

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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At Least 17 More Kurdish Prisoners at Risk of Imminent Execution

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(New York) Iranian authorities executed five prisoners, four of them ethnic Kurds, without warning their families, and have so far refused to release their bodies, Human Rights Watch said today. These executions follow convictions that appear to have relied on the use of torture.

The Kurdish prisoners Farzad Kamangar, Ali Heidarian, Farhad Vakili, and Shirin Alam Holi were executed by hanging on the morning of May 9, 2010, in Tehrans Evin prison, said a statement released by the Tehran Public Prosecutors office. The government also executed a fifth prisoner, Mehdi Eslamian, an alleged member of a banned pro-monarchist group. Authorities maintain that all five were engaged in terrorist operations, including involvement in the bombing of government and public centers in various Iranian cities.

These hangings of four Kurdish prisoners are the latest example of the governments unfair use of the death penalty against ethnic minority dissidents, said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. The judiciary routinely accuses Kurdish dissidents, including civil society activists, of belonging to armed separatist groups and sentences them to death in an effort to crush dissent.

The Tehran prosecutors statement alleged that Kamangar, Heidarian, Vakili, and Alam Holi had confessed to being members of the outlawed Free Life Party of Kurdistan, or PJAK, and were involved in a series of bomb plots in northwestern Iran as well as Tehran. PJAK is widely regarded by analysts to be an Iranian affiliate of the banned Turkish Kurdish Workers Party, or PKK.

The government accused the fifth prisoner, Eslamian, of involvement in the bombing of a religious site in the southern city of Shiraz in 2008. Authorities alleged that Eslamian was a supporter of the pro-monarchist Anjoman-e Padeshahi, or the Kingdom Assembly. The government executed two other alleged members of this group, Arash Ramanipour and Mohammad-Reza Ali Zamani, earlier this year.

Branch 30 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced Kamangar, Heidarian and Vakil to death on February 25, 2008. Khalil Bahramian, one of the lawyers representing Kamangar who was at the closed-door trial of the three men, said that gross irregularities, including the absence of a jury, plagued the initial trial and subsequent appellate court decisions upholding the convictions. Bahramian told the BBC on Sunday that Kamangars trial lasted all of 10 minutes, and that when Bahramian asked permission to present his clients case, the judge simply instructed him to write down [his] concerns.

In the end [the judge] never heard what I had to say, Bahramian told the BBC. He sharply denied that his client was in any way involved with PJAK or any other terrorist group.

In addition to finding the five persons guilty of various national security crimes, the judiciary sentenced all five to death after convicting them of the crime of moharebeh, or enmity with God. Under articles 186 and 190-91 of Irans penal code, anyone charged with taking up arms against the state, or belonging to organizations that take up arms against the government, may be considered guilty of moharebeh and sentenced to death.

Security forces arrested Kamangar, a superintendent of high schools in the city of Kamyaran in July 2006 in Tehran. In February 2008, Bahramian informed Human Rights Watch that his client had alleged numerous instances of abuse and torture at the hands of prison authorities in Sanandaj, Kermanshah, and Tehran. Human Rights Watch obtained a copy of a letter Kamangar wrote and smuggled out of prison in which he detailed his torture, including threats of sexual violence. Bahramian also represented Eslamian.

Vakili, Heidarian, and Alam Holi made similar allegations in prison letters, indicating that authorities used torture to secure confessions from them. In a series of letters from prison, Alam Holi, a 28-year-old Kurdish woman accused of bombing a vehicle at a Revolutionary Guards compound in Tehran, described numerous instances of physical and psychological torture suffered at the hands of her captors,

including beatings with cables and electric batons.

The May 9 executions were carried out unannounced the government informed neither the lawyers nor the families of the prisoners, Bahramian and family members said. Bahramian told the BBC that the law requires that I be informed regarding my two clients but I was not informed [of their execution] in any way. One of Kamangars brothers told the BBC that the families learned about the executions from media reports.

A family member of one of the other prisoners told Human Rights Watch that the authorities have so far prevented delivery of their bodies to the families for burial. Islamic custom generally requires burials to take place as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours.

Irans judiciary should immediately issue a moratorium on all executions, Stork said. This includes the 17 Kurdish dissidents known to be on death row.

The 17 Kurds presently facing execution are: Rostam Arkia, Hossein Khezri, Anvar Rostami, Mohammad Amin Abdolahi, Ghader Mohammadzadeh, Zeynab Jalalian, Habibollah Latifi, Sherko Moarefi, Mostafa Salimi, Hassan Tali, Iraj Mohammadi, Rashid Akhkandi, Mohammad Amin Agoushi, Ahmad Pouladkhani, Sayed Sami Hosseini, Sayed Jamal Mohammadi, and Aziz Mohammadzadeh.

Human Rights Watch opposes capital punishment in all circumstances because of its cruel and inhumane nature.

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