

Iraq: Over 900 prisoners face execution by New Year

17 women among those set to die with fears government is 'playing politics'

By [Global Research](#)

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Iraq is preparing to execute hundreds of prisoners, including 17 women, warned Amnesty International today, as it issued an 'urgent action' appeal to try to prevent the deaths.

The 900-plus prisoners have exhausted all their appeals and their death sentences are said to have been ratified by the Presidential Council, meaning that they could be executed at any time. Amnesty supporters are contacting Iraqi embassies around the world, including that in London, in a bid to stop the executions.

The condemned prisoners have been convicted of offences such as murder and kidnapping, but many are likely to have been sentenced after unfair trials. The 17 women are thought to include a group known to have been held on death row at the 5th section (al-Shu'ba al-Khamissa) of Baghdad's al-Kadhimiya Prison.

Amnesty International UK Campaigns Director Tim Hancock said:

'This is a staggering number of people facing execution and the fact that the government may be playing politics over these cases is truly frightening.

'Wholesale use of the death penalty was one of the worst aspects of Saddam Hussein's regime and the present government should stop aping his behaviour.

'Instead of sending nearly a thousand people to a grisly death by hanging, the Iraqi authorities should halt all executions and impose an immediate death penalty moratorium.'

Iraqi media reports suggest that the Iraqi government is currently trying to present itself as 'tough' on crime ahead of national elections scheduled for January. Iraqi opposition politicians have expressed concern that executions may be carried out to give the ruling party a political advantage ahead of the elections, and there have been calls for the government to temporarily suspend all executions.

Amnesty is warning that Iraq's use of capital punishment is already spiralling. At least 120 people are known to have been executed in Iraq this year, greatly up on the 34 executions recorded during 2008.

Iraq is now one of the world's heaviest users of the death penalty. After the US-controlled Coalition Provisional Authority suspended the death penalty following the toppling of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003, Iraq's subsequent reintroduction of capital punishment led to a rapid acceleration in death sentences and executions. Despite this, and contrary to some claims made by the Iraqi authorities, use of the death penalty has not seen

a drop in crime levels in the country, with rises and falls in insurgency violence having no discernible relation to execution rates.

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