

Summary of the annual report on the death penalty in Iran- 2016

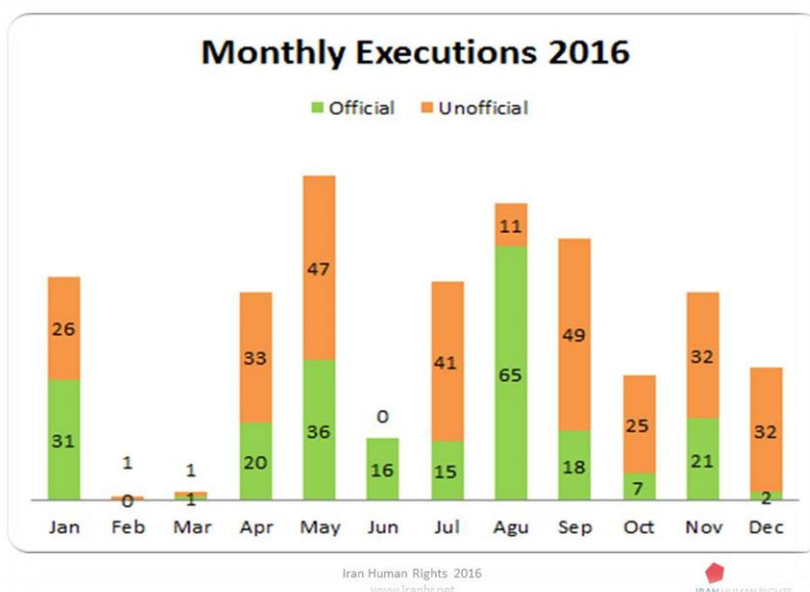
The 9th annual report of Iran Human Rights (IHR) on the death penalty gives an assessment and analysis of death penalty trends in 2016 in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Annual 2016 Report at a Glance

- 530 people were executed in 2016 (45% decrease from 2015)
- 232 executions (44%) were announced by official sources
- 64% of the death sentences carried out in 2016 were issued by the Revolution Courts
- 296 (56%) were executed for drug-related charges
- 33 executions were conducted in public spaces
- At least 5 juvenile offenders were among those executed
- At least 9 women were executed
- 142 were executed for murder
- 251 of those sentenced to death were forgiven by the families of the murder victims

Executions trends in 2016

The 9th annual report on the death penalty in Iran shows that the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) executed at least 530 people in 2016. Although this number represents a significant decrease compared to the annual number of executions in the last five years, **in 2016 IRI remains the world's number one executioner *per capita* with an average of more than one execution per day.**



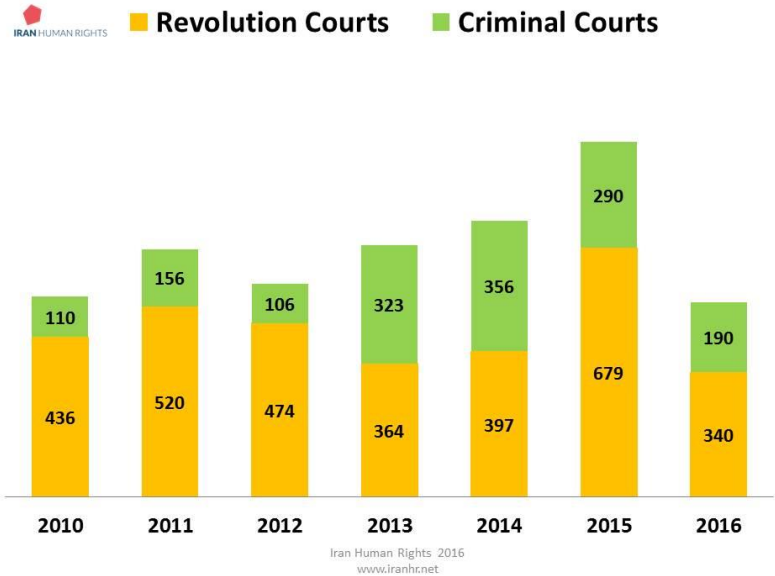
There is little, if any, indication that the significant decrease in the number of executions is due to a change in policy of IRI. Iran Human Rights (IHR) has reported at least 140 executions since the beginning of 2017, suggesting that even if the decrease in 2016 executions resulted from a political decision, it must have been temporary. Indeed, there was only one execution reported in the months of February and March 2016, coinciding with the two rounds of the Parliamentary elections and the Iranian new year Nowrouz. IHR has previously published a report showing that the execution numbers are low during the two weeks before elections.

Drug-related executions

In 2016, a debate about the lack of deterrence of the death penalty for drug offences took place in Iran, and in October 150 MPs in the 290-seat parliament endorsed a bill that would end capital punishment for minor drug trafficking. Despite this, **at least 296 people were hanged for drug offences in 2016**, most of them in the second half of the year. This accounts for about 57% of all executions in 2016. All people with drug charges are tried by the Revolution Courts, often without access to a lawyer.

