

IRAN: End stoning campaign

Background Information



“We have to work to eradicate stoning wherever it happens in the world: it is a brutal and inhuman act... through which the authorities are attempting to control society [and stop] people enjoying their right to a private life”

Shadi Sadr, Iranian lawyer, anti-stoning campaigner and women's rights activist

Stoning is purposefully designed to maximise suffering and the Iranian Penal Code describes in chillingly clinical detail exactly how a person should be stoned to death.

Bound, wrapped in shrouds and buried in a pit with head and shoulders above ground, victims are likely to survive for between 20 minutes and two hours from when the first stone thrown draws blood.

In 2002, a moratorium was declared on stoning in Iran. In 2009, the Legal and Judicial affairs Committee recommended that stoning be removed from the Iranian Penal Code. And yet still this practice continues. Amnesty International knows of at least six people who have been stoned to death since 2002.

A further 14 individuals – four men and ten women – are at risk of death by stoning in Iran right now, although several cases are still under review and alternative sentences may be imposed. One of these is Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, whose case has generated a great deal of international attention and who remains at risk.

Those sentenced to death are frequently poor or otherwise marginalised from society. Most of those sentenced to death are women for the simple reason that they are disadvantaged in the criminal justice system, and face wide-ranging discrimination in law, particularly in regard to marriage and divorce. However, in recent years more men are known to have been stoned to death than women.

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Amnesty International has documented at least 77 stonings, but believes the true figure may well be higher, particularly as it was not able to record figures for all the years between 1979 and 1984.

Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The government is therefore legally bound to observe the provisions of this treaty and to ensure that they are fully reflected in the country's laws and practices. Death by stoning violates Articles 6 (right to life) and 7 (prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) of the Covenant.

Further information on the death penalty in Iran

Iran comes second only to China in the number of executions carried out annually. The most common method of execution is hanging, and hundreds of men, women and children are put to death in this way every year. Iran is one of the few countries that continue to execute juvenile offenders – which is strictly prohibited under international law, it is also one of the few countries that continues to carry out public executions.

Whilst Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, the aim of this campaign is to get stoning removed as a punishment from the Iranian Penal Code. This is a matter already under discussion in Iran, and for which there is some significant prospect of success.