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AGRICULTURE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

September 29, 2011

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei

Dear Grand Ayatollah,

We respectfully request your help from your position of spiritual leadership in the Islamic Republic of Iran. We are very hopeful that the conviction and sentencing of Mr. Youcef Nadarkhani would be overruled and/or rescinded. We understand that he is being called on to reject his faith in Christianity or face death. He identifies himself with the faith or religion of Christianity and will most likely die rather than deny his faith in Jesus. In our age, no civilized nation should force a man to deny his faith or die.

This latest sentencing follows a long and reoccurring pattern of rulings by courts within the Islamic Republic of Iran, ones that violate basic human rights and the Islamic Republic of Iran's international commitments. Specifically, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which most Organization of the Islamic Conference members are signatories, upholds the right to adopt a religion and manifest this religion in community or individually. Furthermore, the punishment in the issued verdict for Mr. Nadarkhani seems to conflict with some Islamic principles.

The punishment in the issued verdict for Mr. Nadarkhani does great damage to the reputation of Islam and to relations between nations and between people of faith in every nation. Many within Islam have taken pride in emphatically underscoring that in its Holy Scripture there must not be any compulsion in adopting a religion. Moreover, the verdict was stated in such a manner that it seems to be in serious dispute by some principles in Islam.

As a final thought, even if one were to adhere to a more strict and textual interpretation of religious penal code, it seems to us that compassion is an essential component of all world religions including Islam. It is this canonical principle of compassion that should overrule other elements.

As people of deep faith, we ask that you use your influence to help secure the release of Mr. Nadarkhani and the dropping of all charges against him. We also appeal for fair treatment and protection for people of all faiths in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in other nations where people are being persecuted for their faith.

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With sincerity and prayers,

Rep. Robert B. Aderholt

Rep. Randy Forbes

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry

Rep. Trent Franks

Rep. Joe Pitts

Rep. Frank Wolf