

UN rights chief urges Iran to halt executions of juveniles on death row

Expressing concern over a “surge” in the number of juvenile offenders being executed in Iran, the United Nations top human rights official called on the country to abide by its obligations under international law and immediately halt all executions of people sentenced to death for crimes committed when they were under the age of eighteen.

“The execution of juvenile offenders is unequivocally prohibited under international law, regardless of the circumstances and nature of the crime committed,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said in a [news release](#) Friday.

“The imposition of the death penalty on people who committed crimes when they were under 18 is in clear violation of Iran’s obligations under two international treaties that it has ratified and is obliged to uphold – namely the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).”

[According](#) to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in January, three people – two male and one female – were executed for crimes they committed when they were 15 or 16 years old. A fourth juvenile offender, who was believed to be on the point of being executed on Wednesday, has reportedly received a temporary reprieve of two months.

In addition, a number of other juvenile offenders are also believed to be in danger of imminent execution, with a total of some 80 such individuals reported to be currently on death row, after being sentenced to death for crimes they committed when they were under eighteen.

“I am sad to say that Iran violates this absolute prohibition under international human rights law far more often than any other State,” expressed the UN rights chief, stressing that no other State “comes even remotely close” to the total number of juveniles who have been executed in Iran over the past couple of decades.

Mr. Zeid also said that Iran assigns criminal responsibility to girls as young as nine years old, whereas boys are not considered criminally responsible until they reach the age of 15.

This discrepancy between the two genders is “wholly unjustifiable on every level,” he stressed, adding that the application of the death penalty to any person, female or male, under 18 is “illegal and unacceptable.”

Some partial improvements in application of death penalty in

drugs crime

Also in the release, the High Commissioner noted that there had been some “partial” improvements in relation to other aspects of the application of the death penalty in Iran, most notably a bill amending the drug-trafficking law that was approved by the Guardian Council in October 2017.

As a result of the amendment, some drug offences that were previously punishable by the death penalty are now subject to a prison term, although the mandatory death sentence is retained for a wide range of drug-related offences.

According to OHCHR, the amendment provides for retroactive applicability, which means that all people currently on death row for drug-related offences which are no longer punishable by the death penalty should see their sentence commuted.

In this context, Mr. Zeid urged Iran to swiftly establish the modalities for the review of all individual cases sentenced to death under the drug-trafficking law, following the principles of transparency, due process and to ensure effective legal representation of all those sentenced.

At present, there are about 5,300 inmates on death row for drugs crimes in the country.