



Stop the Execution of Seven Members of Iran's Ethnic Minorities



Zaniar and Loghman Moradi

Iran has been the world's Number Two executioner (after China) for several years running. At least 500 people were executed in 2012. The majority of those executed were convicted of drug offenses. However dozens of people awaiting execution have been convicted of politically motivated crimes, often following unfair trials where no real evidence was presented that could tie them to specific crimes. Furthermore, many of them are members of Iran's ethnic minorities.

Five young Ahwazi (ethnic Arab) Iranian men: Mohammad Ali Amouri, Sayed Jaber Alboshoka and his brother Sayed Mokhtar Alboshoka, Hashem Sha'bani Amouri (also known as Hashem Shabaninejad), and Hadi Rashidi founded an organization called Al-Hiwar ("Dialogue" in Arabic), a scientific and cultural institute registered during the administration of Iran's former President Mohammad Khatami. Al-Hiwar organizes seminars, educational and art classes, and poetry recitals. However the government banned the organization in 2005 in the wake of unrest in Khuzestan, the Arabic-speaking province in southwestern Iran. All were educated—Hadi Rashidi was a chemistry teacher while Hashem Sha'bani Amouri taught Arabic literature.

They were all sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court after an unfair trial in July 2012, on vaguely worded charges related to national security including "gathering and colluding against state security," "spreading propaganda against the system," "enmity against God," (*moharebeh*) and "corruption on earth," (*ifsad fil-arz*). The government alleged that they were members of an armed Arab terrorist group responsible for shooting at several government employees. Their prosecution may be related to demonstrations that occurred in Khuzestan in 2011 and 2012; the men's involvement in an Arabic cultural organization that promoted ethnic pride and awareness may have made the five men targets. No recognizable evidence was presented that could connect them with any specific crimes.

The death sentences against the five men were confirmed by Iran's Supreme Court on 9 January 2013. They could be hanged at any time. In an ominous development, On 18 January, authorities informed their families that the five men had been transferred out of Karoun prison where they had been held. Their whereabouts are unknown but such a transfer could suggest that their execution is imminent.

The men were subjected to gruesome torture in order to force them to confess to involvement in attacks on government officials on Iranian state-controlled television. Sayed Jaber Alboshoka's jaw and teeth were broken during his detention while Intelligence Ministry agents reportedly forced Hashem Sha'bani Amouri to confess to crimes he had not committed by pouring boiling water on him. Hashem Sha'bani Amouri and Hadi Rashidi were featured in a program aired by Press TV in December 2011. Hashem Sha'bani said he was a "member of the "Popular Resistance" (al-Moghavema al- Sha'bia)" which he said had ties to Saddam Hussein and Mu'ammarr al-Gaddafi, the former leaders of Iraq and Libya. Hadi Rashidi was described as "the leader of the military wing of al-Moghavema al-Sha'bia" and said he had participated in an attack against a house containing four government officials. Iranian courts frequently accept "confessions" extracted under duress as evidence.

While anyone in detention in Iran is subject to suffer severe torture—such as occurred in the tragic case of young blogger Sahar Beheshti who was apparently tortured to death in custody—members of ethnic minorities are at particular risk of being subjected to brutal torture while being detained for security-related offenses.

Zaniar and Loghman Moradi are ethnic Kurds who were sentenced to death in December 2010 for enmity against God (*moharebeh*) and the murder of the son of a cleric. The previous month their "confessions" were broadcast by Press TV. After their conviction, they wrote a letter maintaining that they were forced to confess after being subjected to torture consisting of beatings, including on the sexual organs, sleep deprivation, and threats of sexual assault, including rape.

Needless to say the coerced confessions compromised the fairness of their trial, as it did the trial of the five Ahwazi Arab men. The Iranian government frequently targets members of ethnic and linguistic minorities who engage in peaceful activities to promote cultural awareness, accusing them of involvement in heinous security crimes such as involvement in "terrorist acts" or membership in armed groups. At least 40 political prisoners are awaiting executions for such offenses and at least 20 of them are ethnic Kurds. Their convictions are not based on actual evidence but rather on confessions that are extracted from them as a result of brutal torture.

Take Action:

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Your Excellency:

I am writing to you to express my deep concern about the death sentences against seven men, all members of Iranian ethnic minorities. These men could be executed at any time. They were all sentenced after unfair trials in Revolutionary Courts and were reportedly subjected to torture to force them to make confessions aired on state-controlled television.

Five Ahwazi men: Mohammad Ali Amouri, Sayed Jaber Alboshoka, his brother Sayed Mokhtar Alboshoka, Hashem Sha'bani Amouri (also known as Hashem Shabaninejad), and Hadi Rashidi were sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court after an unfair trial in July 2012, on vaguely worded charges related to national security including "gathering and colluding against state security," "spreading propaganda against the system," "enmity against God," (*moharebeh*) and "corruption on earth," (*ifsad fil-*

arz). The government alleged that they were members of an armed Arab terrorist group responsible for shooting at several government employees. Their sentences were confirmed on 9 January 2013.

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I urge you to order that the death sentences against the seven men be overturned. I also urge that they be given fair trials that adhere to international standards, and that any confessions extracted under duress be inadmissible. I further urge you to order an investigation into the reports that the men were tortured, and that those found responsible should be punished.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,