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ASIA/IRAN - No to worship in the Persian language: a Christian Pastor arrested, the church risks closure

Tehran (Agenzia Fides) - The Christian Pastor, Robert Asserian, of the Protestant denomination "Assembly of God" was arrested yesterday in Tehran during a prayer meeting in his church. As reported to Fides by the NGO "Christian Solidarity Worldwide" (CSW), the church could be forced to close by the end of June.
The security forces broke into Rev. Asserian's home and confiscated some of his personal effects, such as computer and books. They then went to the church and arrested the Pastor who was leading a prayer meeting. The Christian community had already denounced in recent months intimidation by the security forces.
Pressure on Iranian Christians has intensified in recent years, especially towards communities such as the "Assembly of God", offers services of worship in "farsi" (the Persian language). Already in 2009 the ban was imposed to hold liturgies in Persian on Friday, while the authorization remains in force for Sunday. The authorities have now ordered to stop the worship in "farsi" even on Sunday, leaving the possibility to celebrate in Armenian. The ban on the use of the Persian language comes from fears that Iranian Muslim citizens can convert to Christianity.
According to the latest report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Iran is among the nations (with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, North Korea and China) where there are the most serious violations of religious freedom such as "systematic abuse on non-Muslim believers, acts of torture, prolonged detention without charges, disappearances". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 22/05/2013)

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