



Iran stays stoning to death of woman for adultery: press

December 23 2004, TEHRAN (AFP) - Iranian authorities have temporarily stayed the execution by stoning of a woman convicted of adultery while her case is studied by the judiciary pardons commission, the press reported.

Hajieh Esmailvand, whose plight has been taken up by rights group Amnesty International, was originally sentenced by a court in the northwestern town of Jolfa to be flogged 100 times, jailed for five years and then hanged.

Her lover, identified only as Ruhollah G., who was 17 years old at the time of the affair, has been sentenced to hang and is still awaiting execution.

In its report, reformist daily Tasseh said the two had murdered Esmailvand's husband in 2000.

The Supreme Court later changed Esmailvand's sentence to stoning because of the adultery, as is permitted under Islamic law.

But an unnamed judiciary official said the "stoning has been stayed pending a decision by the pardons commission."

There was no indication of when that might be expected.

Amnesty International has called on its members to appeal to the Iranian authorities for the execution to be stopped.

According to Amnesty, Iran's penal code is very specific about the manner of execution and types of stones that should be used.

It states that men should be buried up to their waists and women up to their breasts for the purpose of execution by stoning. However, those who manage to free themselves are spared.

It also says, with reference to the penalty for adultery, that the stones used should "not be large enough to kill the person by one or two strikes, nor should they be so small that they could not be defined as stones."

Although the exact date of Esmailvand's arrest and trial are not known, it is reported that she has been imprisoned in Jolfa since January 2000.

Amnesty said reports suggested that the Supreme Court has ordered that the remainder of her prison sentence be annulled so that the stoning sentence could be carried out before December 21.

But no sentence of stoning has been carried out in Iran for more than a year, with the practice seeming to have been suspended since the end of 2002 under pressure from the European Union, which has made human rights a touchstone of talks with Tehran on closer trade ties.

Murder, armed robbery, rape, apostasy and serious drug trafficking are also punishable by hanging in Iran.

