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Public Statement

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Iran: Worrying trends in use of death penalty

Amnesty International today expressed grave concern about the rate of executions reported in Iran and said it feared for the lives of a number of political prisoners, some of whom are reported to have been on death row for several years. The organization is also outraged that Iran continues to sentence child offenders to death in contravention of its international human rights obligations.

Executions in Iran continue at an alarming rate. Amnesty International recorded 94 executions in 2005, although the true figure is likely to be much higher. So far in 2006, it has recorded as many as 28 executions. Most of the victims were sentenced for crimes such as murder but one of those recently executed was a political prisoner, Hojjat Zamani, a member of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), who was forcibly returned to Iran from Turkey in 2003 and sentenced to death in 2004 after conviction of involvement in a bomb explosion in Tehran in 1988 which killed 3 people (see Urgent Actions AI Index EUR 44/025/2003, 5 November 2003 and MDE 13/032/2004). He was taken from his cell in Gohar Dasht prison and executed on 7 February 2006, though his execution was officially confirmed by Iranian officials only on 21 February.

Hojjat Zamani's execution has fuelled fears that other political prisoners may be at risk of imminent execution. According to unconfirmed reports that have been circulating since early February, a number of political and other prisoners who are under sentence of death have been told by prison officials that they would be executed if Iran should be referred to the UN Security Council over the resumption of its nuclear programme (which Iran claims is intended solely for the peaceful production of nuclear energy). These are said to have included other members of the PMOI, which is an illegal organization in Iran. The National Council of Resistance of Iran, of which the PMOI is a member, was the source of evidence in 2002 revealing Iran's nuclear programme to the outside world.

Among those feared to be at risk are **Sa'id Masouri** (See Urgent Action AI Index MDE 13/018/2002), a PMOI member who has been held in solitary confinement in Section 209 of Evin Prison since late 2004; **Khaled Hardani**, **Farhang Pour Mansouri** and **Shahram Pour Mansouri** (See Urgent Action AI Index: MDE 13/003/2005), all three of whom were involved in hijacking a plane in 2001 when Shahram Pour Mansouri was aged only 17; **Gholamhossein Kalbi** and **Valiollah Feyz Mahdavi**, both PMOI members, and **Alireza Karami Khairabadi**.

Amnesty International has also received reports that at least two Iranian Arabs may be facing imminent execution. The province of Khuzestan has been the centre of wide scale unrest since 15 April 2005 (For further information on the unrest in Khuzestan province, see Iran: New Government fails to address dire human rights situation AI Index MDE 13/010/2006). **Mohammad Ali Sawari** and **Mehdi Nawaseri**, both said to be in their early twenties, have reportedly been sentenced to death. Mohammad Ali Sawari was reportedly arrested following demonstrations in Ahwaz City on 4 November 2005. Mehdi Nawaseri was

reportedly arrested in October 2005, after previously having been detained in April 2005 and subsequently released.

On 14 February 2006, Jamal Karimi-Rad, Minister of Justice and Spokesman for the Judiciary, told the news agency IRNA that seven of the 45 people arrested in connection with bomb explosions in September and October 2005 had been convicted on charges including "enmity with God, corruption on earth and murder" and that their sentences would be announced shortly. The penalty for enmity against God and corruption on earth can be execution, cross amputation, crucifixion for three days, or banishment. On 20 February 2006, the Prosecutor General Ghorban-Ali Dori-Najafabadi was reported as stating "*some of the convicted in this case have received execution verdict, including the two main culprits, whose presence in the recent Ahvaz incidents was proved and their execution verdict is definitive*". On 21 February, in a statement to IRNA commenting on this report, Jamal Karimi-Rad stated that only two had been sentenced to death and these were under review by the Supreme Court. He noted that "*the crimes committed by all the seven convicts do not call for the death sentence*". Amnesty International fears that Mohammad Ali Sawari and Mehdi Nawaseri may be the two referred to and may be at imminent risk of execution.

Amnesty International is also outraged that Iran has sentenced yet another child offender to death. According to reports carried by two Iranian news agencies, Fars, and the Iran Students Correspondents Association (ISCA), an 18-year-old youth, identified only as Mohammad, was sentenced to death by Branch 71 of the Tehran Criminal Court for a murder he committed in August 2003 when he was aged only 16. According to these reports, he had originally been tried by the Childrens' Court and sentenced to five years' imprisonment and payment of blood money. However, the family of the victim reportedly complained that the sentence was insufficiently severe and the Supreme Court decided that as Mohammad had now reached 18, he could be tried in the Criminal Court, which resulted in his death sentence. The death sentence must be ratified by the Supreme Court before it can be carried out.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Iran has undertaken not to execute anyone for an offence committed when they were under the age of 18. Nevertheless, Amnesty International has recorded 18 executions of child offenders in Iran since 1990. In 2005 alone, at least eight executions of child offenders were recorded

Amnesty International recognizes the rights and responsibilities of governments to bring to justice those suspected of committing recognizably criminal offences, but the organization is unconditionally opposed to the use of the death penalty as the ultimate violation of the right to life. It therefore urges the Iranian authorities to impose an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty and to abide by its international obligations not to execute anyone for an offence committed when they were a child.