

AI Index: PRE 01/424/2009
04 December 2009

Iraq: Over 900 people on death row face imminent execution

The Iraqi authorities must immediately stop the executions of more than 900 people on death row who have exhausted their legal appeals and could be put to death at any time, Amnesty International said.

The prisoners, who include 17 women, are said to have had their death sentences ratified by the Presidential Council, the final step before executions are carried out.

At least 120 people are known to have been executed in Iraq so far this year.

“In a country which already has one of the highest rates of execution in the world, the prospect that this statistic may rise significantly is disturbing indeed,” said Philip Luther, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme.

Many of the condemned prisoners have been convicted of offences such as murder and kidnapping. Some are likely to have been sentenced after unfair trials.

Opposition politicians have expressed concern that executions may be carried out to allow the ruling al-Da’wa party to gain political advantage ahead of the elections. They have called on the government to temporarily suspend all executions.

One of those women facing execution is Samar Sa’ad ‘Abdullah, who was sentenced to death on 15 August 2005. She had been found guilty of the murder of her uncle, his wife and one of their children in Baghdad.

Samar Sa’ad ‘Abdullah was reported to have blamed the killings on her fiancé, who, she said, had carried them out in order to rob her uncle.

At her trial, Samar Sa’ad ‘Abdullah alleged that, after her arrest, police in Hay al-Khadhra, Baghdad, had beaten her with a cable, beaten the soles of her feet (falaqa) and subjected her to electric shocks to make her “confess”.

The judge failed to order an investigation into her allegations, and sentenced her to death.

Her father, Sa’ad ‘Abdel- Majid ‘Abd al-Karim, told Amnesty International the trial was concluded in less than two days, that he was not permitted entry to the court, and that Amal ‘Abdel-Amir al-Zubaidi, one of Samar’s lawyers, was ordered out of the court by the trial judge.

Samar Sa’ad ‘Abdullah's death sentence was confirmed by the Court of Cassation on 26 February 2007.

Since the reintroduction of the death penalty in August 2004, at least 1,000 people have been sentenced to death and scores have been executed. There are no official figures for the number of prisoners facing execution.

After all avenues of appeal have been exhausted, death sentences are referred to the Presidential Council composed of the President and the two Vice-Presidents, for ratification, after which they are carried out.

The President, Jalal Talabani, opposes the death penalty and delegates his ratification powers to the two Vice-Presidents, who do not oppose its use.

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the Iraqi authorities to establish an immediate moratorium on executions.

"The Iraqi government must heed international demands to stop executions," said Philip Luther.