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Iran: Four death row prisoners at imminent risk amid reports of secret executions

Four Sunni prisoners on death row, Hamed Ahmadi, Jahangir Dehghani, Jamshid Dehghani and Kamal Molaee, have been transferred to solitary confinement and are scheduled to be executed on Sunday 15 June on the charge of “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*), only days after reports of the secret execution of Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi on the same charge, warned Amnesty International.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities not to execute Hamed Ahmadi, Jahangir Dehghani, Jamshid Dehghani and Kamal Molaee and immediately impose a moratorium on all executions.

The families of the four men were called on 13 June to visit their relatives for the last time before their death sentence will be implemented in Rajae Shahr prison on 15 June. The four are accused of killing Mullah Mohammad Sheikh al-Islam, a senior Sunni cleric with ties to the Iranian authorities. The men deny the accusation, saying that they had been arrested between June and July 2009, several months before the sheikh’s killing in September 2009, and that they have been targeted solely because they practiced or promoted their faith, such as taking part in Sunni religious seminars and distributing Sunni reading materials. The Supreme Court had upheld the death sentences in September 2013, and the sentences had been sent to the Office for the Implementation of Sentences, the official body in charge of carrying out executions.

The authorities sentenced the four men to death after trials during which basic safeguards, such as rights of defense, were disregarded, in contravention of international fair trial standards

The organization’ call comes amid reports of the secret executions of Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi, two members of Iran’s Ahwazi minority who had been held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance since March 2014.

Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi families learned on 12 June 2014 that the men had been executed. The circumstances surrounding the executions remain shrouded in secrecy as the families have been told neither about the date nor the place at which the executions took place, in violation of Iranian law which requires lawyers and families to be notified of scheduled executions 48 hours in advance. The authorities have never even provided the men’s families and lawyer with the verdict sentencing the two men to death.

On 12 June 2014, the brother and son of Ali Chebieshat were told to report to the Ministry of Intelligence office in Ahvaz, the capital of the Province of Khuzestan in southern Iran. They learned of Ali Chebieshat’s execution only after they were driven to a cemetery in Ramhormozz, a city more than 200 km away from the hometown of Ali Chebieshat in Kaab Khalaf Mosallam, Shush, Khuzestan, and shown an unmarked grave presented to them as the grave of Ali Chebieshat. The family of Sayed Khaled Mousawi were told by the Ministry of Intelligence office in Ahvaz that they would be taken to his burial location on 13 June 2014. Both families were warned against holding memorials for their executed relatives.

Later the same day, people in the home village of Ali Chebieshat who learned of his death went to

the family home to mourn. Shortly thereafter, plainclothes agents from the Ministry of Intelligence reportedly arrived, and dispersed the informal gathering and arrested Ali Chebieshat's brother and son. Both men were subsequently released on 13 June 2014 after providing a written guarantee to not hold a memorial for Ali Chebieshat.

At the time of writing, Sayed Khaled Mousawi's family had not yet been taken to the site of his burial.

Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi were sentenced to death on 9 September 2013 by a Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz on the charge of "enmity against God". The Revolutionary Court is understood to have handed down the sentence based on the men's forced "confessions" to their role in the explosion of a natural gas pipeline close to their native village, despite the director of the state-owned Khuzestan Gas Company describing the explosion as an accident.

While they never received a written verdict, the family members of Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi had been informed informally by an official in the Revolutionary Court of Ahwaz on 1 May that the men's sentences had been upheld by the Supreme Court. Three weeks later on 19 May, they learned, through an informal conversation with a Ministry of Intelligence employee that the men would be executed on 22 May 2014. However, when both families went to the Ministry of Intelligence office in Ahvaz on 22 May 2014 for information about the fate of the men, the Ministry of Intelligence officials denied even having them in custody.

According to the UN Human Rights Committee persisting uncertainty of the circumstances that led to [an] execution, as well as the location of the grave; the complete secrecy surrounding the date of the execution and the place of burial, as well as the refusal to hand over the body for burial have the effect of intimidating or punishing the family by intentionally leaving it in a state of uncertainty and mental distress.¹ The Committee has viewed such treatment as inhuman treatment of the family members in violation of Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party.

Ali Chebieshat and Sayad Khaled Mousavi were arrested in November 2012 and taken to a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre in Ahvaz. They were held in solitary confinement in a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre with no access to the external world for over seven months. Amnesty International understands that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated during this period. In court, the two men denied all the charges brought against them and their allegations of torture or other ill-treatment are not known to have been investigated.

In June or July 2013, Ministry of Intelligence officials told the men's families that they could meet with the detainees in a mosque in the village of Jarieh. When they arrived at the mosque, the families realized that the room was equipped with cameras. Amnesty International understands that they were told that if they agreed to be filmed while watching their relatives' recorded "confessions", the authorities would consider reducing their punishments. They were not told that the recorded footage would be aired on national TV. Ali Chebieshat's family members, who refused to be filmed, were apparently contacted by Ministry of Intelligence officials a few months later and coerced into being filmed or risk him being executed. In November 2013, Iran's state-controlled Press TV and Channel 3 of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting aired a "documentary" called "Lost in Darkness" in which they showed the "confessions" of Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi and the footage of the family members.

¹ Case No. 2120/2011, *Vladislav Kovalev et al. v. Belarus*, views adopted on 29 October 2012, UN document CCPR/C/106/D/2120/2011, para. 11.10.

Two other Ahwazi Arab men, Hadi Rashedi and Hashem Sha'bani Nejad were executed in secret at the end of January 2014 after they had been transferred to an undisclosed location. Their families were told by an official from the Ministry of Intelligence on 29 January 2014 that the two men had been executed and buried a few days earlier. Amnesty International understands that those men's families were also not told the exact date of the executions, either in advance or after they had taken place, and have not received the men's bodies. The official told the families they were not permitted to hold a public memorial for the two men and had only 24 hours in which to hold a private service. Three other Ahwazi Arab men, Mohammad Ali Amouri, Sayed Jaber Alboshoka and Sayed Mokhtar Alboshoka, who had been sentenced to death along with them, remain at risk of execution.

Iran remains the second largest executioner in the world, after China. In 2013, according to Amnesty International figures, the Iranian authorities officially acknowledged 369 executions. However, reliable sources have reported that hundreds of additional executions took place in 2013, bringing the possible total to over 700. According to Amnesty International, as of 10 June, 157 executions during 2014 have been acknowledged by the authorities or state-sanctioned media, while reliable sources have reported at least 197 additional executions.