

AI Index: PRE 01/212/2008
06 August 2008

Iran: Announcement of suspension of stoning a welcome step if carried out

Amnesty International welcomed the announcement by the spokesperson for Iran's judiciary that execution by stoning has been suspended, as a result of which several women have had their sentences commuted.

"Stoning is a horrific practice, designed to increase the suffering of those facing execution, and it has no place in the modern world," Amnesty International said. "We look to the Iranian authorities to ensure that this dreadful punishment is never again used."

The organization cautioned that the authorities must ensure that this is not a 'hollow promise.' They failed to stop the practice after Ayatollah Shahroudi, the head of Iran's judiciary, announced a moratorium on stoning in December 2002. At least one stoning execution was carried out in 2007 in Qazvin province.

"If this announcement holds, it will represent a signal victory for Iranian human rights defenders who recently mounted their own Stop Stoning Forever Campaign, and a big step forward for human rights," said Amnesty International.

"Now we need to see further action by the Iranian authorities to end other cruel and inhuman punishments such as flogging and the amputation of limbs, as well as other steps to reduce use of the death penalty."

Background

In January 2008 Amnesty International published a 30 page report [*Iran: End executions by stoning \(MDE 13/001/2008\)*](#).

Iran's existing Penal Code prescribes execution by stoning as the penalty for adultery by married persons. It even dictates that the stones are large enough to cause pain, but not so large as to kill the victim immediately.

Despite official claims that stonings have been halted - including a moratorium issued by the Head of the Judiciary in 2002 - several have taken place, with the latest in 2007. Ja'far Kiani, a man, was stoned to death for adultery on 5 July 2007 in the village of Aghche-kand, near Takestan in Qazvin province. A woman and a man are also known to have been stoned to death in Mashhad in May 2006.

The majority of those sentenced to death by stoning are women. Women are not treated equally with men under the law and by courts, and they are also particularly vulnerable to unfair trials because their higher illiteracy rate makes them more likely to sign confessions to crimes they did not commit.

Despite this bleak reality, human rights defenders in Iran believe that international publicity can help bring an end to stoning. Courageous efforts are being made by their Stop Stoning Forever campaign, whose efforts have helped save five people from stoning (and led to another sentence being stayed) since

it began in October 2006.

These efforts have come at a price, with campaigners facing harassment and intimidation by the authorities. Thirty-three women, including members of the Stop Stoning Forever campaign, were arrested while protesting in March 2007 about the trial of five women's rights activists in Tehran.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases.