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Iran hangs teenage murderer

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Iran on Tuesday hanged a 19-year-old youth in prison in the central city of Isfahan after his conviction for murder, the state-run television website reported.

It identified the man sent to gallows as Hamid Reza Q., 19, convicted of stabbing to death a friend who owed him 250,000 rials (around 27 dollars) in the Iranian year of 1385 (March 2006-March 2007).

No further details were given about the man's age at the time of the murder.

Western rights groups have accused Iran of hanging criminals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the offence, in defiance of its obligations in international agreements on juvenile offenders.

The judiciary insists that no-one under 18 is hanged in Iran but local media reports in June said Iran hanged a 17-year-old boy named Mohammad Hassanzadeh convicted of murder in the western city of Sanandaj.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour and the European parliament have also urged Iran to halt the scheduled executions of Behnoud Shojaee, Mohammad Fedaei, Saeed Jazee and Behnam Zaare.

The four face hanging in Tehran for crimes committed while they were still technically minors under the age of 18. Rights groups fear at least a dozen others face the same punishment in other cities.

Iran is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child which prohibit the execution of minors who were under the age of 18 at the time of the offence.

The new hanging brings to at least 114 the number of executions carried out in Iran so far this year, according to an AFP count.

Amnesty International reported that Iran in 2007 applied the death penalty more often than any other country apart from China, executing 317 people during the year.

Capital offences in the Islamic republic include murder, rape, armed robbery, drug trafficking and adultery.

Human rights groups have accused Iran of making excessive use of the death penalty but Tehran insists it is an effective deterrent that is carried out only after an exhaustive judicial process.

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