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Chechen Republic: Amnesty International condemns new execution

Amnesty International condemned yesterday's execution of Salan Bakharchiyev, sentenced to death by the Chechen Supreme Shari'a Court in Chechnya for the premeditated murder of four people, and called on the president to commute the death sentences of up to 30 people believed to be awaiting the Shari'a courts' verdicts on charges of kidnapping.

"As more and more countries are abolishing the death penalty, the Chechen Republic continues to carry out this cruel and outmoded form of punishment," Amnesty International said today. "What makes it even more barbaric is that executions in Chechnya have usually been filmed by the authorities."

According to reports, the court found Salan Bakharchiyev guilty of having killed four people. He was convicted of allegedly shooting and killing Chechen First Deputy Shari'a and State Security Minister, Shamsudin Uvaisayev, former Foreign Minister, Ruslan Chimayev, and two others on 15 May. It was not known whether Salan Bakharchiyev had access to a legal representation. Amnesty International has not yet confirmed that any of the people sentenced to death by Shari'a courts in Chechnya have been given access to a lawyer of their choice.

Amnesty International knows of five executions which took place in 1997 in the Chechen Republic. The organization fears that other people in the Chechen Republic may also face imminent execution, among them up to 30 people believed to be awaiting the Shari'a courts' verdicts on charges of kidnapping, after President Aslan Maskhadov issued a decree in June 1997 allowing courts to sentence kidnappers to death. In November 1997 a delegation of the Council of Europe visited Chechnya and met with high-ranking government officials. The delegation was told that a new Shari'a Criminal Code is being drafted in Chechnya which will be adapted in line with the Chechen tradition.

On 3 September 1997, a man and a woman were publicly executed by firing squad in the Chechen Republic after being found guilty of murder by the Chechen Supreme Shari'a Court. A third woman, Assa Larsanova, also found guilty of murder, had her execution postponed when doctors established at the last moment that she was pregnant. Assa Larsanova, mother of three, her sister Mariam, and a man whose name is not known, were sentenced to death by the Chechen Supreme Shari'a Court earlier in 1997 for the murder of Assa's husband. Her two co-defendants were publicly executed by firing squad on 3 September. Mariam's husband reportedly said that Mariam's three children watched their mother's execution on television.

According to reports of May 1998, Assa Larsanova gave birth in prison and is still detained in Grozny, awaiting her execution. Unofficial sources reported that, asked about the case of Assa Larsanova, the Chechen Minister of Interior, Kazbek Makhashov, allegedly said: *"Yes, the case of Assa Larsanova became widely popular internationally. We should never do the executions publicly in the future..."*

During an Amnesty International mission to the Russian Federation in May, the Representative of the Chechen Republic to the Russian Federation, Vakha Khasanov, told Amnesty International's delegation that there was a "de facto" moratorium on executions in Chechnya, because of the wide international outcry and condemnation of the five executions in 1997.

Regardless of its current legal status, the Chechen Republic still remains bound by the international human rights obligations of the Russian Federation, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Amnesty International does not promote or oppose any particular system of justice, urging only that it conforms to internationally accepted standards.

Amnesty International called on the Chechen President during a meeting with him in London, earlier this year, to immediately grant clemency to all prisoners currently on death row in the Chechen Republic. The organization also called for the revision of the provisions of the Chechen Criminal Code which provide for the death penalty and corporal punishments, with a view to abolishing the death penalty and all acts which constitute torture and ill-treatment.
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