

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Iraq must commute the death sentence of former MP

Amnesty International has today urged the Iraqi authorities to commute the death sentence imposed against former member of the Council of Representatives (Parliament) Ahmed al-'Alwani after a trial marred with irregularities.

The Central Criminal Court of Iraq (CCCI) in Baghdad sentenced Ahmed al-'Alwani to death on 23 November for the killing of two soldiers after having been charged under Article 4 of the 2005 Anti-Terrorism Law for an "assault on military assets and killing and injuring security forces for terrorist ends". He was sentenced to life imprisonment in three other cases relating to the same incident. He has 30 days to appeal his sentences.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned that Ahmed al-'Alwani, a prominent member of al-'Iraqiya Bloc, a secular political party, and from the predominantly Sunni Muslim al-Anbar, was sentenced to death after a trial marred with irregularities. Since his arrest on 28 December 2013 he has been denied access to his lawyer or family. In court, his former lawyer, Badi'e 'Arif, was not allowed to cross-examine prosecution witnesses or ask questions as they were deemed 'not productive' by the court. The court refused to record his questions in the minutes of the hearing.

Badi'e 'Arif was arrested in March 2014 before a planned meeting with officials of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). He was blindfolded for twelve hours and questioned about the motives for defending Ahmed al-'Alwani. Despite calls by Amnesty International urging the government to stop intimidation against [Badi'e 'Arif](#) earlier in May, he said he was forced to withdraw from the case after he was threatened with arrest by the court's presiding judge. Al-'Alwani was then represented by another lawyer.

The death sentence against Ahmed al-'Alwani has caused criticism, including from amongst Sunni tribal leaders in the Abu-'Alwan tribe, to which the MP belongs, and which is currently fighting the armed group calling itself the Islamic State (IS) alongside the government forces in Ramadi.

Amnesty International recognizes the Iraqi government's responsibility to bring perpetrators of crimes to justice, but it must be done in trials that conform to international standards and without resort to the death penalty. Under international standards, trials for crimes carrying the death penalty must comply with the most rigorous internationally recognized standards for fair trial. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and under all circumstances and considers it to be the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Amnesty International urges the Iraqi government to commute the death sentence against Ahmed al-'Alwani. Iraq is one of the leading executioners in the world. In the past years most of those sentenced to death and executed have been sentenced in terrorism related offences, often after grossly unfair trials.

Since the death penalty was reinstated in August 2004, at least 689 people have been executed, with 169 executed in 2013 alone, the highest number of people executed since 2004. Meanwhile, hundreds of prisoners are currently held on death row.

Background

Ahmed al-'Alwani was arrested on 28 December 2013 when security forces exchanged gun fire with his private security guards when they reportedly came to arrest his brother, 'Ali al-'Alwani, who was wanted together with others after security forces dispersed a year-long Sunni protest in Ramadi.

Ahmed al-'Alwani was a leading figure and supporter of a protest camp in Ramadi. The protest was violently dispersed by the Iraqi security forces on the grounds that it became a nest for al-Qa'ida militants. This sparked fighting that extended to Fallujah early in the year. The IS took control of Fallujah early in January and has since then controlled most parts of the Anbar province.