

Tariq Aziz, Sentenced to Death

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, October 27, 2010

Al Jazeera 27 October 2010

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Law and Justice](#)

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An Iraqi court handed down the death sentence against Aziz for his role in eliminating Islamic parties [AFP]

Iraq's high tribunal has passed a death sentence on Tariq Aziz, one of deposed leader Saddam Hussein's most prominent deputies.

The death sentence, announced on Tuesday, was the first to be handed to Aziz, who had previously been convicted for his role in the execution of dozens of merchants for profiteering.

"The court today issued the death sentence on Tariq Aziz and four others for committing crimes against humanity. The charge of elimination of religious parties was classified as crimes against humanity," Judge Mohammed Abdul-Sahib, a spokesman of the Iraqi High Tribunal, said.

"The nature of the crimes is wilful killing, torture and the enforced disappearance of persons."

Al Jazeera's Rawya Rageh, reporting from Baghdad, said that the charges against Aziz are related to the persecution of Shia Muslim parties in the 1980s.

Aziz, 74, was at the centre of explaining Iraq's policy in the months leading up to the first Gulf War after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and in the years after as Iraq faced sanctions and arms inspections.

Face of Saddam's rule

As a former foreign minister and deputy prime minister for Saddam, he was often seen as the face of the president's government in foreign capitals and at the United Nations.

In 2003, he met with Pope John-Paul II in an unsuccessful effort to avert the threat of military action by the US and its allies.

The Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal (SICT) was set up to try former members of Saddam's rule.

"Aziz's lawyers have 30 days to present an appeal. The court then has another 30 days to look into that appeal," Rageh said.

"Assuming his appeal is turned down there are 30 more days before the death penalty would be carried out."

Badee Aref, Aziz's lawyer, told Al Jazeera that from a legal perspective the sentence was "unreasonable, irrational and wrong".

"I don't recognise this court because it sentenced Saddam Hussein to death and all the decisions it took are void because they are based on murder and assassination," Aref said.

"It is an invalid sentence from both legal and ethical perspectives."

Aref said that the timing of the sentence was aimed at diverting attention away from crimes that happened in Iraq that were outlined by WikiLeaks on Saturday.

'Forced to sign'

Al Jazeera has [reported extensively](#) on findings from the thousands of classified documents released by the organisation that implicate many senior Iraqi politicians.

"Before the court passes any death sentences it informs us a month before the date of the sentence. They didn't this time," Aref said.

Tariq Aziz was previously handed a 15-year jail term for the 1992 executions of 42 merchants

"I was told by my sources inside the court that three of the judges do not approve of the sentence and were forced to sign it."

After US forces entered Baghdad in April 2003, Aziz was number 43 on the list of the 55 most wanted Iraqi senior officials.

He turned himself in to US forces on April 25 and has been in their custody ever since.

Aziz was brought to trial on April 29, 2008 and accused of signing an order for the execution of 42 merchants who allegedly manipulated food prices in July 1992 at the height of the country's economic downturn under UN sanctions. He denied the charges.

On March 11, 2009 an Iraqi court found Aziz guilty of the July 1992 executions and handed him a 15-year sentence.

Prosecutors had also hoped that Aziz, would testify against Saddam, but the former foreign minister refused to condemn his one-time boss and continued to refer to him as "the president".

Amnesty plea

The family of Aziz, who is a Christian, say his health has deteriorated considerably since he suffered a stroke prior to the US invasion. Senior members of Iraq's Assyrian Church have called on US forces to release him.

The Vatican urged Iraqi authorities not to carry out the death sentence against Aziz. This would help reconciliation, peace and justice, the Vatican spokesman said in a statement.

The Vatican did not rule out the possibility of making a humanitarian intervention on behalf of Aziz, but said this would be done through diplomatic channels, the spokesman added.

His lawyer confirmed that he was in poor health and in deep shock and astonishment.

“The sentence was a big blow to him and he is still under the effect of the shock, a matter that could end his life before he is executed,” Aref said.

Two other defendants, Sadoun Shakir, a former interior minister under Saddam, and Abed Hamoud, the former president’s private secretary, were also sentenced to death by the SICT on Tuesday.

Amnesty International called on the Iraqi authorities not to execute Aziz or the two other former officials.

“Saddam Hussain’s rule was synonymous with executions, torture and other gross human rights violations, and it is right that those who committed crimes are brought to justice,” Malcolm Smart, a director of Amnesty International, said.

“However, it is vital that the death penalty, which is the ultimate denial of human rights, should never be used, whatever the gravity of the crime.”

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