

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 13/078/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 119
27 June 2007

Embargo Date: 27 June 2007 00:01 GMT

Iran: End child executions

"My daughter Delara is accused of a crime that she did not commit... Help me and help us until justice is properly served. There are no signs of humanity and justice in here."
father of Delara Darabi who is awaiting execution in Iran, 11 January 2007

Amnesty International is calling on Iran's judicial and political authorities to order an immediate moratorium to prevent further executions of child offenders and to amend the laws so no children who commit crimes can be sentenced to death. In a new report, the organization said at least 71 child offenders were awaiting execution in Iran, where more child offenders have been executed than in any other country since 1990.

"Iran stands virtually alone as a country in which child offenders - persons under 18 at the time of the crime of which they were convicted - are put to death," said Malcolm Smart, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme. "It is high time that the Iranian authorities put an end to this shameful practice - for once and for all - and bring themselves in line with the rest of the international community, which has long recognized the obscenity of executing those who commit crimes while children."

In the report, Iran: The last executioner of children, Amnesty International lists the names of the 71 child offenders known to be facing the death penalty, but notes that the total number could be much higher as many death penalty cases in Iran are believed to go unreported. Of the 24 child offenders recorded as having been executed since 1990, 11 were still under the age of 18 at the time of their execution while the others were either kept on death row until they had reached 18 or were convicted and sentenced after reaching that age.

"The Iranian authorities deny that they execute children but so far this year we have already recorded two executions of child offenders," said Malcolm Smart. "Mohammad Mousavi, aged 19, was executed in April for a crime committed when he was 16, and Sa'id Qanbar Zahi, hanged on 27 May 2007 at Zahedan prison, was only 17 when he was sentenced to death with six other members of Iran's Baluchi minority two months earlier."

The execution of Atefeh Rajabi Sahaaleh, sentenced for "crimes against chastity" and hanged at the age of 16 on August 2004, is one of seven cases highlighted by the report. A day after her execution, a judiciary official told a newspaper that she was 22 years old. Rajabi's case highlights the failure of the Iranian judicial system to protect children and provides further evidence that some child offenders are executed in Iran even before they reach the age of 18. The report also lists the cases of 17 other people who were executed for crimes committed when they were under 18.

Although executions of child offenders are few compared to the total number of executions in Iran, they highlight the government's disregard for its commitments and obligations under international law, which prohibits in all circumstances the use of the death penalty against child offenders. Apart from Iran, the only countries in which executions of child offenders have been recorded since 2003 are China, Sudan and Pakistan; though the Chinese and Pakistani authorities insisted that those executed were aged 18 or over at the time of the crime. In each year the number of child offenders executed in Iran exceeded the total number of all other executions of child offenders.

Some members of the government and the judiciary are also believed to favour at least reducing, if not abolishing, the death penalty for child offenders, but progress is painfully slow. For example, a draft law proposed by the judiciary in

2001 could pave the way for the abolition of the death sentence for minors or at least result in a reduction in the number of offences for which child offenders could be sentenced to death, but the draft law is still under consideration by the political and judicial authorities.

Amid the horror of child executions and the wider problem of the death penalty in Iran, there are some positive signs, particularly, the emergence of a growing movement in favour of the abolition of the death penalty for child offenders. This is being led by a courageous band of human rights defenders and activists within Iran, and it has already achieved some notable successes.

"Amnesty International opposes the death penalty unreservedly for anyone, regardless of their age and regardless of the nature of the crime or the character of the condemned," said Malcolm Smart. "Every execution is an affront to human dignity - a human rights violation of premeditated cruelty that denies the right to life enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>