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Iran: Brother of death row prisoner feared arrested for giving interviews

Iran must release Majid Sedeghi, who was arrested this morning shortly before his brother Saeed Sedeghi had been expected to be executed in Tehran's Evin Prison, unless he is to be charged with an internationally recognizable offence, Amnesty International said.

Majid Sedeghi was arrested at his home by two plain-clothed security officers in the early hours of Thursday, a day after giving interviews to BBC Persian – the BBC's Persian language news service - and Voice of America about his brother Saeed Sedeghi, a shop worker who was sentenced to death for drug-trafficking in June after an unfair trial.

He has so far not been able to contact his family, who were not told the reasons for his arrest, nor where he was taken.

“If Majid Sedeghi is being held solely for peacefully advocating on behalf of his brother – as he is entitled to do under international law - by giving interviews about Saeed Sedeghi's case, then he should be released immediately and unconditionally,” said Ann Harrison, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

On Wednesday, Saeed Sedeghi was transferred along with 10 other men from Ghezel Hesar prison to Evin Prison to be executed.

It was thought this would take place on Thursday morning but is now understood to be scheduled for Saturday.

“Granting a two-day reprieve from death when what is needed is a fair retrial which cannot end in execution is not justice. The Iranian authorities know full well that executing people for drugs crimes violates international human rights standards and must end this practice immediately,” said Harrison.

“The Iranian authorities must also ensure Majid Sedeghi is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while in detention.”

Shortly after Majid Sedeghi's arrest, his mother called the Police's emergency number to ask the whereabouts of her son, only to be told by officials that they were unable to help her and that her family should not have given interviews about the impending execution.

On Thursday morning Majid Sedeghi's mother visited Evin Prison and Kahrizak detention centre, also in Tehran, seeking information about her son's whereabouts, but was told by officials at both prisons that nothing was known about him.

The families of 10 other prisoners transferred to Evin Prison for execution were in front of Evin Prison

trying to find out information on whether the executions had taken place, when they were told by the prison authorities that the executions had been postponed until 13 October.

Iran is second only to China in the number of executions carried out annually.

Of the 344 executions believed to have been carried out so far this year, the majority have been of individuals convicted of drugs offences.