

AI Index: PRE01/493/2012
15 October 2012

Iran must clarify fate of 11 men after apparent stay of execution

The fate and whereabouts of 11 men who were due to be put to death on Saturday must be disclosed by the authorities in Iran, Amnesty International said following reports that the executions did not take place.

Among those scheduled to be executed was Saeed Sedeghi, a shop worker who was sentenced to death in June after an unfair trial on drugs-related charges.

A member of Saeed Sedeghi's family has told Amnesty International she had been informed on Saturday by the authorities at Tehran's Evin Prison that the executions did not take place and that all 11 men were still alive.

It is not clear if the executions were postponed or halted or if the men are still being held at Evin Prison. When Saeed Sedeghi's family asked about his whereabouts, the prison authorities at both Evin and Ghezel Hesar prisons told them that he is not being held at either facility.

"The Iranian authorities must do much more than granting a further reprieve for Saeed Sedeghi whose execution – along with the other men's - was apparently put on hold on Saturday," said Ann Harrison, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"The death sentences of all 11 men must be overturned once and for all as a matter of urgency. The Iranian authorities must also end the distress these men's families are currently suffering by clarifying their relatives' current whereabouts and allowing the men to contact their families.

"The Iranian authorities must take immediate steps to end their ongoing killing spree and commute all death sentences. They must review legislation with a view to removing the death penalty as a possible punishment.

"Saeed Sedeghi and anyone else convicted after unfair trials must be afforded retrials in proceedings that meet international fair trial standards without recourse to the death penalty."

Saeed Sedeghi's brother Majid Sedeghi, who was arrested on Thursday, 11 October, a day after giving interviews to BBC Persian and Voice of America about his brother's plight, is currently being held at Evin Prison.

As of 9 October, the Iranian authorities are believed to have executed at least 344 people since the start of the year, including 135 executions that have not been formally announced. The majority of those executed were convicted of drug trafficking.

The vast majority of executions in the country in recent years have been for drug-related offences, despite there being no clear evidence that the death penalty serves as an effective deterrent against such offences – the country has one of the highest rates of drug addiction in world.

Amnesty International continues to urge Iran to review its Anti-Narcotics law to ensure the death penalty is no longer considered as a possible punishment.

International standards prohibit the use of the death penalty except for “crimes with an intention to kill which resulted in the loss of life”. The UN Human Rights Committee has on numerous occasions found that drug-related offences do not meet this criterion.

On 2 June 2012, Iran’s Revolutionary Court sentenced Saeed Sedeghi to death after he was convicted of purchasing and possessing 512 kg of methamphetamine (“crystal meth”) along with three other men. The state-appointed lawyer who represented him at this trial had never met him nor had access to his case file before the trial started.

Like others sentenced to death under the Anti-Narcotics Law, he appears to have had no opportunity to appeal against his conviction and sentence, a violation of the right to a fair trial.

In addition to execution, the court handed Saeed Sedeghi a fine of 2 million rials (approximately US\$163) and sentenced him to 20 lashes for individual possession of 21 grams of opium and marijuana. He also told his family that he was tortured or otherwise ill-treated in detention, where he had three teeth knocked out.

In late July, he was brought before Branch 30 of Tehran’s Revolutionary Court without the presence of his lawyer and made to sign a document apparently informing him that his death sentence was going to be carried out.