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> Iran: Alarming spike in executions since disputed presidential election

IRAN: ALARMING SPIKE IN EXECUTIONS SINCE DISPUTED PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

7 August 2009

The eight weeks between the presidential election on 12 June and the inauguration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for a second term as president on 5 August saw an alarming spike in the number of executions by the Iranian authorities, Amnesty International said today.

“In just over 50 days, we recorded no less than 115 executions, that is an average of more than two each day,” said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International. “This represents a significant increase, even compared to the appallingly high rate of executions that has been so long a feature of the human rights scene in Iran.”

From the start of 2009 up to 12 June, Amnesty International recorded at least 196 executions, placing Iran second in the world behind China for the number of executions carried out. The 115 executions known to have been carried out since the presidential election on 12 June included 14 executions on 2 July, 20 on 4 July, 13 on 14 July and a further 24 executions on 5 August, the day of the inauguration.

“In recent weeks world attention has understandably been focussed on the Tehran authorities’ brutal attempts to suppress the mass and largely peaceful protests that followed the widely-disputed official outcome of the presidential vote,” said Irene Khan. “Yet, as these grotesque figures show, there has been no let up in other longstanding patterns of human rights abuse – in fact, the reverse.”

Amnesty International recognizes that the true total number of executions is almost certainly higher even than the number it has been able to record, which is based on official Iranian, media and other sources. Most of those executed are said to have been convicted of drug-smuggling or related offences. Those executed by hanging are believed to have been men, mostly between 20 and 50 years of age, but include at least two women. Some but not all of the victims’ identities are known. In particular, the authorities have not named any of the 24 prisoners executed on 5 August at Rejai Shahr Prison in Karaj, disclosing only that they were executed for drugs-related offences.

“This is a dreadful situation, and one that is made worse by the fact that all or most of those executed are likely to have been denied fair trials, in gross breach of international law,” said Irene Khan.

Typically, people accused of drugs offences or other serious crimes are held for long periods in pre-trial detention, routinely ill-treated, and allowed access to a lawyer only at the point where they go on

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trial, if at all.

“Last year and in 2008 an overwhelming majority of UN Member states called for a global moratorium on executions, reflecting the increasing world trend towards abolition of the death penalty,” said Irene Khan. “It is high time, therefore, that the Iranian authorities ceased bucking the trend and start living up to their obligations under international human rights law.”

Background

The adoption of Resolutions 62/149 in December 2007 and 63/168 in December 2008 calling for a moratorium on executions at the 62nd and 63rd sessions of the United Nations General Assembly means that a large majority of UN member states from all regions of the world are in favour of a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. In 2008, 89 States co-sponsored the resolution and there were 106 votes in favour, 46 against and 34 abstentions. Eight members of the League of Arab States abstained.
