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IRAN: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS AGAINST FURTHER EXECUTIONS AND AMPUTATIONS

Following a dramatic increase in the number of executions reported in Iran in recent months -- and what are believed to be the first amputations carried out since 1994 -- Amnesty International is demanding that the Iranian authorities immediately stop further executions and amputations.

“It is alarming that the authorities are stepping up implementation of these cruel, inhuman and degrading forms of punishment, particularly so soon after three representatives of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights visited Iran to investigate the human rights situation,” Amnesty International said today.

The worldwide human rights organization has recorded up to 70 executions so far in 1996; there were about 50 recorded throughout 1995. The true figure may be much higher, as the organization believes many executions which are carried out are never reported. Of these, about 20 per cent have been of political prisoners, convicted on charges such as membership of, and activities on behalf of, opposition groups and espionage. Amnesty International is concerned that many, if not most, of these trials were unfair.

Some of those executed have reportedly included people sentenced to death several years ago. For example, Ahmad Bakhtari (a member of the People's Fedaiyan Organization of Iran [Minority]) was arrested in February 1992 and sentenced to death in January 1993 in a trial where he had no lawyer. This death sentence was overturned by the Supreme Court, which returned the case to a lower court where he was again sentenced to death in 1994. Following confirmation by the Supreme Court, and a rejection of his plea for clemency from the General Amnesty Board, he was finally executed on 22 June 1996.

Others reportedly included Salim Sabernia and Mustafa Ghaderi (members of Komala, a Kurdish opposition group) who were detained in 1990, sentenced to death in 1993 and executed on 10 April 1996; and Mehrdad Kalani (a member of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran), sentenced to death in early 1994, and executed on 22 June 1996.

Amnesty International is also concerned that an unknown number of drug traffickers may be facing execution. According to press reports, 1,743 major drug dealers; 6,802 small-scale distributors; and 18,172 drug addicts were arrested in the three months up to 20 June. Under a 1989 law, the death penalty is mandatory for a wide range of drug offences. On 17 July, the execution of seven drug traffickers was announced on Iranian radio, and on 25 July, Iranian newspapers reported the sentencing of four people to death for drug-trafficking and murder following armed clashes with police. It is not known if they have been executed.

“There is no convincing evidence to show that the death penalty deters would-be traffickers more effectively than other punishments,” Amnesty International said. “Our information strongly suggests that the absence of the death penalty will not harm -- and may even strengthen -- efforts to combat drug trafficking and abuse.”

Amnesty International is also concerned at reports on 5 August that six people convicted more than once of theft have had their fingers amputated. Other convicted thieves were said to have been brought from prison to witness the amputations. These amputations, the first recorded by Amnesty International since March 1994, followed a statement by the State Prosecutor, Ayatollah Moghtadai, on 25 July that amputations for theft were to resume in order to halt rising crime. The organization fears that others convicted of theft may also be at risk of amputation.

Amnesty International opposes judicial punishments such as amputations and floggings as they constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. Such punishments are inconsistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a State Party.

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