

News and Current Events :: Iran Proposes Death Penalty for leaving Islam

Iran Proposes Death Penalty for leaving Islam - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2008/9/16 12:56

The Iranian parliament is reviewing a new law that would impose a death penalty on citizens who leave Islam, a human rights group alerted recently.

In the past, the death penalty for apostasy was one of many possible punishments, including imprisonment and hard labor, for renouncing Islam. But the new law proposes to make death the sentence for all apostates, according to the Institute on Religion and Public Policy (IRPP).

“This is not something new, they just want to be more harsh towards those who are leaving Islam,” an Iranian pastor told the persecution watchdog Compass.

The death sentence was approved by the Iranian Cabinet a month ago, and appears to have the needed parliamentary support to pass, according to an Iranian Christian.

Many victims of the “apostasy” law are Muslims who convert to Christianity, but victims also include liberal thinkers and members of Iran’s Baha’i religious minority.

“The draft penal code is gross violation of fundamental and human rights by a regime that has repeatedly abused religious and other minorities,” said IRPP president Joseph K. Grieboski. “This is simply another legislative attempt on the part of the Iranian regime to persecute religious minorities in the country and around the globe.”

No converts to Christianity have been convicted of “apostasy” since 1994, after the case of a convert garnered international attention. But in the years that followed, converts and those working with converts have been brutally murdered. Local believers suspect the government to have played a role in the killings.

“They began assassinating pastors and Christian workers,” said an Iranian pastor, who requested anonymity, to Compass. “Legally, they did not take them to court, but they just killed them and said that they hanged themselves and gave some other excuses.”

In 1994, Bishop Haik Hovsepian of Iran was brutally murdered and found secretly buried in a Muslim graveyard with 26 stab wounds after defending a Christian convert. The convert, Mehdi Dibaj, had already served 10 years in prison, but was still set to be executed simply for the crime of leaving Islam.

Hovsepian had garnered support from the United Nations, the U.S. Congress, and other global bodies to pressure Iran to release the convert. After successfully helping to free the convert, Hovsepian soon disappeared and was later found dead. The convert was also secretly murdered after his release.

“A careful review of the draft clearly shows that it is nothing more than a legislative tool to consolidate power around the regime and extend its religious tyranny globally,” Grieboski commented. “Such legislation will not be accepted by the international community and that message must resoundingly be sent to Tehran.”

Some parts of the draft indicate that both men and women can be executed for apostasy. Other sections seem to limit the death penalty to males. Female “apostates” appear to instead face life imprisonment or “hardship.”

Besides apostasy, other crimes that result in capital punishment include repeated drunkenness, rape, murder, armed robbery, drug trafficking, adultery and male homosexuality in Iran.

At least 22 people were convicted and executed in January, the BBC reported.

Iran is ranked the third worst persecutor of Christians in the world, according to the Open Doors USA world watch list.

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