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Iraq urged to end executions amid ratification of death sentences

Iraq must impose an immediate moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition Amnesty International said, amid yesterday's reported ratification of further death sentences.

Death sentences for 28 people accused of terrorism-related offences were reportedly ratified on 17 December by one of the vice-Presidents, the last step in the judicial process. They are at risk of imminent execution.

Earlier this month it has been reported that about 40 death row prisoners were transferred to al-Kadhemiya Prison in Baghdad where executions are carried out.

Iraq has executed at least 129 people in 2012, the highest number since 2005. As in previous years, hundreds were estimated to have been sentenced to death, or had death sentences upheld by the courts.

"Death sentences are being flung out after grossly unfair trials relying on 'confessions' obtained under torture," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme's Deputy Director.

"Instead of carrying out executions, the Iraqi authorities should prioritize fixing its deeply flawed criminal justice system."

On 16 December, Iraqi vice-President Tareq al-Hashemi and his son-in-law were sentenced to death in absentia for the fifth time in a highly politicized trial by the Central Criminal Court, for possession and use of weapons. They have received four other death sentences on terrorism-related offences.

Since the death penalty was reintroduced in Iraq in 2004, the death sentence and executions are being imposed and carried out extensively, after procedures that violate human rights standards.

Many trials of those sentenced to death failed to meet international standards for fair trials, including by using "confessions" obtained under torture or other ill-treatment as evidence against the defendants.

Some Iraqi television stations continue to broadcast self-incriminating testimonies of detainees even before the opening of a trial, undermining the fundamental right of defendants to be considered innocent until proven guilty.

Amnesty International last week urged the Iraqi authorities to quash death sentences against four men sentenced on 3 December in Anbar province, western Iraq, following the broadcast of 'confessions' given while reportedly being tortured in pre-trial detention.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, as a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

More than two-thirds of the countries in the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

Link on the 4 men/12 Dec case to include online:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE14/017/2012/en/a0537c82-7818-44f7-9c07-ecf23e510ef6/mde140172012en.html>

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