

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Iranian League for Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI)

Joint press release

IRAN: Dramatic wave of executions and death sentences to repress free expression, political opposition and ethnic affiliation.

Paris, 6th January 2011 - The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Iranian League for Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI) are alarmed by the wave of executions of and death sentences on tens of people following blatantly unfair trials and for apparent grounds of repression of their free expression, political or ethnic affiliation.

On 5th January, the executions toll reached almost 70 in the span of one month alone. According to various official and semi-official sources, these included a public hanging at the centre of capital Tehran on 5th January 2011, 8 hangings on 3rd January and 16 'in the course of the preceding days in Ahvaz.' Most of those executed were charged with drug trafficking, but at least 18 reportedly faced the death penalty for political reasons facing the vague charges of moharebeh [fighting God] and 'corruption on earth.'

Vice-president of FIDH and president of the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights, Karim Lahidji condemned: "the dramatic toll embodying the increased repression" and repeated a "call to the international community to echo its condemnation outlined in the UN General Assembly Resolution of 21st December 2010 by adopting individual targeted sanctions against human rights offenders responsible for the massive level of human rights violations".

In particular, the following executions clearly contravened Iran's international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):

- 62-year-old Ali Saremi, was one of the 40 prisoners of conscience, for whose release FIDH and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) launched a joint campaign in June 2010 (see: <http://www.rsf-fidh-iran.org/?lang=en#libe>). He had served at least 11 years in prison in the 1980s and 90s. He had been arrested in September 2007 and charged with moharebeh. He was hanged in Evin Prison of Tehran on 28 December. The Tehran prosecutor had alleged in January 2010 that Saremi had been detained during post-election unrests in 2009. Another man, Ali Akbar Siadat, was hanged on charge of spying for Israel, but the authorities provided hardly any concrete detail about his case.
- 16 imprisoned members of the Baluch ethnic community were executed. Eleven of them were hanged on 20 December for alleged membership of an armed terrorist group known as Jondollah [army of God] in the immediate aftermath of a suicide bombing on 15th December at a mosque in Chabahar, a city in the Sistan-Baluchistan province, for which the Jondollah claimed responsibility. This should clearly be seen as a reprisal victimising prisoners who had been detained before the bombing.
- 50-odd alleged drug traffickers were executed, including eight in Kermanshah province in western Iran, which is in large part inhabited by Kurds, another ethnic community, and 16 in Ahvaz, the provincial capital of Khuzestan in the south with a large population of the Iranian Arab ethnic community.

- Unofficial reports indicated that 10 people were secretly executed in Vakilabad Prison of Mashhad in late December 2010. Secret group executions in Mashhad have been reported several times in recent months.

Other reports show an increase in death sentences following arbitrary and unfair trials, being passed in recent months, in violation of Iran's same international obligations:

