



**To:** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Governments of Norway, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Ireland & Japan

**Cc:** Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Iran

United Nations Human Rights Council

European Union

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly oppose the continuing use of the death penalty in the Islamic Republic of Iran. We are concerned that Iran's radical policies, which allegedly aim to eradicate drug-trafficking and result in the execution of several hundred prisoners every year, are supported in part by international funding.

Of the countries that continue to apply the death penalty in their domestic jurisdictions, Iran leads in number of executions per capita. Many of these executions are conducted in secret and go unreported by official sources. According to reports from human rights groups that document executions in Iran from both official and unofficial sources, roughly 650 executions were carried out in 2010 and 670 in 2011. At the time of the publication of this statement, at least 332 individuals have been executed in 2012. Of these executions, it is estimated that more than 70% are for drug-related offenses.

Pursuant to Article 6(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a State Party, countries that have not abolished the death penalty may only sentence someone to death for the "most serious crimes". The United Nations Human Rights Committee, a body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the ICCPR by its State parties, has found on numerous occasions that drug-related offenses do not meet the criterion of "most serious crimes."

Nonetheless, Iranian authorities have been unabashed in their application of the death penalty to individuals convicted of drug-related offenses. In June 2011, Mahmoud Zoghi, the prosecutor of Mashad, said: “Considering the number of cases we have had, these many hangings are proportionally adequate. Foreign media is exaggerating the issue for no reason.”

Iran’s Anti-Narcotics Law mandates the death penalty in cases of possession or trafficking of more than a specified amount of various drugs. The range of offenses punishable by death was broadened with a series of amendments to the Anti-Narcotics Law that came into force in January 2011. The amended law mandates the death penalty for a wider range of illegal drugs—including the possession or trafficking of more than 30 grams of methamphetamine.

According to reports from human rights groups, many of those executed are arrested on spurious charges of alleged drug trafficking, are interrogated without a lawyer present, have confessions extracted under torture admitted as evidence against them in court, are convicted without legal counsel or the ability to review the evidence against them and sentenced to death without a right of appeal.

Too often, the targets of these sweeping anti-drug laws are the most vulnerable members of Iranian society. Poor and marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities and foreign nationals who have been historically discriminated against by the Iranian government, are targeted by Iran’s drug laws, as are single mothers who, with no other means to support their children, engage in drug trafficking to feed their children.

In addition to the cruel and inhumane treatment of those sentenced to death under these anti-drug laws, the imposition of the mandatory death penalty for these offenses has a deleterious effect on Iranian society as a whole. Executions carried out at large public gatherings, often with young children in attendance, have the effect of normalizing the use of the death penalty and state-sanctioned violence in Iranian society.

Also, while Iranian officials maintain that execution of drug traffickers is effective in combating the abuse and sale of drugs, there is no clear evidence to support this. Many of those executed are not at the top of the drug sale chain and drug use in Iran is on the rise. Recent statistics on opiate abuse place Iran second in the world in the percentage of the population using opiates, exceeded only by Afghanistan. The rate of addiction to high-potency heroin is also on the rise, especially among the youth.

While human rights groups have raised concerns to the Iranian government about the mandatory death sentencing for drug-related offenses, the Iranian authorities have failed to respond to this criticism in any meaningful fashion. At the same time, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and country donors including Norway, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Ireland and Japan provide funding to Iran for its anti-drug trafficking programs.

While we appreciate that country donors are trying to stop the flow of drugs into Europe and North America, the efforts of these Western governments should not result in human rights abuses in Iran and similarly situated countries. With no reason to believe it will be penalized by an international community that in fact funds these efforts, the Iranian government has continued its on-going campaign of executing individuals for drug-related offenses with virtual impunity. Efforts by human rights defenders and others to request information through official channels about the nature of UNODC’s support to Iran have been met with vague or otherwise unresponsive answers.

**In light of the reasons enumerated above, we, the undersigned, set forth the following demands to the international community, including UNODC, states that donate or have donated in the past to UNODC, or other international government organizations engaged in anti-drug trafficking initiatives with Iran:**

- **Immediately halt the provision of any monetary funds, services or other resources to the Iranian authorities for anti-drug trafficking purposes until such time the Iranian government renounces its policy of executing individuals for drug-related offenses.**
- **Demand that until the Iranian government renounces the policy of execution for drug-related offenses, funds only be used for treatment and other anti-drug initiatives unrelated to law enforcement.**
- **Impose strict transparency guidelines on any funding intended for treatment and other anti-drug initiatives unrelated to law enforcement, with strict guidelines on amounts and a detailed reporting of its specific use.**

Signed on this **10<sup>th</sup> day of October 2012** (International Day against the Death Penalty) by:

Arseh Sevom

Iran Human Rights

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center

Justice for Iran

Together against the Death Penalty/ *Ensemble contre la peine de mort* (ECPM)