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> Iran urged to release lawyer imprisoned for criticizing juvenile's execution

IRAN URGED TO RELEASE LAWYER IMPRISONED FOR CRITICIZING JUVENILE'S EXECUTION

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Amnesty International has urged the Iranian authorities to release a human rights lawyer who was arrested after speaking



Mohammad Olyaeifard was sentenced to one year in prison

out against the execution of one of his clients during interviews with international media.

Mohammad Olyaeifard was detained on 1 May on charges of "propaganda against the system" to begin serving a one-year jail term. His lawyers have not been informed of his sentence, in violation of Iranian law.

Before his arrest, Mohammad Olyaeifard said that he had been convicted because of an interview he gave to Voice of America's Persian Service shortly after his client, juvenile offender Behnoud Shojaee, was hanged for a murder he committed when he was 17 years old.

"The arrest of Mohammad Olyaeifard sends a chilling message to lawyers in Iran that if they dare to denounce abuses or miscarriages of justice they will face reprisals," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director.

"All he did was point out to the world that – for the 45th time since 1990 - Iran violated international law by executing someone for a crime committed when under 18.

"Mohammad Olyaeifard has been imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and he must be immediately and unconditionally released."

Shortly after his interviews, Mohammad Olyaeifard was summoned for questioning on the basis of a complaint

brought against him by the Tehran Prosecutor and in November 2009 he was briefly arrested and charged before being released on bail equivalent to about US\$50,000.

He was then sentenced to one year in prison on 7 February 2010 by the Revolutionary Court in Tehran.

He was arrested a second time on 8 March 2010 but was released six days later as his lawyers had not been informed of his sentence.

His lawyer, Abdolfattah Soltani, told Deutsche Welle's Persian service that Mohammad Olyaeifard was rearrested on 1 May when he went to the Revolutionary Court in Tehran to meet a court official. He is now held in Section 350 of Evin Prison.

Mohammad Olyaeifard, who has defended many prisoners of conscience and juvenile offenders – those sentenced to death for crimes committed when under the age of 18, has previously been targeted for his work. He was once interrogated and accused of "propagating lies" for condemning the torture of one of his clients, while he has been a vocal critic of Iran's executions of juvenile offenders.

Amnesty International has urged the Iranian authorities to ensure that while imprisoned, he is granted access to his family and lawyers and to adequate medical care. Mohammad Olyaeifard requires regular medication for severe migraines and fainted on 4 March.

The Iranian authorities have intensified the already severe restrictions on freedom of expression in Iran since the disputed presidential election last June, arresting politicians and activists, students, human rights defenders and journalists, as well as lawyers such as Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, Abdolfattah Soltani and Mohammad Mostafaei, although all were later freed on bail.

The arrest of Mohammad Olyaeifard follows attempts by the Iranian authorities to undermine the independence of the Iranian Bar Association, including by barring candidates from standing for election to senior positions.

"This latest move of the Iranian authorities is an indication of the expanding realm of repression in Iran. It shows that no group is immune. The authorities are seeking to silence anyone who is criticizing them. Human rights organizations and their members, journalists, opposition figures, students and women's rights defenders have been targeted. It is now the turn of lawyers", said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers not only state that lawyers must be allowed to carry out their work “without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference” but also expressly recognizes that they are entitled to freedom of expression, which includes “the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights”.

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