

Press release

Iran: arbitrary death sentences against prisoners of conscience

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Paris, 29 June 2007 - The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI) express their deep concern at the arbitrary detention and sentencing of Ayatollah Mohammad Hossein Kazemeini Boroujerdi and a group of his followers in the Islamic Republic of Iran. According to information received, Ayatollah Kazemeini Boroujerdi was tried before the Special Clerical Court, in which he was denied legal counsel, and sentenced to death on June 10, 2007.

Ayatollah Kazemeini Boroujerdi was arrested on October 8, 2006 and has been imprisoned since then. Hundreds of his followers were arrested in the weeks preceding his arrest, but most of them were later released. For much of the nine months of his imprisonment, Ayatollah Kazemeini Boroujerdi was reportedly not informed of the charges against him, while also being denied access to legal counsel. Despite the fact that Iranian human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi and the Center for Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) have offered to represent Ayatollah Kazemeini Boroujerdi, he has been denied his right to contact a lawyer, as the Special Clerical Court only accepts the legal credentials of clergy members. The denial of this fundamental human right is a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party.

Indeed, the Special Clerical Court itself stands outside of the legal framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as it is not provided for by any legislation. Thus, Kazemeini Boroujerdi's imprisonment, trial, and sentencing, while all in contravention of international human rights law, also violate Iranian law. Ayatollah Kazemeini Boroujerdi espouses the belief that religion and politics should be separate, and thus calls into question the foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The sentences pronounced against Ayatollah Kazemeini Boroujerdi and his followers are thus in violation of the freedom of opinion, making them prisoners of conscience.

In addition to being denied any legal counsel and information about the charges brought against him, Ayatollah Kazemeini Boroujerdi has been denied any contact with his family, despite the fact that his mother reportedly fell ill and died during his imprisonment. At the same time, he is reportedly suffering from Parkinson's disease, and has been denied medical treatment. According to the information available, Ayatollah

Kazemeini Boroujerdi, forced to defend himself before the Special Clerical Court, was too ill to stand upright and had trouble speaking clearly. After unfair and seemingly arbitrary proceedings, Kazemeini and a reported 17 others were sentenced to death. The date of their executions remains unknown.

Due to the lack of transparency of the Iranian judiciary, especially regarding the Special Clerical Court, it is impossible to obtain confirmation of this information; in a case involving the execution of 18 people for their religious and political beliefs, this is particularly alarming and in complete violation of the Iranian government's international obligations.

FIDH and LDDHI reiterate their concern for the physical health and psychological integrity of Ayatollah Kazemeini Boroujerdi and his followers, as well as its dismay at their treatment, notably their imprisonment without medical attention or legal support for nine months, the absence of any representation before an illegal court and their sentencing to death for their opinions. Since the Special Clerical Court is not provided for in Iranian law and the fair trial guarantees have been blatantly violated, any attempt to carry out the sentences will amount to arbitrary execution. FIDH and LDDHI call on the Iranian authorities to reverse all relevant sentences immediately and release these prisoners of conscience without delay, in respect of the international human rights obligations binding upon the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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