

## Iran: Gitmos and gallows

Sunday 15 November 2009, by [SULEHRIA Farooq](#) (Date first published: 14 November 2009).

A 27-year-old left-wing Kurdish activist, Ehsan Fatahiyan, was executed in Iran on Novemebr 11.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of activists in many countries desperately campaigned to save his life. But in vain.

Initially arrested for being *Mohareb* (enemy of Allah), eighteen months ago, Fatahiyan was sentenced to prison for ten years. On appeal against imprisonment, he was handed down a death sentence. According to Fatahiyan's family, he was sentenced to death because the regime considered him one of the key figures behind the recent anti-regime uprising in the city of Kamyaran.

Iran like its arch rivals Saudi Arabia and the USA, is notorious for an alarmingly high number of capital punishments. According to Amnesty International, 346 people were hanged in Iran last year. Homosexuality, drug trafficking, murder, sodomy, apostasy, all are liable to capital punishment. Often regime's dissidents are sent to gallows on charges of apostasy. Hence, Fatahiyan's case was not novel. According to an appeal circulated by his supporters campaigning to save his life, he was during his solitary confinement subjected to severe torture in order to obtain a false confession. However, according to his friends, even under those harsh circumstances Fatahiyan did not confess to carrying arms or being involved in an armed struggle.

Fatahiyan maintained that he never carried arms and had never been involved in armed struggle. He himself believed his death sentence had political reasons.

Fatahiyan execution signifies the latest wave of repression to quell the movement that caught hold of Iran following June-12 rigged elections. According to Human Rights Watch, since September 30, four death sentences have been awarded.

On October 10, the judiciary announced that two men identified only by their initials, M.Z. and A.P., had been sentenced to death. Both were members of the KInddam Assembly of Iran, a group that wants to restore the monarchy. "M.Z." is believed to be Mohamad Ali Zamani who was arrested before the June 12 election. His name is included in the group indictment of post-election arrests. Another man, with the initials N.A., was sentenced to death for being a member of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO), a dissident group largely operating from exile.

Arbitrary arrests of political activists have become a routine. Online media outlets like akhbar-rooz.com and we-change.org have been sending SOS and documenting such arrests. Among arrested activists, women constitute a sizeable majority. Most of these women activists----aged between 20 to 30---- have been detained at notorious Khorin Waramin prison. Of late, unfortunate news about sexual assaults on imprisoned activists have also been making rounds. The Human Rights Watch has documented at least three such cases. A harsh media censorship, particularly ban on international media organisations, is making it difficult for the news as well as truth to escape Iranian borders.