

Doc\_Number: EU000116

World Watch

August 7, 2009 3:58 AM

# Iran Executions Increase Since Election

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(AP Photo/Halabisaz)

An Iranian justice official has confirmed the execution of 24 convicted drug traffickers at the end of July, believed to be one of the largest mass-executions carried out by the Islamic Republic since the revolution brought the Ayatollahs to power 30 years ago.

The message of swift, decisive "justice" delivered by Iran's leaders is clear, and comes at a time when those leaders, both political and religious, are wrestling to overcome an image of internal dispute

and reassert their authority following post-election violence that left at least 30 people dead and hundreds jailed.

Tehran's deputy prosecutor, Mahmoud Salarkia, said the 24 were hanged at the notorious Karaj prison on July 30th. "Their execution was approved by the supreme court," said Salarkia, without naming the prisoners.

Iran has killed at least 219 prisoners already this year, according to a tally from the French news agency AFP, and the pace of the executions seems to have increased amid the postelection turmoil.

President [Mahmoud Ahamdinejad was sworn in](#) on Wednesday for a second term after his purported land-slide reelection on June 12.

Since then, Iranian police and Basij paramilitary members have cracked down hard on thousands of opposition supporters who took to the streets with their claim the vote was rigged on a dramatic scale by Ahmadinejad and his supporters.

Also since then, and officially unrelated, Iran has executed [at least 44 drug convicts](#), [19 Baluch minorities](#) convicted of supporting a terrorist group, and [possibly two young men sentenced for murders](#)

they allegedly committed before the age of 18.

Thus far, international outrage over the supposedly coincidental uptick in executions amid the postelection turmoil has been muted, at best.

The [European Union condemned](#) the July 30 executions and said in a statement that the 27-member bloc was "concerned about the continued large-scale use of the death penalty in Iran, including the repeated incidence of collective executions during the past month."

"The Presidency continues to call on the Iranian authorities to abolish the death penalty completely and, in the meantime, to establish a moratorium on executions," it added.

The United States government has made no official remarks on the sanctioned killings.

Iran came second only to China in the number of prisoners executed during 2008, with a reported total of 246. China is believed to have killed as many as 5,000 of its convicts, but that number is unconfirmed. In the United States, by comparison, 37 people were executed in state death chambers, according to the [Death Penalty Information Center](#).

Iran did execute 29 people convicted of drug trafficking and other various crimes in July of 2008, but this summer's killings come after an apparent push within the Islamic Republic's judiciary to reduce the application of the death penalty.

According to a [report by CNN](#), a spokesman for the judiciary — which is handpicked and approved by the clerical leadership — announced a move to curtail "unnecessary executions" in May this year, the month before the presidential elections.

"Certain measures have been sent to parliament for approval. In particular, regarding cases involving unnecessary executions. Those laws are in the process of being changed... We hope to see a reduction of such sentences," Iranian media quoted a judiciary spokesman as saying, according to the CNN story. The official cited "a huge development in our laws in recent years."

Progress on those reforms, it would seem, has been postponed. A worrying delay as three ill-advised [American backpackers sit in an Iranian jail](#) after apparently crossing the border illegally.

Not to mention the 500 or so Iranian dissidents, academics and journalists still [awaiting their fate](#) in prisons across the country.