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OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Iraq: Wave of mass executions must stop, trials are unfair - UN experts

GENEVA (20 November 2020) – UN human rights experts* expressed alarm at reports that some 50 prisoners convicted of terrorism-related crimes in Iraq face execution on Monday, and urged the Government to immediately halt all mass executions saying they had serious concerns about the conduct of the trials and the extraction of confessions under torture.

Since October 2020, the Iraqi authorities have reportedly initiated a wave of executions of prisoners on death row at the Nasiriyah central prison (also known as al-Hoot prison). Twenty-one were executed during October, followed by another 21 on 16 November alone, in what seems to be part of a larger plan to execute all prisoners on death row.

“We strongly urge the Iraqi Government to respect its international legal obligations and to immediately halt further plans to execute prisoners,” the experts said.

A reported 4,000 prisoners, most of them charged with terrorism offences, are on death row in Iraq. The UN experts said hundreds of deaths were now imminent after their execution orders had been signed-off.

“Trials under the Anti-Terrorism Law have been marked with alarming irregularities,” the UN experts said. “Defendants have frequently been denied the most basic right to an adequate defence and their allegations of torture and ill-treatment during interrogations have not been investigated.”

The Iraqi Anti-Terrorism Law no.13 of 2005 raises serious human rights concerns, including the vague and overly broad definition of terrorism. Under the law, an individual can face trial on terrorism charges and can be sentenced to death for a non-violent crime committed without intent to terrorize the population. Furthermore, when rendering punishment, no distinction is made between different levels of participation, involvement and responsibility in terrorist acts and no assessment is made based on the severity of the act.

“Any death sentence carried out following an unfair trial or on the basis of an ambiguous law, amounts to an arbitrary deprivation of life,” the experts said. “When carried out on a widespread and systematic basis, arbitrary executions may well amount to crimes against humanity and may entail universal criminal responsibility for any official involved in such acts.”

ENDS

* *The experts: Mr. Nils Melzer, [Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#); Fionnuala Ni Aoláin, [Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism](#); Ms. Agnes Callamard, [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#).*

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ecoi.net summary:

UN human rights experts
concerned as about 50 prisoners
convicted of terrorism-related
charges are to be executed on 23
November 2020; 42 prisoners have
been executed since October 2020

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