

# URGENT ACTION

## Four Kurdish men at grave risk of execution

Anwar Khezri, Farhad Salimi, Kamran Sheikheh and Khosrow Basharat, all from Iran's Kurdish Sunni minority, are at grave risk of execution in Ghezel Hesar prison, Alborz province, amid an ongoing spike in executions across the country and following the arbitrary executions of three other Iranian Kurdish men between November 2023 and January 2024, who were tried in the same case. The seven men were convicted of "corruption on earth" (*efsad-e fel-arz*) and sentenced to death in a grossly unfair trial marred by allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

*Head of judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei*

*c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium*

*Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,*

*I am deeply concerned that Iranian Sunni Kurdish men **Anwar Khezri, Farhad Salimi, Kamran Sheikheh and Khosrow Basharat** are at grave risk of execution in Ghezel Hesar prison, Karaj, Alborz province, following the arbitrary executions of **Ghasem Abesteh** on 5 November 2023, **Ayoub Karimi** on 29 November 2023 and **Davoud Abdollahi** on 2 January 2024, who were sentenced to death in the same case. According to an informed source, prison authorities subjected Ghasem Abesteh to torture and other ill-treatment, resulting in a broken nose, shortly before executing him. According to media reports, officials conditioned handing over Davoud Abdollahi's and Ayoub Karimi's bodies to their families on them not publicizing their loved ones' executions. Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran convicted Anwar Khezri, Ayoub Karimi, Davoud Abdollahi, Farhad Salimi, Ghasem Abesteh, Kamran Sheikheh and Khosrow Basharat of "corruption on earth" (*efsad-e fel-arz*) and national security offences, and sentenced them to death following a grossly unfair trial around June 2018, during which the presiding judge barred their lawyer from speaking. Despite serious fair trial violations, on 3 February 2020, Branch 41 of the Supreme Court upheld their convictions and death sentences and, in early September 2020, Branch 38 of the Supreme Court rejected their request for retrial. In August 2023, the men were transferred from Raja'i Shahr prison, Alborz province, to Ghezel Hesar prison, where they are held in a high security wing of the prison.*

*Following their arrests between early December 2009 and late January 2010 in West Azerbaijan province, northwest Iran, the seven men were taken to a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility in Urumieh, West Azerbaijan province, and accused of membership in "Salafist groups", which they all denied. Anwar Khezri, Kamran Sheikheh and Khosrow Basharat were also later accused of fatally hitting a man by a car – they deny involvement in his death. Anwar Khezri, Khosrow Basharat and Farhad Salimi wrote in open letters that Ministry of Intelligence agents repeatedly subjected them to torture during interrogations and as a result they were forced to make "confessions". Reported methods of torture included repeated beatings, suspension from the ceiling, mock executions, sleep deprivation and psychological torture.*

*I urge you to immediately halt any plans to execute Anwar Khezri, Farhad Salimi, Kamran Sheikheh and Khosrow Basharat, quash their convictions and death sentences, and grant them fair retrials in proceedings in line with international fair trial standards without recourse to the death penalty and excluding coerced "confessions". I also urge you to ensure that they are protected from further torture and other ill-treatment and their torture allegations investigated, bringing anyone found responsible to justice in fair trials. Finally, immediately establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.*

*Yours sincerely*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In his open letter written in February 2020 to the then Head of the Judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, Anwar Khezri outlined the multiple serious human rights violations to which he was subjected by Ministry of Intelligence agents, judges and prison authorities. He wrote that he had attempted suicide after being subjected to 56 days of torture following his arrest, including repeated beatings to his chest, head and soles of his feet in a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility – to which he referred as a “torture chamber”. After receiving blood transfusions in hospital for blood loss related to his suicide attempt, agents returned him to prison the next day against medical advice. He said he was then forced to sign “confessions” after his torture resumed. He described being taken out of his cell while blindfolded and handcuffed and subjected to a mock execution in August 2017. According to an informed source, following arrest, Khosrow Basharat was repeatedly beaten with electric cables while tied to a bed, suspended by his cuffed hands from the ceiling for prolonged periods, and forced to listen to the screams of what sounded like others being tortured at night, which led to sleep deprivation and severe distress. After three weeks of such torture, he was forced to sign a pre-written “confession”. In an open letter from February 2020, Farhad Salimi wrote that around this time he was repeatedly put under pressure to make forced “confessions” to incriminate himself and to dismiss the lawyer of his own choosing. No investigations are known to have been conducted into the men’s claims of torture.

Following their arrests, the seven men were held separately in a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility in Urumieh before being transferred to prisons in West Azerbaijan province. After spending over six years in pre-trial detention, they were first sentenced to death in late May 2016 for “corruption on earth” by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran. The Court also convicted them of national security offences for their alleged “membership in Salafist groups”, which Ministry of Intelligence agents alleged included al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Kurdish opposition groups. The trial was grossly unfair and consisted of one hearing in mid-March 2016 that lasted just five minutes. On appeal to Branch 41 of the Supreme Court, their sentences and convictions were overturned around March 2017 and the Court remanded their cases to Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran for re-trial. In mid-2018, Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran convicted all seven men of “corruption on earth” and sentenced them to death. On 3 February 2020, on appeal, Branch 41 of the Supreme Court upheld their convictions and sentences. On 19 September 2017, Anwar Khezri, Kamran Sheikheh and Khosrow Basharat were transferred from Raja’i Shahr prison to Urumieh prison to stand trial in a separate case before a criminal court in Urumieh for murder. In early July 2018, this court convicted Kamran Sheikheh of murder and sentenced him to death as well as to 10 years’ imprisonment, while Anwar Khezri and Khosrow Basharat were convicted of complicity to murder and sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment.

Ghasem Abesteh’s, Ayoub Karimi’s and Davoud Abdollahi’s arbitrary executions come amid an alarming execution spree by the Iranian authorities in recent months. In November 2023 alone, the authorities executed at least 115 people or almost double the number of executions they carried out in November 2022. This spike comes against the backdrop of the Iranian authorities’ intensified use of the death penalty in 2023, including as a tool of repression against members of oppressed minorities, protesters and dissidents.

Ethnic minorities in Iran, including Kurds, Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis and Turkmen face discrimination which curtails their access to education, employment and political office. Ethnic minorities, including Kurds, are also disproportionately affected by death sentences imposed for vague charges such as “corruption on earth” and also being executed in secret with the authorities then refusing to return their bodies for burial to their families. Additionally, religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims, Baha’is, Christians, Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, and Yaresan suffer discrimination in law and practice, including in access to education, employment, child adoption, political office and places of worship. Authorities also subject religious minorities to arbitrary detention, unjust prosecutions, torture and other ill-treatment for professing or practising their faith. On 30 June 2022, Tehran’s Prosecutor, Ali Salehi, visited Raja’i Shahr prison, where the seven men were imprisoned at the time. According to Kurdish Human Rights News, he stated during the visit that “Sunni people don’t deserve the right to life in Iran”, prompting 22 Sunni prisoners to go on hunger strike in protest at his remark.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Amnesty International has consistently called on all states that retain the death penalty, including Iran, to establish an official moratorium on executions, with a view to completely abolishing the death penalty.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Persian, English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 8 March 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Anwar Khezri, Farhad Salimi, Kamran Sheikheh and Khosrow Basharat (all are he, him)