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Iran stoning sentence suspension not enough

Amnesty International welcomes an Iranian official's statement that Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani's sentence of stoning to death has been temporarily suspended but urged the authorities to overturn the death sentence against her entirely.

"This news does not go far enough," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

"We hope this is not merely a cynical move by the authorities to deflect international criticism, as this temporary suspension by the Head of the Judiciary could be lifted at any time, leaving Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani at risk of execution, particularly if the current judicial review of her case results in a confirmation of her sentence.

"The Iranian authorities must immediately take the necessary steps to ensure that her death sentence is overturned once and for all."

On Wednesday 8 September, Iranian state-run Press TV reported that Ramin Mehmanparast, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, had said that Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani's execution for adultery had been "stopped".

He also reiterated that her case was being reviewed, but said that "her sentencing for complicity in murder is in process".

Amnesty International is also concerned that the Iranian authorities may be preparing to bring what appear to be fresh charges against her in relation to the death of her husband, Ebrahim Qaderzadeh, although her state-appointed lawyer told the organization earlier that she had been acquitted of the murder.

The organization has been unable to obtain any court documents relating to the investigation of his death.

"In August 2010, Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani was forced to confess under duress on TV to adultery and involvement in her husband's death," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui. "If the judicial authorities now charge and sentence her on this basis, yet another layer of injustice would be added to the travesty of her case."