post on September 8, 2012 at <http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=284322>

Iran has released Youcef Nadarkhani, a Christian pastor, after three years of imprisonment on charges of apostasy, according to the **United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)**.

Nadarkhani, now 34, was arrested in 2009 for questioning the compulsory Islamic education of his children and seeking to register a home-based church. He converted to Christianity at the age of 19. He was sentenced to death in 2010. Iran's judiciary upheld the sentence in February.

In a statement sent to The Jerusalem Post on Saturday, the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), a Washington-based advocacy group that promotes religious freedom in the US and abroad, wrote "Pastor Youcef had been summoned to appear before the court this morning for the charges brought against him. His hearing lasted almost six hours. But in the end, he was released and able to return home to his family."

ACLJ, which launched a global campaign social media campaign to secure the Pastor's release, added "Some of our sources close to the case report that the court acquitted him of apostasy, but charged and convicted him of evangelizing to Muslims. According to these same sources, the court sentenced Pastor Youcef to three years in prison and granted him time served, which means his prison sentence already has been completed. Pastor Youcef's story is an example of how the world can join together to ensure that justice is served and freedom preserved."

The ACLJ noted that "while we praise the release of Pastor Youcef, we must recognize that Iran felt obligated to save face among its people and continue its pattern of suppressing religious freedom with intimidation tactics. International attention to this matter saved this man's life, but we must not forget the human right of freedom of religion includes the right to freedom of expression. We must also not forget the numerous other religious minorities in Iran who are imprisoned and face persecution for their faith."

Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, who chairs USCIRF, welcomed the pastor's release and called on Iran to free other prisoners as well. "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 said.

USCIRF has classified Iran as a “country of concern” since 1999. US President Barack Obama, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and the governments of Germany, Britain and France had all called on the Iranian government to release Nadarkhani.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner please contact Samantha Schnitzer at sschnitzer@uscirf.gov or (202) 786-0613.