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Prisoner of Conscience sentenced to death for downloading and distributing materials from the internet

Amnesty International condemns the decision to sentence to death journalist Perwiz Kambakhsh who had been convicted of downloading and distributing written materials that examined the role of women in the Islamic faith by the primary court in Mazar-i Sharif, northern Afghanistan.

“Amnesty International is gravely concerned about the combination of human rights violations which Perwiz Kambakhsh has reportedly suffered: ill-treatment to enforce confession, lack of access to a lawyer, a closed, unfair trial resulting in the death penalty – all for acts that may not have taken place, and at any rate should not have been the subject of prosecution,” Catherine Baber director of Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific programme said.

According to information received by Amnesty International, Perwiz Kambakhsh was sentenced to death on Tuesday 22 January 2008 following proceedings that manifestly failed to meet international fair trial standards. Such standards are provided, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Afghanistan is a state party and in the 1984 Safeguards Guaranteeing Protection of the Rights of Those Facing the Death Penalty adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council and endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

This sentence comes despite the recent UN General Assembly’s adoption of a resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions on 18 December 2007 and at a time when a total of 135 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

“Amnesty International condemns the death sentence against Perwiz Kambakhsh and urges President Karzai to use his power to ensure that the sentence is commuted and that Perwiz Kambakhsh, a prisoner of conscience, is unconditionally released,” said Catherine Baber.

In line with the recent adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions in December Amnesty International calls on the

Afghanistan government to re-introduce a moratorium on executions as a first step towards the total abolition of the death penalty in Afghanistan.

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