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Iraq: Death sentence for former Vice President deals another blow to justice

Amnesty International today condemned the death sentence imposed on former Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadhan as a denial of true justice to the victims of Saddam Hussain's rule and a further undermining of the fundamental rights to a fair trial and the right to life.

"By imposing the death sentence, the SICT has simply bowed to the demand of an Appeals Chamber which seems motivated more by vengeance than by any concern for justice and fair trial," said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General. "The entire appeal process was rushed and appears to have been little more than a rubber stamp, intended to provide a veneer of legitimacy to what was clearly a politically-motivated outcome.

Taha Yassin Ramadhan was sentenced to life imprisonment by the SICT on 5 November 2006 at the end of the al-Dujail trial, in which he was accused together with Saddam Hussain and six others in connection with the killing of 148 people from al-Dujail, a largely Shi'a village, following a failed assassination attempt against Saddam Hussain in 1982. Under the law establishing the SICT, executions are to be carried out within 30 days when they have been confirmed by the court.

Three of the accused, including Saddam Hussain, his half-brother and former head of the intelligence service (Mukhabarat), Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti, and 'Awad Hamad al-Bandar, former chief judge of the Revolutionary Court, were sentenced to death. Three other accused received prison sentences and one was acquitted and released.

These sentences were all upheld by the Tribunal's Appeals Chamber on 26 December 2006 and Saddam Hussain was executed four days later. Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti and 'Awad Hamad al-Bandar were executed on 15 January 2007. The Appeals Chamber expressed dissatisfaction, however, with the life sentence imposed on Ramadhan, describing it as too lenient, and sent his case back to the trial court for it to be increased to death.

Saddam Hussain and his co-accused, including Taha Yassin Ramadhan, should have received a fair trial despite the magnitude of the charges against them, but overall the affair was a mockery, one which will make it all the harder to establish the rule of law and justice in Iraq after the decades of tyranny."

"We call on Iraq's President and Prime Minister to act immediately to prevent Ramadhan's execution and urge world leaders, including US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to intervene," said Irene Khan.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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