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ASIA/IRAN - A Christian sentenced to ten years in prison for spreading copies of the Gospel

Tehran (Agenzia Fides) - An Iranian man, converted from Islam to Christianity, was sentenced to ten years in prison for "crimes against state security": the defendant is guilty of distributing copies of the Gospel in the country. Mohammad-Hadi Bordbar, known as Mostafa, a native of the city of Rasht, was accused of conspiracy and sentenced. As reported to Fides Agency, the court documents show that the man confessed to "having abandoned Islam to follow Christianity", and "considering evangelization his duty, he distributed 12,000 pocket gospels".

After having received baptism, Mostafa had set up a "house church", an assembly of home worship, with prayer meetings at home, which are considered "illegal". Mostafa was arrested in Tehran on December 27, 2012, after a police raid at his house. The security officers detained and interrogated all those present at the meeting for hours, about 50 Iranian Christians. In his home the police found material and Christian publications, such as movies, books, CDs and over 6,000 copies of the Gospel. Mostafa had already been arrested in 2009 for conversion to Christianity, found guilty of apostasy, then released on bail.

In another recent case, reported to Fides by the Iranian Christian Agency "Mohabat News", a court in the city of Robat-Karim, south of Tehran, sentenced the young Ebrahim Firouzi, another Iranian Christian to one year in prison and two years of exile, for "evangelization activities and distribution of Bibles", considered "in opposition to the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran". In the ruling, the judge describes Ebrahim Firouzi of being "guilty of criminal acts for holding prayer meetings at home and for having spread among the young doubts on Islamic principles". The young man was arrested in March 2013.

As recalled by the NGO "Barnabas team" and "Christian Solidarity Worldwide", committed to the defense of Christians in the world, in recent years the interest of young Iranians towards Christianity has made conversion to Christianity a disturbing problem for the Iranian authorities. Many churches of Farsi-language have been closed in Tehran and in other cities, while the pressure on Christian converts from Islam is on the rise. The new Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, spoke of a possible "reform of civil rights" recently asking Islamic religious clergy to "stop state interference in the private lives of people". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 20/08/2013)

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