

AI Index: PRE 01/282/2008  
12 November 2008

## **Afghanistan: Stop Move Toward Wide Use of Executions**

The Afghan government must immediately repeal the death sentences against 111 people who are on death row, Amnesty International said today, following reports of the execution of nine people since last week, which may signal further executions ahead.

"The sudden rush in executions is of serious concern, given that Afghanistan's fledgling justice system is largely incapable of providing fair and sound trials," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director. "The authorities should impose an immediate moratorium on all executions in Afghanistan, with a view to abolishing the use of this horrific punishment."

Death sentences for at least 111 people have been recently approved by President Hamid Karzai, who signs the final execution orders. This move is widely seen as an effort by President Karzai to bolster his popularity among the Afghan people who increasingly complain of rising criminality and the government's failure to impose the rule of law.

"There is no evidence that the death penalty has a deterrent effect on crime anywhere in the world, and particularly not in Afghanistan," Sam Zarifi said. "If President Karzai is serious about sending a message about ending criminality and extending the rule of law, he should begin by dealing with the higher levels of government people facing credible allegations of serious human rights abuses and engaging in criminal enterprises, as well as Afghanistan's massive narcotics business."

These latest executions are the first since October 2007, when the government executed 15 people.

The death penalty was widely used by the Taliban during their rule which ended in 2001, but after they fell from power the new government observed a self-imposed moratorium which ended three years later with the execution of Abdullah Shah in April 2004. According to Afghan law, all death sentences have to be endorsed by three courts (primary, appeal and Supreme Court) before they go to the president who has to sign the execution order, or pardon those accused.

"This may be just the beginning of a campaign by some authorities to reintroduce the harsh policies of the Taliban," said Sam Zarifi. "The Afghan government has a right and responsibility to bring to justice those suspected of criminal offences, but for justice to prevail, the proceedings must meet basic international standards of fairness and comply with human rights standards. The death penalty constitutes the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment"

The death penalty is handed down in Afghanistan for crimes such as kidnapping, murder and rape. However, the majority of court proceedings are marred by serious substantive and procedural irregularities, such as the failure of police and the judiciary to investigate cases properly, political interference in the investigative and judicial processes, and lack of access for detainees to a defence lawyer.

President Karzai recently said in a public address that he would not bow to pressure on his government

from the international community or human rights organizations to end the use of the death penalty.

"We call on President Karzai to publicly reaffirm the commitment given by his Chief of Staff to Amnesty International in 2003 that there would be a moratorium on executions while judicial reform is carried out," said Sam Zarifi.