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Iran: Protester death sentence must be reviewed

Amnesty International is urging the Iranian authorities to rescind the death sentence imposed on Mohammad-Reza Ali-Zamani, the first person to be sentenced to death in connection with protests following disputed presidential elections.

Zamani, 37, was sentenced to death by a Tehran Revolutionary Court on Thursday after he was convicted of “enmity against God for membership of and activities to further the aims of the terrorist grouplet Anjoman-e Padeshahi-e Iran (API)”.

The API is an exiled opposition group which advocates the ending of the Islamic Republic and the establishment of an Iranian monarchy.

He was also convicted of “propaganda against the system”, “insulting the holy sanctities”, “gathering and colluding with intent to harm national internal security ” as well as of leaving the country illegally to visit Iraq where he was alleged to have met US military officials.

Zamani is one of more than 100 people currently standing trial before a Tehran Revolutionary Court for fomenting protests against the disputed official result of Iran's 12 June presidential election. Amnesty International has condemned such “show trials” as a “mockery of justice”

Amnesty International fears that Zamani's death sentence will pave the way for more death sentences against those being tried on similar offences.

The call also comes as the international community prepares to mark the World Day Against the Death Penalty on 10 October.

At least 13 other people are also currently at risk of being executed in Iran.

Akram Mahdavi, 35, who was sentenced to death in 2003 for murdering her 74-year old husband is reported to be scheduled to be executed in the coming days, even though her lawyer has not been informed, as is required by Iranian law.

A judicial official in Tehran told her husband's family to come to Evin Prison in the capital at 3 am on 11 October 2009 to witness her execution. Their presence is required by law.

Other people on death row include seven male members of Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority who are at risk of imminent execution in Karoun Prison in Ahvaz city, the capital of Khuzestan province.

They have been convicted of “acting against national security” and killing an anti-Sunni Shi’a cleric in June 2007.

Iranian sources fear that these executions may take place shortly – possibly as soon as 14 October, as records show that most executions of political activists in Ahvaz have taken place on Wednesdays.

Ali Saedi (25), Walid Naisi (23), Majid Fardipour (Mahawi) (26), Doayr Mahawi (50) and his son Maher Mahawi (21), Ahmad Saedi, (28) and Yousuf Leftehpour (25), are all believed to have been held for between 8 and 15 months in solitary confinement in a detention centre belonging to the intelligence services following their arrest in August 2007. Torture in such centres is common.

They were sentenced to death by a branch of the Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz on 30 September 2009, in a unfair trial in which they had no access to a lawyer.

Two other men were sentenced to prison terms. The men, some of whom were known political activists within the Ahwazi Arab community, denied the charges.

Three men, members of Iran’s Kurdish minority, are also feared to be at risk of imminent execution. This may be in reprisal for a spate of assassinations and attempted assassinations which took place in September 2009, of officials in the northwestern province of Kordestan.

Habibollah Latifi, Ehsan (Esma’il) Fattahian and Sherko Moarefi have all been sentenced to death for “enmity against God” in unconnected cases over the last two years. They are believed to be on death row in a prison in Sanandaj, the provincial capital of Kordestan.

Two Iranian men are also at risk of imminent execution in Tehran for murders they committed while under the age of 18. According to their lawyer, Behnoud Shojaee, 21, is due to be executed on 11 October 2009, while Safar Angooti is due to be executed on 21 October 2009, although a newspaper report has suggested his execution may take place as soon as 19 October.

Afghan national Abbas Hosseini was scheduled to be executed last Monday for a murder he was accused of committing when he was only 17. Hosseini was sentenced to death in June 2004 for the murder of a man who had tried to rape him in July 2003. His execution was postponed to later this month to allow more time for officials to try to persuade the victim's family to pardon him in exchange for monetary compensation in the form of diyeh.

Executions of those under 18 at the time of their alleged offence is strictly prohibited under international law. Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to immediately halt all scheduled executions and to commute all death sentences.

Amnesty International continues to urge the Iranian authorities to impose an immediate and comprehensive moratorium on executions, as a first step towards ending the use of this punishment.