

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

16 November 2022

Iran: Chilling use of the death penalty to further brutally quell popular uprising

The Iranian authorities are seeking the death penalty for at least 21 people in sham trials designed to intimidate those participating in the popular uprising that has rocked Iran since September and deter others from joining the movement, Amnesty International said today.

Since 13 November, the authorities have announced, in separate statements, that Revolutionary Courts in Tehran have sentenced five unnamed individuals to death for “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) and “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*) over what they called acts of arson, destruction of property and fatal assault against a member of the security forces during protests in Tehran province. Since 29 October, state media have regularly reported on the trial of nine men on protest-related charges carrying the death penalty. It is unclear whether the five unnamed individuals sentenced to death are among the nine men. At least 12 other people including a woman are also facing capital charges in connection with the protests.

Amnesty International issued a [detailed analysis](#) today about the cases of the 21 individuals who are at risk and highlighting the deeply flawed nature of the proceedings by Revolutionary Courts amid the authorities’ shocking calls for speedy trials and public executions.

“The Iranian authorities must immediately quash all death sentences, refrain from seeking the imposition of the death penalty and drop all charges against those arrested in connection with their peaceful participation in protests. The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, its abhorrent nature further compounded by a fundamentally flawed criminal trials devoid of transparency or independence,” said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Two months into the popular uprising and three years on from the November 2019 protests, the crisis of impunity prevailing in Iran is enabling the Iranian authorities to not only continue carrying out mass killings but also to escalate the use of the death penalty as a tool of political repression. Member states of the UN Human Rights Council holding a special session on Iran next week must urgently establish an investigative and accountability mechanism to address this all-out-assault on the right to life and other human rights,” said Diana Eltahawy.

Amnesty International fears that many others are at risk of facing the death penalty, given the thousands of people arrested and number of indictments issued by the authorities.

Amnesty International is urging all governments with embassies in Iran to immediately send high level observers to all ongoing trials where defendants are at risk of being sentenced to death. The Iranian authorities have said such trials will be public.

Individuals facing the death penalty over protests

The cases of the 21 individuals who are at risk of the death penalty are at different stages and taking place before various courts. The cases of those sentenced to death can be appealed before the Supreme Court.

Six men charged with “enmity against God” (*mohraebbeh*) or “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*) have been referred to a Revolutionary Court in Tehran for a group trial. Their names are **Mohammad Ghobadlou**, **Saman Seydi (Yasin)**, **Saeed Shirazi**, **Mohammad Boroughani**, **Abolfazl Mehri Hossein Hajilou**, and **Mohsen Rezazadeh Gharagholou**. Three other men – **Sahand Nourmohammad-Zadeh**, **Mahan Sedarat Madani** and

Manouchehr Mehman-Navaz – are facing separate trials before Revolutionary Courts in Tehran for alleged criminal conduct amounting to “enmity against God” (*mohraebah*). In eight of these cases, the charges carrying the death penalty involve no accusations of intentional killing and primarily stem from acts described as vandalism, destruction of public and/or private property, arson and disturbing public order.

Although the authorities have not disclosed the identities of the five individuals officially announced as having been sentenced to death, information revealed about their charges have led human rights activists to believe that these unnamed individuals are Mohammad Ghobadlou, Manouchehr Mehman Navaz, Mahan Sedarat Madani, Mohammad Boroughani and Sahand Nourmohammad-Zadeh.

Eleven other people are also facing trial on the charge of “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*) before a Revolutionary Court in Karaj, Alborz province. Among them is a married couple, **Farzaneh Ghare-Hasanlou** and **Hamid Ghare-Hasanlou**, who is a medical doctor.

Amnesty International is also aware of another man, 26-year-old **Parham Parvari** from Iran’s Kurdish minority who has been charged with “enmity against God” in connection with protests. According to his family, he was a bystander who was violently arrested in Tehran while returning home from work during the protests.

There is evidence that at least three individuals have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment and that torture-tainted “confessions” have been used against the defendants in court.

Denial of fair trial rights

Documented violations of fair trial rights against the 21 individuals include denial of the rights to access a lawyer of their own choosing from the time of arrest and throughout the investigation and trial proceedings, denial of the right to be presumed innocent, to remain silent and not to be compelled to incriminate oneself or to confess guilt. Defendants are systematically regularly denied the right to be protected from torture and other-ill-treatment; to obtain full access to relevant evidence; and to receive a fair, public hearing before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal.

Under international law, the imposition of the death penalty following an unfair trial violates the right to life and the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment.

Officials call for speedy trials and public executions

A parliamentary statement from 227 of 290 Iranian parliamentarians has called on the judiciary to “show no leniency” to protesters by urgently issuing death sentences against them as “a lesson” to others. The Head of the Judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei, has called for speedy trials and punishments, including executions.

According to an official document reviewed by Amnesty International, on 9 October, the country’s Prosecutor General, Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, instructed prosecution authorities to expedite criminal proceedings against Mohammad Ghobadlou. In another official document dated 29 September, a senior police chief asked for the trial of Mohammad Ghobadlou to be completed “in the shortest possible time” and that his death sentence be carried out in public as “a heart-warming gesture towards the security forces”.

Background

Iran has been rocked by a nationwide popular uprising against the Islamic republic system since the death in custody of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini at the hands of Iran’s “morality” police on 16 September 2022. Security forces have responded with unlawful force, including lethal, killing hundreds of men, women and children and injuring thousands of others.

According to a leaked audio file obtained by BBC Persian, the authorities arbitrarily arrested between 15,000 and 16,000 people in the first wave of arrests since the protests began. Those arrested include protesters, journalists, human rights defenders, dissidents, university students and schoolchildren, and many have been subjected to enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and unfair trials.

On 8 November 2022, the Iranian judiciary announced that 1,024 indictments had been issued in relation to the protests in Tehran province alone, without providing further details on the charges.

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