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> Iran must halt imminent execution of Kurdish man

IRAN MUST HALT IMMINENT EXECUTION OF KURDISH MAN

10 November 2009

The Iranian authorities must halt the execution of a Kurdish man sentenced to death for "enmity against God" in connection with his alleged membership of an illegal opposition group, Amnesty International said on Tuesday.

Ehsan (Esma'il) Fattahian is scheduled to be executed on Wednesday, at the prison in the city of Sanandaj, the provincial capital of Kordestan. According to a letter he has written from prison, he is a member of Komala, a Marxist Kurdish opposition group.

Reports suggest that Ehsan Fattahian may have been tortured while in detention.

Two other Iranian Kurdish men are also feared to be at imminent risk of execution.

All three executions appear to have been scheduled in reprisal for a spate of assassinations and attempted assassinations of officials in Kordestan province which took place between 9 and 19 September and were widely reported in Iran.

At least 10 other Kurdish men and one woman are believed to be on death row in Iran in connection with their membership of and activities in support of proscribed Kurdish organizations.

No group has claimed responsibility for the September attacks, which targeted mainly religious figures and judges. The authorities have variously blamed the Kurdistan Independent Life Party (PJAK), an armed Kurdish opposition group, and "hard-line Sunni fundamentalists" linked to foreign intelligence services.

Those killed included the head of Sanandaj city council, a Sunni cleric who had supported President Ahmadinejad's re-election campaign, and the Kordestan representative to the Assembly of Experts (the body which appoints the Supreme Leader). Two judges were also injured. Amnesty International condemns these attacks on civilians.

Ehsan Fattahian was detained on 20 July 2008 and says in his letter that he was regularly beaten in detention.

Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court in Sanandaj sentenced him to 10 years' imprisonment to be served in exile, after a trial in which he was denied access to a lawyer.

Both Ehsan Fattahian and the prosecutor appealed against this verdict, and in January 2009 Branch 4 of the Kordestan Appeal Court overturned the initial verdict.

Instead he was sentenced to death for "enmity against God". This new sentence was never subject to an appeal, as is required by international law.

He says the new sentence was passed because he refused to agree to "confess" on film and to reject his beliefs.

Two other men, Habibollah Latifi, arrested in October 2007, and Sherko Moarefi, detained in October 2008, remain on death row in Sanandaj prison.

Fears were raised that all three were at imminent risk of execution after a judge in Sanandaj received orders in October to carry out their executions.

Amnesty International has urged the Iranian authorities to commute Ehsan Fattahian's death sentence along with those of Habibollah Latifi and Sherko Moarefi.

The organization expressed concern that Ehsan Fattahian was reportedly tortured and was sentenced to death after an appeal after an unfair trial.

It also called on the authorities to impose an immediate and comprehensive moratorium on executions, as a first

step towards ending the use of this punishment.

Kurds, who are one of Iran's many minority groups, live mainly in the west and north-west of the country, in the province of Kordestan and neighbouring provinces bordering Kurdish areas of Turkey and Iraq. They experience religious, economic and cultural discrimination.

For many years, Kurdish organizations such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the Marxist group Komala engaged in armed opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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