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Iran executes three men on homosexuality charges

Convicts were sentenced to death 'for acts against the Sharia law and bad deeds'

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Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told the United Nations 'we don't have homosexuals'. Photograph: Vahid Salemi/AP

Three Iranian men have been executed after being found guilty of charges related to homosexuality, according to a semi-official news agency.

The men, only identified by their initials, were hanged on Sunday in the south-western city of Ahvaz, the capital of Iran's Khuzestan province.

"The three convicts were sentenced to death based on the articles 108 and 110 of Iran's

Islamic penal code, for acts against the sharia law and bad deeds," the Isna agency quoted a judiciary official in Khuzestan as saying.

Iran Human Rights, an independent NGO based in Norway, said the men were charged with "lavat" – sexual intercourse between two men. It is not clear whether the three men were homosexuals or merely smeared with homosexuality accused of being gay.

Isna said the men were also convicted of robbery and kidnapping.

Three other people were also executed on the same day on charges related to drug-dealing, rape and robbery.

It is believed that the execution of the three men is the first time for many years that any Iranians have been given death sentences on the basis of their sexuality.

In the past, Iran has executed convicts for homosexuality but they were typically simultaneously convicted of other charges that carried the death sentence, such as male rape.

"The executions for sodomy might be among the rare cases where the Iranian authorities admit to having executed men convicted of homosexual acts ... Iranian authorities normally present such cases as rape, but rape has not been mentioned in this case," said Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, a spokesman for IHR.

Mohammad Mostafaei, a prominent Iranian lawyer who has represented people accused of homosexuality and now lives in exile in Norway, said in an email: "It is not clear whether these three men had any lawyers or were tried without legal representation. Who are their lawyers? I believe they are innocent.

"We should not forget what [president] Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in a speech during his visit to New York for the UN general assembly when he said we don't have homosexuals in Iran and no one will be punished for homosexuality in the country. Many innocent people have indeed been sentenced to death or hanged in secret based on such ambiguous accusations in Iran [in recent years]."

Ahmadinejad famously said in New York: "In Iran, we don't have homosexuals like you do in your country. This does not exist in our country."

In August 2010, an 18-year-old Iranian, Ebrahim Hamidi, a client of Mostafaei, faced execution on charges of homosexuality on the basis of "judge's knowledge" which is a legal loophole that allows for subjective judicial rulings where there is no conclusive evidence. Hamidi, who has been temporarily reprieved after his case drew widespread

international attention, is not gay.

In July, human rights groups raised alarm over a sharp escalation in the use of capital punishment in Iran where almost two people a day were executed in the first six months of 2011.

Islam advises against execution during the holy month of Ramadan but capital punishments have again taken place since the fasting month came to an end last week.



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