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Iran: International community must act urgently to stop horrific plan to amputate fingers of eight prisoners

The international community must use all diplomatic means available to stop the Iranian authorities from amputating the fingers of eight men, at least three of whom were convicted based on torture-tainted “confessions” following grossly unfair trials, said Amnesty International today.

According to information obtained by the organization, the authorities have informed the men that they will be transferred to a prison with a guillotine machine in the coming days to implement their sentences.

“Amputating prisoners’ fingers is a form of torture, and is yet another shocking reminder of the shameless inhumanity of the criminal justice system in Iran, which legalizes torture, a crime under international law. Carrying out such heinous punishments is not justice – it is an abhorrent assault on human dignity. The Iranian authorities must immediately quash the convictions and amputation sentences of these eight men and grant them fair retrials without resorting to corporal punishments,” said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International’s Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“We call on the international community to urgently intervene to stop these sentences from being carried out. They must also call on Iranian authorities to abolish all forms of corporal punishment. It is unacceptable that the authorities in Iran continue to commit such criminal acts of cruelty with impunity.”

All eight men are currently being held at the Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary. **Hadi Rostami, Mehdi Sharfian and Mehdi Shahivand** – were transferred from Urumieh prison, West Azerbaijan province, on 15 May 2022, in preparation for the implementation of their sentences. Of the remaining five prisoners, the name of one, **Yaghoub Fazeli**, has been identified, but the organization has not been able to obtain the names of the other men. All eight were convicted of robbery and sentenced to amputation of their fingers. Amnesty International understands that the sentences of all the men have been upheld by the Supreme Court and sent to the Office for the Implementation of Sentences. This means their sentences could be carried out at any time.

Prosecution authorities told the men on 8 June 2022 that they would be transferred to Tehran's Evin prison or Raja'i Shahr prison in Karaj, Alborz province, to have their sentences carried out, but the transfer was postponed at the last minute for unknown reasons. This comes amid reports from human rights activists in Iran that a guillotine machine was brought to the medical clinic of Evin prison last month and that, on 31 May 2022, the prison authorities amputated four fingers of a prisoner who was moved there from Dizel Abad prison, Kermanshah province, for the implementation of his sentence.

Inhumane punishments such as amputation are torture, which is a crime under international law and prohibited under Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party. Iran is legally obliged to prohibit and punish torture in all circumstances and without exception.

Despite this, Iran's Islamic Penal Code also provides for other corporal judicial punishments amounting to torture, including flogging, blinding, crucifixion and stoning.

“To prevent such state-sanctioned torture and provide victims with redress, we call on all states to exercise universal jurisdiction where possible to investigate Iranian officials, including medical professionals, responsible for ordering, committing, aiding and/or abetting acts of torture such as amputations, and if enough admissible evidence exists, issue arrest warrants and seek to prosecute them.”

Background

Hadi Rostami and Mehdi Shahivand went on hunger strike on 29 May 2022 to protest their sentences. They ended their hunger strike on 2 June 2022 after officials assured them they would be pardoned.

Hadi Rostami, Mehdi Sharfian and Mehdi Shahivand were all denied access to lawyers during the investigation phase of their cases, and courts relied on forced “confessions” obtained under torture and other ill-treatment to secure their convictions, despite the defendants retracting them during their trials. The judicial authorities failed to order any investigations into their torture allegations. According to their court verdicts, reviewed by Amnesty International, they are sentenced to “have four fingers on their right hands completely cut off so only the palm of their hands and thumbs are left”, as per the punishment stipulated for certain types of robbery under Iran's Islamic Penal Code.

Previous plans by the Iranian authorities to carry out the sentences against Hadi Rostami, Mehdi Sharfian and Mehdi Shahivand were halted in September 2020 after international pressure.

In February 2021, Hadi Rostami was flogged 60 times in prison after being convicted of “disrupting prison order” in reprisal for his peaceful protest, including through hunger strikes, against his inhumane prison conditions and repeated threats that his amputation sentence would be implemented imminently. He has attempted suicide twice in prison, resulting in serious health complications.

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