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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Iran: Four Iranian Arabs executed after unfair trials

Amnesty International deplores the executions earlier today of four Iranian Arab men and fears for the lives of other prisoners who are reported to have been sentenced to death recently following unfair trials.

Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to halt executions and to ensure that all persons in detention are protected from torture or other ill-treatment.

Executions in Iran continue at an alarming rate. Amnesty International recorded at least 177 executions in 2006 but fears that the true figure may have been much higher. At least four of those executed were under the age of 18 at the time of their alleged offences, including one who was still under 18 at the time of his execution. In 2006, Iran and Pakistan were the only countries in the world to continue to execute child offenders (although Pakistan enacted in 2000 the Juvenile Justice System Law which abolished the death penalty for people under 18 at the time of the crime in most parts of the country). To date in 2007, Amnesty International has recorded 19 further executions in Iran, including the four today.

Those executed today are believed to be Khalaf Derhab Khudayrawi, Alireza Asakreh, Mohammad Jaab Pour and Abdulmir Farjallah Jaab. They were among 10 men, all members of Iran's Arab minority, who were reportedly convicted of being *mohareb* (at enmity with God) on account of their alleged involvement in bomb attacks in October 2005 which caused the deaths of at least six people and wounded more than a hundred others, in Ahvaz city, Khuzestan province. According to reports, the four men were denied access to their lawyers in the two weeks prior to their execution.

On 9 November 2006, the head of the Khuzestan Prosecutor's Office, Abbas Ja'afari Dowlat Abadi, reportedly announced that the Supreme Court had upheld the death sentences against 10 of some 19 people allegedly responsible for bomb explosions in Khuzestan and that they would be publicly hanged.

On 13 November 2006, an Iranian local television station, Khuzestan TV, broadcast a documentary film which included the "confessions" of nine of these men. In the programme, the 10 people, said to be members of a group named *Al-e Naser*, (a little-known Iranian Arab militant group that is not known to have been active since the time of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s) "confessed" to their involvement in the bomb explosions.

On 19 December 2006 three of them, Abdullah Suleymani (initially named as Alireza Asakreh), Malek Banitamim and Ali Matouri Zadeh were reportedly executed in prison in Khuzestan province.

The bodies of the executed men were reportedly not handed to their families for burial, and there were fears that they would be buried in an unmarked, mass grave site called *La'natabad* (Place of

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the damned). The security forces reportedly prevented people from visiting the families to offer condolences.

According to information received by Amnesty International, on or around 2 March 2006 and prior to his arrest, Khalaf Derhab Khudayrawi was reportedly shot by the security forces before being taken away. His family believed he had died in the shooting, but a few days later received a phone call from the authorities informing them that he had been transferred to the Sepidar detention centre. His wife, Soghra Khudayrawi, and four-year-old son Zeidan were detained in Ahvaz on 7 March 2006 and both remain in detention. (See UA 65/06, MDE 13/028/2006, 23 March 2006) and Iran: Appeal Case: *Four Ahwazi Arab women and two children: Prisoners of conscience*, AI Index: MDE 13/059/2006, 17 May 2006, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130592006?open&of=ENG-IRN>). Mohammad Jaab Pour and Abdulmir Farjallah Jaab were also reportedly arrested on 7 March 2006.

At the beginning of June 2006, seven lawyers who appeared before Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court representing the defendants, including some of the 10 who were sentenced to death, reportedly wrote formally to the court's president complaining about irregularities in the trial. They said they were notified of their clients' trial date only one to two days in advance, instead of the minimum of five days stipulated in Article 64 of the Civil Procedure Code, and could not study their clients' files fully; that they were not allowed to meet in private with their clients although they had requested this and despite the head of the judiciary's stated assurance on 20 May 2006 that *"nobody has the right to issue an order in contravention of the law and to deprive the accused of the right of visits by their family and lawyer. They must know quite clearly that they may request private meetings with their lawyers."* The lawyers also complained that trial sessions have been held without other defendants or their lawyers being present.

Following this letter, in October 2006 at least five of the lawyers were summoned to appear before Branch 7 of the Revolutionary Court in Ahwaz for allegedly endangering national security by complaining about the legal proceedings and publishing their protest on Ahwazi websites abroad. They were reportedly released upon payment of bail.

On 10 January 2007, three leading UN human rights experts - Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Leandro Despouy, UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, and Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on torture – jointly called on the government of Iran to "stop the imminent execution of seven men belonging to the Ahwazi Arab minority and grant them a fair and public hearing." The seven individuals concerned were reported to be Abdulreza Sanawati Zergani, Qasem Salamat, Mohammad Jaab Pour, Abdulmir Farjallah Jaab, Alireza Asakreh, Majed Alboghbaish Khalaf and Derhab Khudayrawi. These UN experts stated: *"We are fully aware that these men are accused of serious crimes... However, this cannot justify their conviction and execution after trials that made a mockery of due process requirements."*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



Much of Iran's Arab community lives in the province of Khuzestan, which borders Iraq. The province is strategically important because it is the site of much of Iran's oil reserves, but the Arab population does not feel it has benefited as much from the oil revenue as the Persian population. Historically, the Arab community has been marginalised and discriminated against. In April 2005, Iranian Arabs took part in mass demonstrations in Ahvaz city, after it was alleged that the government planned to disperse the country's Arab population or to force them to relinquish their Arab identity. Hundreds were arrested and some were reportedly tortured. Following bomb explosions in Ahvaz city in June and October 2005, which killed at least 14 people, and explosions at oil installations in September and October, the cycle of violence intensified, with hundreds of people reportedly arrested. Further bombings on 24 January 2006, in which at least six people were killed, were followed by further mass arrests. Two men, Mehdi Nawaseri and Ali Awdeh Afrawi, were executed in public on 2 March 2006 after they were convicted of involvement in the October bombings. Their executions followed unfair trials before a Revolutionary Court during which they are believed to have been denied access to lawyers, and their "confessions", along with those of seven other men, were broadcast on television.

Amnesty International condemns bomb explosions and other attacks against civilians and fully recognizes the right and responsibility of governments to bring to justice those suspected of criminal offences, but in doing so governments must comply with their obligations under international human rights law, including the right of fair trial. Amnesty International is unconditionally opposed to the death penalty as a violation of the right to life and the ultimate form of cruel and inhuman punishment. Please see *Iran: Death Sentences appeal case – 11 Iranian Arab men facing death sentences*, AI Index MDE 13/051/2006, May 2006, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130512006?open&of=ENG-IRN>).

Iran has a history of airing video-taped "confessions" on television. In previous cases, people who have made such "confessions" have later stated that such confessions were made after they had been tortured or ill-treated.

Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which includes the right not to be compelled to testify against oneself or to confess guilt (Article 14.3.g). Principle 21 of the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment states that it should be prohibited to take undue advantage of the situation of a detainee for the purpose of compelling him to confess or incriminate himself.

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