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## **Iran: Surge of secret executions for drug offences must end**

This year has seen a dramatic rise in the number of people – many impoverished – who are executed for drug offences in Iran, Amnesty International said today in a new report.

In the 44-page [\*Addicted to Death: Executions for Drug Offences in Iran\*](#), the organization finds that at least 488 people have been executed for alleged drug offences so far in 2011, a nearly threefold increase on the 2009 figures, when Amnesty International recorded at least 166 executions for similar offences.

In total Amnesty International has recorded some 600 executions reported by both official and unofficial sources this year, with drug offences accounting for about 81% of the total. The organization called on the Iranian authorities to end the use of the death penalty against those accused of drug offences.

"To try to contain their immense drug problem, the Iranian authorities have carried out a killing spree of staggering proportions, when there is no evidence that execution prevents drug smuggling any more effectively than imprisonment" said Amnesty International's Interim Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director Ann Harrison.

"Drug offences go much of the way to accounting for the steep rise in executions we have seen in the last 18 months. Ultimately Iran must abolish the death penalty for all crimes, but stopping the practice of executing drug offenders, which violates international law, would as a first step cut the overall number significantly."

Amnesty International said that during the middle of 2010, it began to receive credible reports that a new wave of executions for drug offences was taking place. These included reports of secret mass executions at Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad, with one - on 4 August 2010 - involving over 89 individuals.

The Iranian authorities officially acknowledged 253 executions in 2010, of which 172 were for drug offences – almost 68% of the total – but Amnesty International received credible reports of a further 300 executions, the vast majority believed to be for drug-related offences.

In almost all cases executions have followed grossly unfair trials and the families and lawyers of those accused have often received little or no warning that executions were due to take place. Members of marginalized groups - including impoverished communities, ethnic minorities that suffer discrimination, and foreign nationals, particularly Afghans - are most at risk of execution for drugs offences.

Mohammad Jangali, a 38 year old trainee truck driver from the Kouresunni minority - a small community of Sunnis from the mainly Shi'a Azerbaijani minority - was executed on 10 October 2011 after the truck he was driving was found with drugs in it near Oroumieh in 2008. He is believed to have signed a coerced "confession" prepared by the Ministry of Intelligence after he was tortured.

His family were given no information about the case by the authorities until they were contacted by the prison to say that he would be executed in eight hours and they should come now if they wanted to see

him. He maintained until his death that he had not known that the truck contained drugs.

Amnesty International said there may be as many as 4000 Afghan nationals on death row for drugs offences. They appear to be particularly poorly treated by the justice system.

The organization said it had received reports of some Afghans who have been executed without being brought to trial at all, and only learnt of their impending executions from prison authorities.

Amnesty International continues to hear of executions of juvenile offenders for alleged drug-related offences, despite Iranian officials claiming that these are no longer taking place.

Iran has the fourth highest rate of drug-related deaths in the world, at 91 per 1 million people aged 15-64, and is a major international transit route for drug smuggling. In recent years Iran has received international assistance, including from several European countries and the United Nations, to help stem the flow of drugs across its borders.

The European Union is providing 9.5 million euros over three years for an Iran-based project to strengthen regional anti-narcotics cooperation. The project involves German Federal Police support for the establishment of forensic laboratories in the region.

The UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has provided up to \$22 million since 2005 to support training projects for Iran's counter narcotics forces.

Belgium, France, Ireland and Japan have all previously contributed to a UNODC sniffer dog programme. The UNODC has also provided drug detection kits to Iran.

Norway, Denmark and Germany have committed to providing funding between 2011 and 2014 to support UNODC's programme of technical cooperation on drugs and crime in Iran.

The UN programme is supposed to include work to promote reform in the Iranian justice system to help bring it in line with international standards. But in a July 2011 visit to Iran, UNODC's Executive Director praised Iran's counter-narcotics work without mentioning the increasing application of the death penalty for drugs offences.

"All countries and international organizations helping the Iranian authorities arrest more people for alleged drugs offences need to take a long hard look at the potential impact of that assistance and what they could do to stop this surge of executions," said Ann Harrison.

"They cannot simply look the other way while hundreds of impoverished people are killed each year without fair trials, many only learning their fates a few hours before their deaths."

#### **Notes for editors:**

- In 2009 there were at least 389 executions in total. Almost 43% were for drug related offences.
- In 2010 there were over 550 executions. Official sources acknowledged 253 executions but Amnesty has received credible reports of over 300 more, the vast majority believed to be for drug-related offences.
- In 2011 it is believed that there have been - until end-November - at least 600 executions in total. Around 81% have been for drug-related offences.

#### **Spokespeople:**

- Ann Harrison, interim Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director is available for interview from London in English.
- Drewery Dyke, Researcher on Iran is available to interview from London in English and Persian.
- Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director, is available for interview

in French.