

Amnesty slams Iranian execution of two men charged of financial crimes

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Wed, 2018-11-14 19:52

LONDON: After two men convicted of financial crimes were executed in Iran, Amnesty International has strongly criticized the Iranian regime.

Vahid Mazloumin and Mohammad Esmail Ghasemi were put to death after a trial Amnesty has called "grossly unfair."

Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Research and Advocacy Director, Philip Luther, said of the case: "With these abhorrent executions the Iranian authorities have flagrantly violated international law and once again displayed their shameless disregard for the right to life.

"Use of the death penalty is appalling under any circumstances but it is even more horrific given that these men were convicted after a grossly unfair show trial that was broadcast on state television. Under international human rights law, the death penalty is absolutely forbidden for non-lethal crimes, such as financial corruption.

"The shocking manner in which their trial was fast-tracked through Iran's judicial system without allowing them the chance of a proper appeal is yet another example of the brazen disregard the Iranian authorities have for defendants' basic due process rights."

The duo were executed after being charged with "manipulating coin and hard currency markets through illegal and unauthorized deals" as well as smuggling. An unspecified number of other accomplices went to prison. Iran detained Mazloumin, 58, in July for hoarding two tons of gold coins. With Iran in the grip of a deepening economic crisis, authorities have carried out mass arrests of individuals whom they accuse of being "financially corrupt" and "saboteurs of the economy."

According to Amnesty, the pair were convicted and sentenced to flogging, lengthy prison terms and eventually the death penalty after "grossly unfair summary trials."

In August, Iran's Supreme Leader approved a request by the Head of Judiciary to set up special courts to deal with crimes involving financial corruption. Since then, these courts have sentenced several people to death.

In a statement, Amnesty said the trials were unfair because defendants were denied access to lawyers of their own choosing, had no right to appeal against sentences of imprisonment during the process and were given only 10 days within which to appeal death sentences.



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Iran must disclose fate and location of hundreds of Ahwazi Arab prisoners:
Amnesty International
Amnesty International strips Myanmar's Suu Kyi of
'conscience' award

[Iraq recovers property worth millions after illegal sale](#)

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Wed, 2018-11-14 12:56

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi government said Wednesday it had retaken ownership of a piece of property in Baghdad worth millions of dollars after it was

unlawfully sold to a government official's wife.

In a statement to journalists, the Integrity Commission said it had worked with Baghdad authorities to recover the land in Kadhimiyah district.

"The Baghdad-Karakh appeals court issued a decision to seize the property, which amounts to 12,642 square meters, from the wife of a leading official in the previous government and re-register it in the name of the Mayoralty," the statement said.

"The land registration in the name of the official's wife has been nullified, as well as all subsequent registrations," it added.

The northern neighborhood of Kadhimiyah is home to a revered Shiite shrine, as well as some of the city's most luxurious properties – priced at up to \$10,000 per square meter.

The Integrity Commission said its investigation had revealed the official had sold the property to his wife in violation of laws regulating the lease or sale of state-owned property.

It did not reveal the official's identity, but a parliamentary source told AFP the accused had briefly served as a deputy to Iraq's former prime minister, Haidar Al-Abadi.

In Baghdad, abandoned homes once belonging to Saddam Hussein-era officials or to minorities who have fled abroad are regularly occupied by powerful political parties.

Iraq, according to Transparency International, is the 12th most corrupt country in the world.

The embezzlement of public goods – from land to government funds – is a deeply rooted problem in a country with such a large public sector.

Corruption, shell companies and "phantom" public employees who receive salaries but do not work have cost Iraq the equivalent of \$228 billion dollars since 2003, according to Iraq's parliament.

That figure is more than the country's gross domestic product and nearly three times the annual budget.



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Iraq to exchange food for Iranian gas, seeks US approval
Daesh militants attempting to cross into Iraq from Syria: Iraqi PM

[Dozens of migrants refuse to leave container ship in Libya](#)

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Thu, 2018-11-15 (All day)

MISRATA: Dozens of migrants have barricaded themselves in a container ship in the Libyan port city of Misrata for the past five days, after being picked up at sea, and refuse to disembark, saying Libya is too dangerous for them. Loaded with cars, the ship Nivin was already bound for Misrata when it picked

up 93 migrants in a foundering raft in the Mediterranean Sea late on Friday and continued toward its destination. Two of the migrants agreed to leave with the Libyan coast guard, but the others refused, saying Libya was deadly for migrants and they wanted to go to Europe.

They have been in the Misrata port ever since, with the captain and crew taking refuge on the upper decks.

One of the migrants, a man from South Sudan reached by The Associated Press on the ship, vowed on Wednesday to reach Europe or die trying. He said six commercial ships passed his group before the Nivin finally stopped.

Libya's coast guard had no immediate comment on the situation.

With just one rescue ship patrolling the Mediterranean, and European ports refusing to take in rescued migrants, commercial ships have become increasingly leery of picking up people in the sea. Repeatedly in recent months, they have found themselves caught in the middle between governments hostile to new migrants and an obligation under international maritime law to save

The man, who identified himself only by his name, Victor, fearing for his safety, said he himself had already been imprisoned repeatedly in Libya and that his own brother had died there. He had no intention of returning, he said.

