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Iraq: 24 sentenced to death after unfair trial for the Speicher massacre

Amnesty International today said it is deeply concerned over the death sentences issued by a court in Baghdad following a speedy trial of 28 men for the killing of at least 1,700 military cadets in June last year.

The Central Criminal Court of Iraq (CCCI) in Baghdad yesterday sentenced to death by hanging 24 men under Article 4 of the 2005 Anti-Terrorism Law after convicting them of killing at least 1,700 military cadets from the Speicher Military Camp, near Tikrit in Salahuddin governorate, on 12 June 2014. Four others were acquitted for lack of evidence. More than 600 arrest warrants were issued by the Iraqi authorities in connection with the massacre.

The cadets were mostly Shi'a who were captured by militants from the Islamic State (IS) in June 2014 and were shown in videos by the IS being led in trucks and summarily executed.

The trial, which lasted only a few hours, relied mainly on "confessions" obtained from the defendants during interrogation and video footage of the massacre previously circulated by the IS. According to reports from the court room, defendants denied involvement in the killings and said their "confessions" presented as evidence against them in court were extracted from them under torture. Others denied being in the Tikrit area at the time of the massacre.

The speed with which the verdict was reached and the lack of any investigations into the defendants' torture allegations cast serious doubt about the fairness of the trial. The defendants were represented by court appointed lawyers who, according to media reports, requested leniency for their clients but did not dispute the evidence or the "confessions".

Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned the atrocities committed by IS militants and called for those responsible to be held to account. While the summary execution of captured and unarmed military cadets is a heinous crime, those standing trial for such a crime must be afforded a fair trial in line with international standards in order for justice to be served.

Despite a statement by the spokesman for Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council, Abdul-Sattar al-Birqdar, that the defendants will be provided all guarantees under international laws and standards, yesterday's trial bears the hallmark of grossly unfair trials that have seen in the past years thousands of those accused of terrorism in Iraq sentenced to long prison terms or to death. Often confessions extracted under torture during interrogation and later denied by the defendants in court were used to secure convictions.

The death sentences come amid increasing calls from the government and members of parliament on President Fuad Masum to speed up the ratification of death sentences in order to expedite

executions.

On 16 June, the Iraqi Cabinet [approved](#) a proposed amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedures empowering the Minister of Justice to ratify executions if the president did not ratify, pardon, issue clemency or commute final death sentences within 30 days. While no such amendment is known to have been discussed in parliament so far, there were reports that President Fuad Masum has authorized Vice-President Nouri al-Maliki to ratify death sentences.

Expediting the implementation of death sentences is the wrong step to take, more so in Iraq where the justice system is deeply flawed. Amnesty International has [documented](#) many cases of individuals sentenced to death based on torture tainted “confessions” and the reliance on information from secret informants in total disregard for fair trial guarantees.

Amnesty International calls on the Iraqi authorities to commute without delay the death sentences imposed on the 24 men and of all persons on death row; and declare an official moratorium on all executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature or circumstances of the crime; guilt, innocence or other characteristics of the individual; or the method used by the state to carry out the execution. The death penalty violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.