

# Iran Uses the Holidays to Announce the Imminent Execution of a Student

December 24, 2010

Today, most of us working with human rights organizations or the media outside Iran are off from work, shopping for Christmas, or spending time with our families. In Iran, government offices are closed on Thursday afternoons and Fridays. Yet, for the Iranian government, Christmas and the weekend's closure presented the ideal opportunity to announce the imminent execution a young Kurdish engineering student and environmentalist to his family.

Habibollah Latify was sentenced to death for "waging war on God" in 2009 and is scheduled to be hanged on Sunday. He was arrested in the fall of 2007 in Sanandaj, the Kordestan provincial capital, north-western Iran for alleged membership in a proscribed armed group. According to [Amnesty International](#), Habibollah's "trial was held behind closed doors and his lawyer was not allowed to be present to defend him. Nor was his family allowed to attend the trial". His family [reported](#) that he was held incommunicado for four months and beaten so badly that he was hospitalized for internal bleeding and unable to stand for weeks. Habibollah eventually confessed but retracted his confession during his trial. The court reportedly refused to hear witnesses who could have confirmed that Habibollah was not in the town where the crimes he is accused of were committed.

The streets around us here in Washington are filled with light and joy as families prepare for celebrating Christmas. And yet, in an isolated prison in a remote town in the Iranian Kordestan, a family is pleading to save the life of their 29-year old son, a straight A student and an athlete who loves nature and his country's mountains. They are hoping that our attention would save the life of a young man who instead of serving his country and building the future is scheduled to die in a few hours, after three terrible years of imprisonment.

Since yesterday, human rights groups and the Farsi-speaking media have done their best to draw attention to Habibollah's imminent execution. His sister has given numerous interviews since his lawyer, like other Iranian lawyers, has been warned not to talk about his clients' case to the media. But time is short and, in the absence of international attention, many of us have little hope in the possibility of saving Habibollah's life.

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Today many of us who believe in the importance of due process of law feel helpless and overwhelmed by a cascade of unanswered questions. How can we do our work effectively? How can lawyers do their work of defending their clients if the law allows detainees to be interrogated, and tortured, without their presence and if the judges accept coerced confessions as evidence? How can the accused present a proper defense if the law allows the judge to decide whether or not an attorney would be present at their trial, whether or not they can call witnesses to testify? How can attorneys advocate on behalf of their clients and protest about irregularities in the judicial process if doing so leads to their [arrest](#)?

Most authoritarian states execute dissidents to deter dissent. A young unknown Kurdish student in an isolated region is a perfect target. Publicizing an unverifiable accusation of involvement in an armed group is meant to prevent a public opinion outrage and create confusion. Many dissidents like Habibollah latifi have been executed based on trumped-up charges, including a school teacher, [Farzad Kamanqar](#), who was executed earlier this year. The judicial process leading to these executions rarely allows the public to know the truth about the case or the charges leveled against the defendants.

The Islamic Republic authorities do not often feel compelled to discuss about the evidence in specific cases, explain why trials are held behind closed door, or why they feel threatened by attorneys if their accusations are based on evidence. But they are uncomfortable enough with a judicial process that fails to meet the minimum standards of fair trial to announce their decision to execute Habibollah Latify on a Thursday afternoon two days before Christmas when local authorities are inaccessible and, they hope, there will be no international reaction.

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