

Iran: Halt imminent execution of juvenile offender, urge UN human rights experts

2 February 2017 – Calling on the Government of Iran to immediately halt the execution of a juvenile offender whose trial was reportedly marred with lack of due process and fair trial guarantees, a group of United Nations human rights experts have urged the authorities to adopt a moratorium on juvenile executions.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the offender, Hamid Ahmadi, was 17 years old when he was sentenced to death in 2009 for the fatal stabbing of a young man in a fight between five boys, the year before. The court relied on confessions reportedly obtained under torture and ill-treatment at a police station. Mr. Ahmadi was also denied access to a lawyer and his family.

To our knowledge, in the case of Hamid Ahmadi, the most stringent guarantees of fair trial and due process contained in international human rights instruments have been disrespected and, the allegations of torture and confessions extracted under duress were not taken into consideration nor did the lead to any investigation, the human rights experts said.

Any death sentence undertaken in contravention of a Government's international obligations, and particularly when a conviction is based on confessions extracted under torture, is unlawful and tantamount to an arbitrary execution, they stressed.

Mr. Ahmadi's execution, planned to take place by hanging on Saturday, 4 February, is the third time it has been scheduled. In the two previous instances, they were halted at the last minute.

OHCHR further noted that the Iranian Supreme Court had overturned the death sentence in 2009 due to some doubts about the testimony of several key witnesses but ultimately upheld the death sentence a year later.

Furthermore, following the adoption (in 2013) of new juvenile sentencing provisions of the Islamic Penal Code, Mr. Ahmadi was granted a retrial but was eventually re-sentenced to death by a Provincial Criminal Court in December 2015.

Unprecedented rate of scheduling and even conducting executions of juveniles

The experts also condemned that execution of juveniles continue to be scheduled and even conducted at an unprecedented rate in the country since the beginning of the year.

On 17 January, we already intervened to halt the execution of another

juvenile,” they noted.

“Since then, we have learned that two other juveniles have been hanged on 15 and 18 January. Arman Bahr Asemani and Hassan Hassanzadeh were both juveniles at the time they allegedly committed the offence for which they were sentenced to death.”

Underlining that that international standards unequivocally forbid the imposition and execution of the death penalty on persons below 18 years of age, the UN experts urged Iran to observe its international obligations by putting an end to the execution of juvenile offenders “once and for all.”

The human rights experts voicing their concern included:

Independent experts and Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva based UN Human Rights Council – an inter-governmental body responsible for promoting and protecting human rights around the world – to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[Low and middle income countries bear disproportionate burden of cervical cancer – UN agency](#)

2 February 2017 – Noting that cervical cancer kills more than 250,000 women every year and that 85 per cent of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, the United Nations health agency underlined the importance of vaccinating girls against the cancer-causing virus and screening programmes to detect and treat precancerous lesions.

The agency also stressed the need to overcome cultural norms and dispel gender biases that are challenging the effectiveness of vaccination initiatives.

“In high-income countries, widespread screening has radically reversed the trends, and cervical cancer incidence and mortality have declined sharply [with] the impact of vaccination in reducing human papillomavirus (HPV)-related diseases is already being documented,” said the UN World Health Organization (WHO)'s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in a news release.

“But in developing countries, where the burden of the disease is heaviest, cervical cancer control is often not seen as a priority within

tight health budgets, and women are not given life-saving access to adequate prevention and treatment,” it added.

While HPV vaccination has shown it can protect women from chronic infection caused by HPV16 and HPV18 (the two main types of the virus known to cause cervical cancer), vaccination programmes have not been implemented nationally in many low- and middle-income countries in Asia and Africa.

As a result, women are left vulnerable to the risk of developing cervical disease, which – given the inadequacy of screening and treatment services in many countries – is likely to go untreated.

“Unless we act rapidly, thousands of women will develop cervical cancer because they are not vaccinated,” says Rolando Herrero, head of Early Detection and Prevention Section at the IARC.

“In countries where early detection and screening are difficult to implement due to a lack of proper infrastructure, vaccination has a vital role to play in protecting women from cervical cancer,” he added, urging government commitment to implement HPV vaccination regimes.

In many countries, women are often the only breadwinners, and therefore protecting them is of huge human and economic importance
Head of IASC's Screening Group Dr. Sankaranarayanan

Also, in some regions, cultural norms and fear that “vaccination would promote sexual activity” is also a barrier in vaccinating young girls as are low schooling rates, which can limit the reach of immunization programmes, which often take place in schools.

On top of these hurdles, “gender bias” and perception that “women are a less important population to invest in” in many countries is making matters much worse.

“It is vital that governments address these barriers,” said Rengaswamy Sankaranarayanan, Special Advisor on Cancer Control and Head of IARC's Screening Group, stressing: “In many countries, women are often the only breadwinners, and therefore protecting them is of huge human and economic importance.”

Drawing attention to the need to make vaccines cheaper, particularly for the development world, to step up vaccination coverage, IARC Director Christopher Wild stressed: “Competition between potentially new and existing vaccine manufacturers is urgently needed in order to reduce costs and enable countries to better protect women against cervical cancer.”

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization. It is responsible to coordinate and conduct research on the causes of human cancer, the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, and to develop scientific strategies for cancer control. It is also involved in both epidemiological and laboratory research and dissemination of scientific

information on the disease.

[EU should seek common approach to address tragic loss of life on Mediterranean – UN agencies](#)

2 February 2017 – Ahead of a meeting of the European Council, the United Nations refugee and migration agencies have called on European leaders to take “decisive action” to save lives of migrants and refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea along its central route in hopes of a better future.

