

Iran: In Support of the International Campaign Against the Death Penalty

February 22, 2011

"Our lives, well being, and tranquility depends on these executions".

Ayatollah Mohseni Garakani, Head of the Supreme Court, (5 February 2011)

In the past few weeks, the imposition of the death penalty has skyrocketed in Iran. The escalation in the number of executions has led to a wave of outrage among human rights groups. The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation (ABF) welcomes the launch of the *International Campaign Against the Death Penalty in Iran*, the call by the UN independent human rights experts for a moratorium on the death penalty, and the recent statement by six human rights organizations calling for an end to the imposition of the death penalty in Iran.

The alarming rise in executions was apparent as early as October 2010, when the reported numbers peaked at 31. The average number of cases for which the death penalty was enforced, 14 per month for the first three months of 2010, reached more than 30 in the last three months of the year. ABF, which systematically documents executions in Iran, had expressed serious concern in October 2010 about the numerous executions resulting from a judicial system that violates due process of law, is intolerant of defense lawyers and lacks transparency. (See newsletter below). In January 2011 alone, there were an estimated [95](#) executions, (which averages one every eight hours) and a third as many as reported in all of 2010.[\[1\]](#) Iranian judicial authorities continue to boast about the speed and severity with which they punish convicted criminals.[\[2\]](#)

ABF and other human rights groups suspect that the numbers may be much higher as not all executions are reported by the Iranian authorities who have admitted to deliberately withholding information:

"Since it is inappropriate to make daily statements to the public about executions ... and to provide detailed information regarding the cases, court officials prefer that not all of them be reported."

-Hojatoleslam Fazel, Head of the Islamic Republic Court and Revolutionary Tribunal in Shiraz (2007).

One instance, during which the Iranian authorities executed iranrights.org/english/newsletter-18.php

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scores of drug offenders in secret, was in the city of Mashhad in the summer of 2009. These executions followed a visit to Vakilabad Prison by a delegation from the state's Prison Organization in early August 2010. The stated goal of the visit was to investigate the overcrowding caused by the high numbers imprisoned on drug charges. The Prison Organization had proposed and announced the creation of three 'work camps' to remove drug offenders from overcrowded prisons but, according to officials, in August 2009, these camps had not yet been completed. ABF fears that secret executions reported from Vakilabad Prison may have been the delegation's temporary solution to the prison's overcrowding.

Arbitrary procedures and executions have not reduced criminality nor drug trafficking let alone addiction in Iran. Iranian officials recognize that the country continues to face a "drug crisis." According to the head of the State Welfare Organization, drug use is growing at a rate four times greater than the rate of population growth. In 2008, officials estimated the number of individuals arrested and detained in Iranian prisons to be more than 700,000.^[3] Some 200,000 were arrested between March and September 2010 for addiction or drug-dealing.^[4] According to the head of the Prison Organization, drug dealers now comprise more than half the prison population. Before the revolution, they made up five percent.^[5]

The systematic violation of due process of law, the denial of the right to defense in particular, and the extraordinary power given to unaccountable judges has led to the execution of many innocent people. It has also allowed Iranian authorities to eliminate dissidents by accusing them of crimes that they had not committed. Activists and ordinary Iranians are well aware that an arrest may entail torture, coercion to incriminate oneself, and severe punishment with little or no possibility of a proper defense. The fear of facing the judicial apparatus is paralyzing for many among them and reduces the 'safety zone' for those who want or dare to speak.

It is imperative therefore that a public debate on the impact of the death penalty takes place in Iran. To assist in this process ABF has translated into Persian, several publications on the death penalty. These are available on [ABF's Human Rights and Democracy Library](#). Additionally, to support the newly launched **International Campaign Against the Death Penalty in Iran**, ABF is pleased to announce the electronic release of the Farsi translation of Amnesty International's [Death Penalty, the Ultimate Punishment](#).

ABF, along with other Iranian human rights advocates, will continue to draw attention to the situation inside Iran and try to engage the Iranian public in a debate regarding the effectiveness of the death penalty. But the cost of activism inside Iran is increasingly high and the success of this

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campaign will depend greatly on its international visibility. In October 2010, ABF urged the international community to call for a moratorium on the death penalty. In light of the dramatic surge in executions in Iran, and the hundreds of arrests during the February 12 and 20 protests, ABF hopes that the campaign against the death penalty will not only be supported by the international community, including the media, but followed by concrete action.

More specifically, the international community should call on Iran to:

- allow independent monitoring of cases involving the death penalty,
- allow the presence of lawyers during interrogations, and
- stop retaliating against defence lawyers who publicize their clients' cases.

It should urge the Iranian authorities to allow visits by independent human rights groups giving them access to the families of those whose execution is imminent, as well as to their lawyers and the judges involved in their cases.

In the absence of these practical steps in a determined manner, including a concerted effort to nominate a United Nations special representative for Iran, clearly signaling the international community's concern regarding the systematic violations of due process of law, the number of executions may continue to rise with a lasting and devastating impact on the activities of Iranians who fight for justice inside Iran.

[1] ABF collects reports of executions from official and semi-official sources as well as non-governmental sources. According to our research, nearly 70% of those executed are alleged drug offenders.

[2] Hojatolislam Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, spokesperson for the Judiciary, Fars New Agency, 31 January, 2011.

[3] Director of Evin Detention Center, ISKA News, 2 December, 2009.

[4] Statement by Head of Anti-Narcotic Police, Hamid Reza Hosseiniabadi; <http://www.jamejamonline.ir/newstext.aspx?newsnum=100887324758>; ABF has collected reports regarding more than 220 individuals killed in drug-related clashes with security forces in 2007 and nearly 170 in 2008.

[5] Gholamhossein Esmaili, <http://www.khabaronline.ir/news-87951.aspx>

