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Iran: Four members of Ahwazi Arab minority executed after unfair trial

Amnesty International considers that apparent execution of at least four men, including three brothers – all members of Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority - following an unfair trial lacking any transparency encapsulates all the worst aspects of Iran's state killing machine.

Ahwazi activists close to the family told Amnesty International that brothers Abd al-Rahman Heidarian, 23, (also known as Heidari), Abbas Heidarian, 25 and Taha Heidarian, 28, along with a fourth man named Ali Sharifi, were executed in Ahvaz's Karoun Prison on or around 19 June 2012. They said that following their execution, the men's bodies were not returned to their families.

The fate of a fifth man, Mansour Heidarian, who was detained in the same case and believed to be a cousin of the brothers, is unknown.

The brothers and Mansour Heidarian were apparently convicted by a Revolutionary Court of *moharebeh va ifsad fil-arz* or "enmity against God and corruption on earth" in connection with the killing of a law enforcement official in April 2011 amidst widespread protests in Khuzestan.

Yet another man, Amir Muawi, (or Mo'avi) who may have been tried in connection with the same case has reportedly been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, to be served in internal exile. However, Amnesty International is unaware of the exact details of the charges against him and his trial proceedings. Earlier reports suggested that he had been sentenced to death.

The three brothers and Amir Muawi were reportedly arrested around 18-19 April 2011, in connection with a demonstration in Ta'awen Street, in Malashiya during unrest in Khuzestan marking the sixth anniversary of unrest in the province. Malashiva is an impoverished district in the east of the city of Ahvaz, Khuzestan, in south western Iran. Amnesty International is unaware of the date of Mansour Heidarian's arrest.

The activists told Amnesty International that the men were held in solitary confinement at a facility under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence in the Chahar Shir district of the city Ahvaz. It is not known when they were initially tried, but it appears that the decision by Iran's Supreme Court to uphold their death sentences was communicated to family members on or around 5 March 2012

Under Iranian law, lawyers must receive 48 hours' notice of their client's execution, but it is not clear whether these six men have ever been permitted legal representation.

Amnesty International believes their trial was unfair, as it appears that the men were not represented by lawyers of their choice, and at least one was shown on a national television channel "confessing" to the crime. It is not known when the men's initial trials before a Revolutionary Court took place. Their families have said the men "confessed" to murder, but did so under torture or other ill-treatment. Iranian courts frequently accept "confessions" extracted under duress as evidence.

Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees is commonplace in Iran, often to try to force detainees to make “confessions”. Coerced “confessions”, sometimes broadcast on television even before the trial has concluded, are often accepted as evidence in Iranian courts.

The three brothers, as well as Ali Sharifi, Amir Muawi and Mansour Heidarian, were reportedly transferred to solitary confinement on or around 9 June 2012. Transfer to solitary confinement of death row prisoners frequently happens before executions are carried out.

Amnesty International recognizes the rights and responsibilities of all states to protect those under their jurisdiction and to uphold the rule of law. However, the organization is unconditionally opposed to the death penalty, which it considers to be the ultimate violation of the right to life, regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the individual, or the method used by the state to carry out the execution.

In this regard, the organization is deeply dismayed at the execution of these four men after apparently unfair trials, which violate Iran’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which it is a state party.

Amnesty International has also learned that a fourth brother, Jalil Heidarian, was summoned to an office of the Ministry of Intelligence in Ahwaz on or around 9 June 2012. Apart from a quick telephone call to his family on the day of his arrest, the Heidarian family has not had any further contact with him and are unaware of his current legal status.

Amnesty International is calling for the authorities to immediately inform Jalil Heidarian’s family of his whereabouts and his current legal status, and for the fate of the other six men to be clarified. While held, he should be protected from torture or other ill-treatment, granted access to his family and a lawyer of his choice, and to all necessary medical care. If he is not to be charged and promptly tried on an internationally recognizable criminal offence, he should be released.

Background

Ahwazi Arabs, one of Iran’s many minorities often complain that they are marginalized and discriminated against in access to education, employment, adequate housing, political participation and cultural rights. Some Ahwazi Arabs – who are mostly Shi’a Muslims like the majority of people in Iran – have formed groups calling for a separate Arab state in the area.

In April 2005, Khuzestan province was the scene of mass demonstrations, after reports that Iran’s government planned to disperse Ahwazi Arabs from the area and to attempt to weaken their ethnic identity.

In April 2011, members of the Ahwazi Arab minority organized “Day of Rage” protests across Khuzestan province to mark the sixth anniversary of the earlier unrest. Afterwards, Amnesty International was given the names of 27 people allegedly killed in clashes with the security forces, including in the Malashiya neighbourhood. Ahwazi Arab sources claim there were more casualties, while the Iranian authorities claim only three people died.