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“To better protect refugees and migrants, we need a strong European Union that is engaged beyond its borders to protect, assist and help find solutions for people in need,” said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in a joint statement today.

Such efforts, they noted, should include building capacity to save lives at sea or on land, strengthening the rule of law and fighting against criminal networks.

The agencies also expressed hope that the meeting, to be held tomorrow, will also help move towards the adoption of a common approach to migration by the European Union.

They also appealed for addressing “deplorable conditions” for refugees and migrants in Libya and called for concerted efforts to ensure that sustainable migration and asylum systems are established in the country and in neighbouring countries.

“This should include a significant expansion of opportunities for safe pathways such as resettlement and humanitarian admission, among others, to avoid dangerous journeys,” the noted, urging to shift away from migration management based on “automatic detention of refugees and migrants.”

In this context, UNHCR and IOM underlined the need for creating proper reception services and building capacity to register new arrivals, support the voluntary return of migrants, process asylum claims and offer solutions

to refugees.

Further, stating that they, together with partners on the ground, have made tremendous effort to deliver basic protection not only to refugees and migrants but also to affected local populations, which in some places are also in dire need of assistance, the UN agencies, however, expressed worry that security constraints continued to hinder their efforts.

They also outlined that given the current context, it is not appropriate to consider Libya a safe third country nor to establish extraterritorial processing of asylum-seekers in North Africa.

Expressing hope that humane solutions can be found end the suffering of thousands of migrants and refugees in Libya and across the region, the agencies added: We stand ready to assist and enhance our engagement, conditions permitting.

Last year, 2016, was the worst year in terms of people perishing while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. According to preliminary figures from UNHCR, of the 363,348 people who crossed the sea, 5,079 people almost 1 in 72 were lost (died or missing).

[Following first mission to Africa as UN chief, Guterres highlights strengthened cooperation](#)

1 February 2017 – Speaking to the media on his return from Africa and his participation at the African Union Summit, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted enhanced synergies and avenues of cooperation with the regional bloc.

“We have agreed that Agenda 2063 [the development agenda of the African Union] and the 230 Agenda [for sustainable development] will be aligned,” said Mr. Guterres at a press encounter at the United Nations Headquarters, in New York, today.

“There will be only one line of reporting, which means that there will be a total cooperation between the UN and the African Union in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the Paris Agreement [on climate change] in the years to come,” he added, noting the establishment of regular, high-level interaction between the two organizations.

The Secretary-General further informed the media on the establishment of a mechanism of cooperation between Intergovernmental Authority for Development – a subregional organization in Africa that includes Djibouti, Ethiopia,

Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda as members – the African Union and the UN to “do everything possible” to avoid deterioration of the situation in South Sudan and to bring it back on a better track for peace.

“We will be clearly working together with the same voice, in order to make sure that the national dialogue that will be launched in South Sudan is truly inclusive, including all the key elements of the opposition,” noted Mr. Guterres.

He also said that a full agreement was reached with Kenya in order for it to participate in the Regional Protection Force in South Sudan.

The UN chief also spoke of his meeting with the Heads of State of Mali, Chad, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger on moving the political process forward and addressing complex security and terrorism challenges.

He also expressed hope for progress regarding the situation in Burundi.

Further, underscoring the importance of subregional and regional unity, as evidenced in the resolution of the political crisis in the Gambia, the Secretary-General said: “When the neighbours of a country are together, when [ECOWAS] is united and the African Union is united, then it is possible for the Security Council to decide; it is possible for action to be taken, and it is possible for democracy, human rights, and the freedom of peoples to be defended.”

Recalling the potential that African continent presents, he said that the momentum of recent successes to make sure that the continent is able to achieve sustainable and inclusive developments, knowing that that is also the best way to prevent the conflicts that, unfortunately, have created so much suffering there.

Think of those fleeing Syria and elsewhere not with fear but with open arms and open heart – UN agency chief

1 February 2017 – Expressing shock at the scale of the devastation in war-ravaged city of Aleppo, the top United Nations refugee official today made an impassioned plea for the world to stand in solidarity with those suffering from the effects of conflict there in Syria, as well as in other places such as Iraq, Somalia and Yemen.

“There are people here, some of them are returning to these ruins, who need help, immediate help. They are cold, they are hungry, they need to work to

earn some money, they need the elementary things in life in this very ancient city," said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, presently in Aleppo as part of his mission to Syria.

Stating that despite following the crisis closely, nothing prepared him for immensity of the destruction, and the sights in the war-torn country will weigh very heavily on the conscience of the world for generations.

"When you see children's clothes hanging out of windows, kitchens cut in half by shells and rockets, the real lives of people interrupted by war as it was happening [...] You drive for miles and miles you see destroyed civilian houses, destroyed schools, destroyed hospitals. Everything has been ruined," he added.

Drawing attention to the plight of those who fled such places, he stressed: "This is what refugees from Syria, who are now denied entry [to the United States], have fled from."

"And it is not just here in Aleppo, although this is massive. Refugees from Somalia, refugees from Yemen, refugees from Iraq – they all flee from destruction like this, from devastation like this."

Appealing to the global community for accelerated and immediate for humanitarian assistance, High Commissioner Grandi said: "All the Syrian people need help. We cannot abandon them because the crisis is not over."

"How can we turn them back? How can we not consider giving them protection? At least, for the time while the conflict is continuing, this is what they are escaping from – millions of them," he said, adding: "The world has to go back to solidarity, has to think again of these people – not with fear, not with suspicion, but with open arms, with an open mind, with an open heart."