- The stoning sentences against a man (Vali Janfeshani) and a woman (Sarieh Ebadi) held in Orumieh Prison on charge of adultery were upheld by the Supreme Court for the second time (22 December).
- At least one juvenile (identified by his first name as Ashkan) was sentenced to death in Fars province for a murder committed at the age of 14 (21 December).
- An Iranian-Canadian web designer, Saeed Malekpur, having been coerced to confess under extensive pre-trial torture, was sentenced to death on charges of "moharebeh and 'corruption on earth', insulting sanctities, propaganda against the state and insulting the leader."(5 December). Another Iranian-Canadian, Hamid Qassem Shaal, is reported to be on death-row on charge of spying, since 2008.
- At least one Christian pastor, Yousef Nadarkhani, has been sentenced to death in Rasht on charges of apostasy at the end of September. Another imprisoned pastor, Behrouz Sadeq Khanjani, is likely to receive a similar sentence in Shiraz. The increasing dangers and threats against newly converted Christians in Iran came to light on 4th January when the governor-general of Tehran Province, Morteza Tamaddon, described the 'Evangelical proselytising Christians as a deviate and corrupt tendency' and reported that 'their leaders had been arrested in the Tehran province and more will be arrested in future.' Unconfirmed reports indicated that up to 60 Christians had been detained on Christmas Eve, including Priest Leonard Keshishian in Isfahan.
- While a Kurdish political prisoner, Habibollah Latifpur, was scheduled for execution in late December and was only spared temporarily after widespread international outcry pending a possible review of his case, two other Kurdish political prisoners, Zanyar Moradi and Loqman Moradi, were sentenced on 1st January to hanging in public. The former's father, a political activist abroad, said that his son had been sentenced to death in retaliation for his father's activities. All three are charged with moharebeh and corruption on earth. Nearly 20 Kurdish prisoners are believed to be on death row and some of them are at imminent risk of execution, notably Hossein Khezri and Zaynab Jalalian.
- An Iranian-Dutch woman, Zahra Bahrami, who had been arrested during anti-government protests in Tehran in January 2010, was sentenced to death on charge of possession of 500 grams of cocaine, according to reports on 5th January 2011. She denied the charge during her trial and said she had been coerced to confess to it under "physical and psychological torture" in Section 209 of Evin Prison, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence. She is scheduled to appear in another trial for 'membership of an armed' opposition group later and is likely to receive a second death sentence.
- At least seven other prisoners who were arrested during the post-election protests last year, have been charged with moharebeh, and sentenced to death. Reports on 6th January indicated that the death sentence on one of them, Jafar Kazemi, has been referred for implementation and he is at risk of imminent execution.

Background information:

While an increasing number of countries worldwide have abolished the death penalty, the Islamic Republic of Iran has long overtaken China as far as per capita number of executions is concerned. The number of executions in Iran has been consistently rising in recent years since the start of Mr. Ahmadinejad’s presidency in 2005, from 94 to 177 (2006), 335 (2007), 346 (2008), and 388 (2009). The figures of executions are minimum numbers compiled from various available sources, but the true numbers may be much higher, because the Iranian judiciary does not systematically report all the death sentences issued or implemented.

Thousands of people are believed to be on death row in Iran. A parliamentary delegation from Afghanistan visiting Iran in February 2010 reported that 3,000 Afghan nationals were on death row in Iranian prisons. A report in August 2010 indicated that the head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, had written a letter to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamanei asking for his permission to implement 1,120 death sentences. The Iranian authorities remained conspicuously silent on the report.

The Iranian judicial system consistently and systematically denies the defendants the right to due process and fair trials as required by international standards. The prisoners are sentenced after frequently coerced confessions and grossly unfair and show trials. The Islamic Penal Code in force in Iran stipulates that “any person resorting to arms to cause terror, fear or to breach public security and freedom will be considered to be a mohareb [fighter against God] and corrupt on earth.” Furthermore, it classifies armed robbers and highway bandits to be moharebs. Judges have the power to choose from four punishments for moharebeh: execution, crucifixion for three days (not necessarily entailing death), amputation of the right hand first and then of the left foot, and internal banishment. They often opt for the death penalty, in particular in political cases.

Under the ICCPR, to which Iran is a State party, member states may use the death penalty only for the “most serious crimes”, meaning intentional crimes with lethal or other extremely grave consequences. In the overwhelming majority of the cases, the charges and offences alleged by the Iranian judicial authorities, do not amount to “the most serious crimes.” Meanwhile, keeping prisoners on death row for very long periods of time, sentencing to death and executing people by hanging or stoning for political or sexual charges, are clear cases of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment in violation of the ICCPR.

For more information, see the following reports:

FIDH-LDDHI Report on discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities “The Hidden side of Iran” available at: <http://www.fidh.org/Damning-report-on-an-ignored-issue-Discrimination>

FIDH-RSF Campaign: “Iran- Freedom for all prisoners of conscience detained in Iran”, available at: <http://www.rsf-fidh-iran.org>

FIDH Report on Death Penalty in Iran: “A State Terror Policy” available at: <http://www.fidh.org/A-State-Terror-Policy>

FIDH update to Death Penalty report: <http://www.fidh.org/Iran-death-penalty-A-state-terror-policy-Special>

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