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Public Statement

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Iran: Amnesty International condemns new wave of executions

Amnesty International today expressed alarm at the new wave of executions in Iran and said that it has already recorded almost 250 executions since the beginning of 2007, although the true total of those put to death could be significantly higher.

The victims of the latest executions include a woman who was apparently convicted for a murder which took place as she sought to protect herself from an attempted rape, and one or possibly three child offenders.

On Wednesday 17 October alone, at least nine people were executed in Tehran's Evin Prison, all of them convicted of murder, and at least another three in Shiraz, who were convicted for the kidnapping and rape of two women. On 10 October, two Iranian Kurds were hanged in Sanandaj Prison for the murder of a security official, which took place in January 2007.

With the executions in Sanandaj, Shiraz and Tehran, Amnesty International has, to date, recorded 244 executions in the course of 2007, although the organisation fears that the true figure could be significantly higher.

The execution of at least nine people in Tehran's Evin Prison included Fakhteh S, a 24 year old, who was sentenced to death for the murder of a man, aged 80, at his house. Fakhteh S reportedly worked as a caretaker at the man's residence and was found by the court to have stolen some of his property. She alleged that he was trying to rape her when she stabbed him. She was hanged inside Evin Prison at 5:30 on the morning of 17 October 2007.

Babak, 23, was sentenced to death for the murder by suffocation of his room-mate, which took place on 12 January 2002. It is unclear whether he was under 18 years of age at the time, or if either of two others convicted in the same case were under 18; if so, they were the latest child offenders to have been executed in Iran in violation of international standards prohibiting the use of the death penalty for persons who commit crimes while under 18.

Amnesty is gravely concerned at reports that six members of Iran's Arab minority are also at risk of imminent execution. According to their families, Rasool 'Ali Mezrea', 65, Hamza Sawari, 20, Zamel Bawi, 'Abdul-Imam Za'eri, Nazem Bureihi and Ahmad Marmazi, 35, all held in Karoun Prison, Khuzestan, have been moved to a cell reserved for those soon to be executed.

Rasool 'Ali Mezrea' is a member of the Ahwazi Liberation Organization (ALO) and is recognized as a refugee by the United Nations High commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and had been accepted for resettlement in a third country, but was forcibly returned to Iran from Syria on 16 May 2006.

Hamza Sawari, Zamel Bawi, 'Abdul-Imam Za'eri and Nazem Bureihi had their death sentences confirmed on 10 June 2006 by Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court in Ahwaz, Khuzestan. At the end of July 2006 the Supreme Court upheld the sentences of Abdul-Imam Za'eri and Nazem Bureihi.

The five men have reportedly been accused of being "mohareb" (at enmity with God) which can carry the death penalty. Other charges include "destabilising the country," "attempting to overthrow the government," "possession of home made bombs," "sabotage of oil installations," and carrying out bombings in Ahwaz, which took place between June and October 2005 and caused the deaths of at least six people and wounded more than a hundred others.

Nazem Bureihi has reportedly been in custody since 2000 having been arrested on charges of "insurgency". Though he was serving a 35 year prison sentence, he was among nine men shown on Khuzestan Provincial television on 1 March 2006, "confessing" to involvement in the October 2005 bombings.

Zamel Bawi was reportedly convicted of hiding seven home-made time bombs, which he allegedly defused before his arrest.

Amnesty International recognizes the right and responsibility of governments to bring to justice those suspected of criminal offences, but opposes the death penalty as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. The organisation is calling on the Iranian authorities to commute all death sentences with a view to establishing a moratorium.

In view of the irreversible nature of the death penalty, the organisation is once again urging Iran's judiciary to review all cases of those sentenced to death to ensure that the all international standards protecting the right to a fair trial were scrupulously observed in these cases.

In light of Amnesty International's long-standing concerns relating to the administration of justice in Iran, the organisation urges the judicial authorities to ensure that all safeguards and due process guarantees set out in international standards applicable during pre-trial, trial and appellate stages must be fully respected.

Amnesty International reminds the Iranian authorities that Article 6(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party, states that the sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the crime, and that this means that crimes punishable by death should not go beyond intentional crimes with lethal or other extremely grave consequences and that all mitigating factors must be taken into account.