

## PRISONER PROFILE

*Prisoner Name:* **Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh**

*Location:* **Iran**

*Arrested:* **June 2016**

*Sentence:* **10 years imprisonment**



### Arrest and background

Christian Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh was arrested on 24 June 2016 when 30 intelligence police agents raided an engagement party at a house in the Andisheh township of Karaj, near Tehran. Everyone present was detained, including three visiting Azeri Christians from Baku, Azerbaijan. Most of the Christians were released after questioning and collection of their personal information, but Naser and the Azeris were transferred to Evin prison – some sources suggested that Naser was not released as he was older than the other Christians in the group and was perceived as the leader.

The four Christians were held in solitary confinement for two months and subjected to intense interrogation. During this time, they were denied consular assistance and legal counsel. They were all charged with ‘illegal gathering, collusion and evangelism’. In September 2016, they were transferred to shared cells in Evin’s Ward 350, and they were temporarily released the following month on bail equivalent to approximately £25,500 each. The three Azeris – Bahram Nasibov, Yusif Farhadov and Eldar Gurbanov – were allowed to leave Iran in November 2016, forfeiting their bail.

At Naser’s trial in May 2017, Judge Mashallah Ahmadzadeh, head of the 26th branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran, charged him with ‘acting against national security through the formation and establishment of an illegal church organisation in his home’. The court convicted Naser, basing its decision on a Ministry of Intelligence report that allegedly provided evidence that he attempted to undermine national security by establishing an ‘illegal house church network’. The court refused to present the report to Naser’s lawyer Hossein Ahmadi Niaz, who had not been allowed access to any document in his case file.

On 23 May 2017, Judge Ahmadzadeh sentenced Naser to ten years in prison, and the three Azeris were also sentenced, in their absence, to ten years each in prison. The judgments were not communicated to the four Christians until 12 June 2017.

On 12 November, 2017, Naser lost an appeal at a hearing in the Revolutionary Court in Tehran chaired by Judge Hassan Babaei, in spite of his lawyer providing numerous grounds for his innocence. The three Azeris also appealed and lost, but they are unlikely to be forced to return to Iran to serve their sentences. Lawyer Hossein Ahmadi Niaz commented at this time, ‘My client has not broken any of the criminal code and is not guilty of his charges. All other Christians arrested with him also confirmed all of their meetings were strictly focused on their faith and worship and nothing else.’

On 20 January, 2018, Naser was admitted to section 8, hall 10 of Evin Prison to serve his 10 year sentence. He was denied medical treatment for a severe gum infection and was in great pain. His family feared he may lose all his teeth if the authorities continued to deny him treatment.

In January 2019 it was reported that Naser was well and in good spirits. On October 10, 2019 a High Court ruling on the case was expected. The sitting was adjourned without any decision being taken and no new date was given to hear the appeal. In June 2021, his appeal for conditional release - having served more than one third of his sentence - was rejected.

In January 2022, Naser's lawyer Iman Soleimani submitted another petition for a retrial, basing his new petition on the Supreme Court's recent ruling that nine Christian converts sentenced to five years in prison should not have been convicted of "*actions against national security*" – they had been released pending a review of their cases. In late January, Iran's Supreme Court agreed to review Naser's case. His lawyer Iman Soleimani confirmed that Branch 9 of the Supreme Court had accepted his latest appeal for a review of his client's sentence, although a date for the hearing was not announced .

On 23 February, it was reported that Naser was one of four Christian prisoners in Evin prison to have fallen ill following a suspected Covid-19 outbreak in their ward. The Christians have not been tested but have all experienced symptoms, with Naser's especially severe, though now improving.

On March 1 2022 Naser's family was informed that his fourth appeal for a retrial had been dismissed. In a short verdict dated 19 February but only communicated to his family after repeated requests, presiding judges Alireza Rahmani and Gholamreza Amini-Mehr stated that the lawyer Iman Soleimani's request had not met the requirements of Article 474 of the Code of Criminal Procedure regarding grounds for a retrial, and "*therefore the request is rejected*". Reacting to the judgment, the lawyer commented: "*Unfortunately, the branches of the Supreme Court issue verdicts in an arbitrary way, without considering the rights of the accused.*" He said the ruling was a contravention of Naser's civil rights and Iranian law.

## **Pray:**

1. That God will strengthen Naser physically, spiritually and emotionally.
2. That Naser will experience a profound sense of God's presence with him in the prison cell.
3. For continued physical healing of his painful gum infection and any other sickness.

## **SEND A CARD OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO NASER NAVARD GOL-TAPEH:**

**c/o Release International, PO Box 54, ORPINGTON, BR5 4RT.**

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[www.releaseinternational.org/prisoners](http://www.releaseinternational.org/prisoners).

Sources: MEC, Article 18, Church in Chains

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