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PUBLIC STATEMENT

Iran: Time for judicial reform and end to secret trials

Amnesty International today condemned the death sentences passed against four people arrested in connection with student demonstrations in Iran in July 1999 and called for the immediate halt of trials held in secrecy.

*In an interview with the newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* on 12 September 1999, Gholamhossein Rahbarpour, the President of Tehran Revolutionary Court, announced the death sentences against the four and stated that two of the sentences had already been approved by the Supreme Court. He gave no information as to the identity of those sentenced or details of the charges and trial proceedings against them.*

"The trial appears to have been conducted in complete secrecy and with no opportunity for a proper appeal procedure. We are calling for immediate commutation of the death sentences, urgent clarification of the names of those sentenced, fair re-trials and the release of all those held for their peaceful participation in the demonstrations," said Amnesty International.

*One of those arrested, Manuchehr Mohammadi, a leading member of the *Anjoman-e Daneshjuyan va Daneshamukhtegan Melli* (National Association of Students and Graduates) appeared on state television shortly after the*

demonstrations "confessing" to his involvement with "counter-revolutionary agents", an activity punishable by death in Iran. Any conviction or sentence based on "confessions" under such circumstances would violate Article 11 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial in which he has had all the guarantees for his defence."

"Torture is widespread in Iran and we fear that Manuchehr Mohammadi and others may have been tortured in order to extract such confessions from them. Everyone has the right to be presumed innocent until convicted after fair trial proceedings. The right not to be compelled to testify against oneself or to confess guilt is fundamental to this presumption of innocence".
The organization added.

Amnesty International has long-standing concerns regarding unfair trials in Iran. Trial proceedings in Islamic Revolutionary Courts fall far short of international standards for fair trial. They are usually held behind closed doors, often inside prisons, with lawyers and observers being excluded from the proceedings. Furthermore there is no right to appeal.

During the same interview Gholamhossein Rahbarpour is reported to have stated that there is sufficient and compelling evidence that the 13 Iranian Jews accused of espionage in Iran are guilty of the charges against them. Amnesty International is alarmed at such a public presumption of guilt before trial proceedings have even begun and fears that this trial may also be conducted in secrecy and result in death sentences for the accused.

Amnesty International has welcomed recent comments by the new Head of the Judiciary in Iran, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, in which he has stressed the need for substantial reform of the Judiciary. The organization has also welcomed a recent speech made by His Excellency Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which he is reported to have denounced the use of torture and called for the fundamental rights of all prisoners to be respected.

"Such statements are empty unless accompanied by action. It is now time for the Iranian authorities to take steps towards implementing the promised reforms in order to bring the country's legislation in line with minimum standards for fair trial laid down in article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a State Party."

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