

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 13/040/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 263
19 November 2003

Iran: Alarming spiral of human rights violations mar positive steps

Amnesty International shares the concerns of many lawyers and human rights defenders in Iran following the reported sentencing to death by stoning of four men by a court in Mashhad, northeastern Iran.

"Amnesty International recognizes the rights and responsibilities of states to bring to justice those suspected of criminal offences. However, such sentences consist of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment that fly in the face of Iran's unreserved commitment to uphold the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Iran is a state party," said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International recommends that judicial authorities commute the death sentences with the aim of identifying an alternative punishment as requested by the Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Shahroudi.

The organization is equally concerned about the reported sentencing of seven women to 50 lashes in Shiraz who allegedly showed disrespect during the month of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting which started on 25 October.

Amnesty International welcomes the limited engagement of the Iranian government with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) envoys who visited the country on fact-finding missions earlier this year.

"However, the organization is alarmed at the consequences faced by vulnerable individuals who have sought meetings with these envoys during their visit to the country," said Amnesty International.

In February 2003, the mother of Sasan Al-e Kena'n went to Tehran to seek a meeting with members of the UN's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. On return to Sanandaj in Iranian Kurdistan, she was told that her son had been executed during her absence and that she should not make a 'fuss' and bury him quickly. In November 2003, Ahmad Batebi, on medical leave from prison, met with the Special Rapporteur for the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression. One hour later he 'disappeared'. Officials at Tehran's prosecutor's office threatened him with arrest and later admitted that his son had been re-arrested.

"Judicial authorities in Iran must ensure that those who raise human concerns with either domestic or international bodies are not harassed or threatened with arrest," said Amnesty International.

Background:

Amnesty International has recorded human rights violations including the arbitrary arrest and months of incommunicado detention without charge or trial of Alireza Alijani and other supporters of the *Melli Mazhabi* (National Religious Alliance); the continued closure of newspapers and imprisonment of journalists on vague charges relating to 'insult' and 'defamation'; the lack of transparent and independent investigation into the death of Zahra Kazemi, the Canadian-Iranian photojournalist who died in custody and the murder, five years ago of Dariush Forouhar and Parvaneh Eskandari (Forouhar) who were murdered at their house by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence in November 1998.

The Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly which deals with human rights concerns is considering a draft resolution on the human rights situation in Iran. These concerns include the increased arrest and detention without charge or trial of persons for peaceful expression of political and personal views and the continuing executions without regard to international safeguards and the use torture and other cruel punishments. The draft resolution calls on the Iranian government to meet its human rights obligations, to respond fully to the recommendations made by the UN's human rights experts who visited the country, and encourages visits by other UN experts: notably those with mandates on extrajudicial executions and torture. Taking such steps would, in Amnesty International's views, would greatly contribute to the effective protection of human rights in Iran.

For more information, please see:

http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-irn/urgent_actions

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>