"We don't want to go out in Libya," he told The Associated Press. "You can come and take my dead body outside."

Julien Raickman, who is the head of the Doctors Without Borders mission in Libya, said Europe's policy of refusing to take in rescued migrants has led to a spike in deaths. Now one in five who cross perish at sea, he said.

Raickman said the Libyan coast guard has given international organizations access to the migrants, who have food and some degree of medical care now, but no toilets or other sanitary facilities. The ship's cargo of cars was peacefully unloaded, but the migrants remained unmoved.

"We're afraid that this dispute will end in violence. The people who are on board are determined. They know that they went far and could face charges for taking control of a boat," he said. "But these are people motivated by despair."



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Europe, N. Africa ministers seek to curb Libya migrant flowsEU seeks curb for Libya migrant flows

[Iran must disclose fate and location of hundreds of Ahwazi Arab prisoners: Amnesty International](#)

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Tue, 2018-11-13 23:26

LONDON: Amnesty International called on Tuesday on Iran to disclose the fate of hundreds of Ahwazi Arabs, who they say are being held without access to their families or legal representation.

The human rights group said in a report published Tuesday that it believes a number of Ahwazis have been executed in secret.

Ahwazi exiles told Amnesty that 22 men, including activist Mohammad Momeni Timas, had been killed.

The statement also said that since Sept. 24, up to 600 Ahwazi Arabs had been detained in a wave of arrests following an attack on a military parade in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province, that killed 24 people.

"If confirmed, the secret executions of these men would be not only a crime under international law but also an abhorrent violation of their right to life and a complete mockery of justice, even by the shocking standards of Iran's judicial system," Philip Luther, Amnesty International's Research and Advocacy Director for the Middle East and North Africa said.

"It is difficult to imagine that these individuals could have received a fair trial within merely a few weeks of their arrests, let alone had the opportunity to appeal death sentences." Ahmad Heydari, a 30-year-old ceramics shopkeeper arrested within a few days of the attack in Ahvaz, is also reported to have been killed.

Amnesty said his family heard no news of his fate or whereabouts until Nov. 11, when they were given his death certificate by the Ministry of Intelligence in Ahvaz, and told he had been executed on Nov. 8.

Officials said they were not handing over his body for burial and told the family they were not allowed to hold a memorial service for him.

Amnesty called on the Iranian authorities to reveal the whereabouts of all the detainees "without further delay" and "provide information about what legal procedures have taken place to date."

"While the Iranian authorities have a duty to bring to justice anyone suspected of criminal responsibility for the attack in Ahvaz in fair trials, they must not use this as an excuse to carry out a purge against members of Iran's persecuted Ahwazi Arab ethnic minority," Luther said.



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UN calls for Hodeidah ceasefire as momentum gathers for Yemen peace talks

Tue, 2018-11-13 22:11

LONDON: The United Nations' aid chief called Tuesday for a ceasefire around Hodeidah amid reports that fighting in the Yemeni city had reduced.

The appeal came amid a flurry of diplomacy to calm tensions ahead of a return to UN-backed talks to try and end the conflict.

Fighting intensified around Hodeidah last week as pro-government troops, supported by the Arab coalition, made advances around the port against the Iran-backed Houthi militia.

AP reported that an informal agreement to reduce hostilities in and around Hodeidah had taken hold in the last two days, in what could be a prelude to peace talks.

However, nearly 147 Houthi militants were killed and dozens wounded in the last 24 hours during battles with government troops, the Yemeni Ministry of Defense said on Tuesday.

The ministry said troops advanced in a number of neighborhoods, securing areas and a school and businesses from the Houthis.

Hodeidah, Yemen's main port, has become the main focus of the conflict, which started in 2014 when the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa.

With dire warnings over the humanitarian situation in the county, pressure is growing for a negotiated end to the conflict. The United States has called for a ceasefire and talks on ending the war while Britain has said it is preparing a Security Council draft resolution that would pave the way to peace talks.

On Tuesday, Mark Lowcock, the UN's under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, called for a cessation of hostilities, particularly "around all the infrastructure and facilities on which the aid operation and commercial importers rely."

The UN envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, welcomed the reduction of clashes and said it was a "crucial step" to prevent further humanitarian suffering.

"I am confident that the parties are ready to work on a political solution and am encouraged by the constructive engagement received from all sides," he said.

Sweden is ready to host peace talks as soon as possible to try and negotiate an end to the war in Yemen, Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom said on

Tuesday.

“We are preparing ourselves to, when the parties are ready, welcome them in Sweden,” she said.

Wallstrom said she hoped the negotiations could begin this month.

UN talks in Geneva to end the war, which has killed nearly 10,000 people, collapsed when the Houthis refused to attend.

*With AP and AFP



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Houthi defector says Iranian-backed militia committed 'heinous crimes' against Yemeni people
Hundreds killed in clashes in Yemen's Hodeida in last 10 days