Revolution Courts responsible for majority of the executions

The Revolution Courts were established in 1979 by the first Supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini. They were temporary courts designed to deal with the officials of the former regime. However, more than 37 years later they continue to operate. All cases regarded as security-related, such as cases involving political and civil activists, and others allegedly involved in corruption and drug-related charges, are processed by the Revolution Courts. These courts are responsible for the vast majority of the death sentences issued and carried out over the last 37 years in Iran. The Revolutionary Courts are less transparent than the Public Courts (both criminal and civil) and Revolutionary Court judges are known for greater abuse of their legal powers than other judges^[10]. Revolutionary Court judges often deny access to legal representation during the investigation phase and prevent lawyers from accessing client files on the basis of confidentiality, or that the lawyers have insufficient “qualifications” to review certain files.



In 2016 at least 64% of all executions were based on death sentences issued by the Revolution Courts. **According to the reports by IHR, Revolution Courts are responsible for more than 3200 executions since 2010.**

Execution of 25 Sunni Kurdish prisoners: Confession under torture and minutes-long trials by the Revolution Courts



In August 2016, Shahram Ahmadi and 24 other Kurdish prisoners of the Sunni faith were executed, charged with cooperation with militant Sunni groups. IHR has credible information that many of these prisoners had been subjected to torture to extract forced confessions. **The death sentences were issued by the Revolution Courts after trial sessions**

lasting less than 15 minutes and without any possibility of defense. The prisoners were hanged without having a chance to see their families for the last time.

Execution of juvenile offenders, public executions and other inhumane punishments

In violation of its international obligations, Iran continued the execution of juvenile offenders in 2016. According to our report, at least 5 juvenile offenders were executed in 2016 in Iran. Three of the juvenile offenders were reportedly sentenced to death for drug offences. Iranian authorities also carried out public executions and other barbaric punishments such as amputations, and blinding of eyes. According to IHR's reports, 34 people were hanged in public spaces, in front of hundreds of citizens including children.

Abolition movement



The Revolution Court in Tehran sentenced the human rights defender Narges Mohammadi to 16 years in prison, 10 of the years for establishing the abolitionist campaign LEGAM (Step by step to abolish the death penalty).

The crackdown on the abolition movement reached a peak in 2016, as several activists were sentenced to long prison terms.

However, the forgiveness movement, where families of murder victims are encouraged to choose forgiveness instead of the death penalty (retribution) kept growing. **As in last year, the number of the families of murder victims who chose forgiveness in 2016 was significantly higher than the number of those who asked for a retribution death sentence for the murder convicts.**



Legacy of Hassan Rouhani's first presidential period: Dialogue with the West and more death penalty in Iran

This 2016 annual report is being published with only a few months left in Hassan Rouhani's first presidential period. A review of Mr. Rouhani's 3.5 years as President shows that the number of executions under his presidency was significantly higher than the annual executions under the previous two periods under Ahmadinejad. **Moreover, despite the excellent diplomatic relations between IRI and the EU after the Election of Hassan Rouhani in 2013, the issue of the death penalty has not been on the agenda of the bilateral dialogue between EU and Iran.** This might be the reason why no specific reforms or changes in the policy with regards to the death penalty were applied during Rouhani's period. The EU has admitted that human rights and the issue of the death penalty were not on the agenda prior to 2016, and that for the first time in April 2016, the EU signaled that after the nuclear agreement and the lifting of sanctions, "frank exchanges on human rights issues" will be part of the renewed EU-Iran dialogue. The EU also mentioned in its October 2016 report on Iran-EU relations that "EU sees a major objective within the political dialogue to reduce the application of the death penalty; calls for an immediate moratorium on the carrying out of death sentences in Iran".

On the occasion of launching this annual report, Iran Human Rights (IHR) and ECPM call on Iran's dialogue partners to :

- **Place moratorium on the use of the death penalty, especially death penalty for juvenile offenders, death penalty for drug offences and public executions, at the top of the agenda in their talks with Iran**
- **Push for serious reforms in the Iranian judicial system, including dismantlement of the Revolution Courts**
- **Demand the immediate release of Narges Mohammadi and other prisoners of conscience**

IHR and ECPM call on the Iranian authorities to:

- **Impose a moratorium on the death penalty for drug offences, while they are considering a new revisions of the Anti-drug law.**
- **Stop the practice of public executions**
- **Remove all the death sentences issued for offences committed at under 18 years of age**
- **Immediately release Narges Mohammadi and other prisoners of conscience**
- **Give all prisoners access to lawyers selected by themselves**
- **Dismantle the Revolution Courts**
- **Stop the persecution of lawyers**

IHR and ECPM have been collaborating since 2011 for the international release and dissemination of the annual report on the death penalty in Iran.

IHR and ECPM see the death penalty as a benchmark for the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

