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Iran Sentences 3 to Death in Post-Election Unrest Trial

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Three defendants in Iran's mass trial of opposition figures accused of fueling the country's postelection unrest have been sentenced to death, an Iranian news agency reported Saturday.

Two of them were convicted of membership in a monarchist group seeking to topple Iran's Islamic Republic and restore a monarchy, the semiofficial ISNA news agency reported, quoting judiciary official Zahed Bashiri Rad.

The third defendant was convicted of having ties to a terrorist group for his alleged links to the People's Mujahedeen, an armed opposition group, ISNA quoted Rad as saying.

The three are the first defendants to be sentenced to death since the trial began in August.

More than 100 prominent opposition figures and activists are accused of offenses ranging from rioting to spying and seeking to topple Iran's Islamic rulers through what authorities have called a planned "soft overthrow."

The days of street protests were triggered by allegations of fraud in the June 12 re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The judiciary official would only identify the three sentenced to death by their initials, the news agency reported. He said their lawyers have been informed of the rulings and that they can appeal the sentences, ISNA reported.

On Friday, Amnesty International identified one of those sentenced to death as Mohammad Reza Ali Zamani.

Amnesty said the 37-year-old was convicted of "enmity against God" through membership in a monarchist group. It also said he was convicted of making propaganda against the ruling regime and of leaving the country illegally to meet with U.S. military officials in Iraq.

Amnesty said it was concerned that the ruling against Zamani could open the way for more death sentences for those accused of similar crimes, and the rights group appealed to the authorities to rescind the ruling.

Zamani testified in August that he met with a U.S. intelligence agent called "Frank" in Irbil, the capital of Iraq's self-governing Kurdish region, and received money and a phone from him in return for information on the Iranian government and student movements, according to state media reports at the time.

Rights groups and opposition figures in Iran have criticized the proceedings, calling them a "show trial" and saying such confessions are coerced.

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