Beat: Miscellaneous

UN calls on Iran to halt executions after 40 hanged

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USPA News - United Nations (UN) rights experts on Wednesday called on the Iranian government to immediately halt a sudden surge in executions, with at least 40 people hanged in the first two weeks of this year alone. It follows more than 600 executions last year.

"We are dismayed at the continued application of the death penalty with alarming frequency by the authorities, despite repeated calls for Iran to establish a moratorium on executions," said Ahmed Shaheed, the UN`s Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Iran, calling on the Iranian government to stop the "cruel, inhuman and degrading" executions. Iranian authorities acknowledged 21 prisoners were hanged in the first two weeks of January, but sources informed Amnesty International of at least 19 additional executions during the same period. It follows 625 executions in 2013, the majority for alleged drug offenses, Moharabeh ("enmity against God"), or acting against national security. "It is deeply concerning that the Government proceeds with executions for crimes that do not meet the threshold of the `most serious crimes` as required by international law, and when serious concerns remain about due process rights," said Christof Heyns, the UN`s Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Heyns added: "I would like to recall once again that, if the death penalty is to be used at all in the countries which have not yet abolished it, international law requires that it may be imposed only after proceedings that met the highest level of respect of fair trial and due process standards. The `most serious crimes` provision further requires that it is imposed only for the offence of intentional killing." Shaheed also raised alarm at the recent pace of executions of political activists and individuals from ethnic minority groups, and urged the Iranian government to stop the executions and revisit the cases of prisoners on death row. "The persistent execution of individuals for exercising their rights to freedom of assembly, association, and affiliation to minority groups contravenes universally accepted human rights principles and norms," he added. Murder, rape and drug trafficking are among the crimes which are punishable by death in Iran. Of the more than 600 people believed to have been executed in Iran in 2011, Amnesty International said at least 488 of them were executed for alleged drug offenses, a nearly threefold increase from the 2009 figures. Iran has the fourth highest rate of drug-related deaths in the world, at 91 per 1 million people aged 15-64, and is a major international transit route for drug smuggling. In recent years, Iran has received international assistance, including from several European countries and the United Nations, to help stem the flow of drugs across its borders. The Iranian government claims more than 4,000 security personnel have been killed fighting drug traffickers since Iran`s 1979 Islamic revolution. But while the UN has praised Iran`s counter-narcotics work, the country has failed to mention the increasing application of the death penalty for drugs offenses. The London-based rights group Amnesty International has said that members of marginalized groups, particularly Afghan citizens, are most at risk of execution for drugs offenses. There are as many as 4,000 Afghan nationals on death row for drugs offenses, the organization estimates. According to human rights groups, including Amnesty International, trials in Iran often fail to meet international standards of fairness. Proceedings, particularly those held outside of the Iranian capital of Tehran, are often summary, lasting only a few minutes. Mass trials also take place on some occasions.

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