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Iran: Announcement of end of child executions a welcome step

Amnesty International calls on the Head of Iran's Judiciary to apply with immediate effect today's announcement that it will end the death penalty for those under the age of 18, irrespective of the type of crime allegedly committed.

Iran has instructed all courts to cease the execution of juvenile offenders who have committed crimes punishable by death, according to Hossein Zabhi, Assistant Attorney General for Judicial Affairs.

Iran is currently the only country in the world known to have executed a juvenile offender in 2008. It has carried out the death penalty on juveniles once they reach the age of 18 and, according to information available to Amnesty International, six juvenile offenders have already been hanged this year.

The statement by Hossein Zabhi refers to all types of crime currently punishable by death under Iranian law. In lieu of the death penalty, the directive instructs judges to issue juveniles sentences ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment.

Amnesty International welcomes the announcement and hopes that it will pave the way to a complete abolition of the death penalty in Iran. It calls for the legislation and implementation to adhere to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Iran is a state party, and prohibits life imprisonment without the possibility of release for offences committed by persons below 18 years of age.

Amnesty International urges Iran's parliament, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, or Majles, to ensure that the directive is incorporated quickly into legislation currently under review, and for the higher legislative body, the Council of Guardians, to support this initiative.

Scores of human rights defenders in Iran and around the world have been campaigning for this development for many years.