

Iraqi court hands down 22 death sentences in four weeks

James Cogan
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Over the four weeks from May 6 to June 2, the Central Criminal Court in Iraq (CCCI) sentenced 22 people to death, 21 to life imprisonment and dozens more to terms of between 10 and 30 years. At this rate, the US-backed Iraqi regime will order the judicial murder of well over 250 people by the end of the year and condemn another 2,000 to lengthy prison terms. In numerous cases, the “crimes” for which Iraqis have been convicted were acts of war against US occupation forces.

The CCCI was created in April 2004 by the US-controlled Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) for the specific purpose of processing Iraqi insurgents as criminals rather than prisoners-of-war. It was kept in place by the subsequent Iraqi “interim” and “transitional” governments, as well as the current regime of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. But neither the US-supervised polls nor the various puppet regimes can in any way de-legitimise armed resistance to what was an illegal US invasion and occupation.

Under a series of orders issued by the CPA in 2003, and the 2005 Iraqi “Terrorist Law”, it is a crime punishable by death for Iraqis to fight, intend to fight or even advocate fighting American and other foreign troops. The definition of terrorism is so broad it can include any military action undertaken by Iraqi guerillas.

Reports on the CCCI’s sentences are posted on the web site of “Multi-National Forces-Iraq” approximately every two weeks and then republished in the Middle Eastern and international press. The purpose is to intimidate members of the Iraqi insurgency and further terrorise the Iraqi population, which has endured four years of repression under US occupation.

Executions ordered between May 13 and June 2 included:

* On May 30, Mohammed Al Khorshed, 29, was sentenced to death for commanding a 50-man insurgent cell in Baqubah and conducting attacks against US-led forces.

* The same day, an “admitted member of Al Qaeda,” Dawud Salaman Al Ubydi, was given the death penalty for participating in the bombings of the Sheraton and Al Hamah hotels and arranging transport for Al Qaeda operations.

* Also on May 30, 27-year-old Faris Abdallah Alwan was sentenced to death for “serving as the media and propaganda emir for a terrorist organisation”. He allegedly distributed and posted “terrorist” propaganda on web sites.

* A 23-year-old Libyan and 28-year-old Saudi were sentenced to hang on May 28 on the charge they had come to Iraq with the intent of carrying out “terrorist actions”. The two men had only been detained in February.

Fourteen other men were sentenced to death during this period for alleged involvement in kidnapping and torture. Three others were given the death penalty for killing another detainee while being held in Camp Cropper, a US-run prison near Baghdad.

From May 20 to June 2, 32 men were sentenced to between 15 and 30 years jail for “violating CPA Order 3/2003,” which made it a crime for any Iraqi to possess more than one AK-47 assault rifle. Seventeen more men were given between 10 years and one year for the same offence.

Weapons possession is being used to dispatch many men to overcrowded Iraqi government prisons. On May 13, four were sentenced to life imprisonment for possessing multiple weapons. Between May 13 and 17, 19 men were sentenced to between 30 years and six years for illegal weapon possession.

Dozens more were given sentences ranging from 30 years to two years between May 6 and 12. Among those given 30 years was a 62-year-old man. On May 8, six men who were captured after an attack on US troops were sentenced to life for weapons violations.

One man, Muhammad Mahmud, was detained by US marines in February because “reliable sources” had named him as the leader of an Al Qaeda cell in the Yusufiyah area. The evidence against him consisted of one loaded pistol, an anti-occupation tape and a fake ID.

Other lengthy prison terms were handed down in the four-week period for possessing false passports, belonging to an insurgent group or stealing government property.

The legal system erected by the US occupation has been condemned repeatedly by Amnesty International and in human rights reports regularly issued by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). Prisoners are typically denied any access to legal counsel for 60 days so they can be thoroughly interrogated. Amnesty has documented examples of death sentences handed down against people who claimed they had only confessed to crimes under torture.

UNAMI’s most recent report, covering January 1 to March 30, 2007, condemned the trials. Counsel for the defendants is generally a court-appointed lawyer, whom, the report commented, “they have never met and who have little or no knowledge of the substance of the charges or evidence against their clients”.

UNAMI noted: “Proceedings at trial are typically brief in nature, with sessions lasting on average some 15 to 30 minutes, during which the entire trial is concluded. Deliberations also typically do not last more than several minutes for each trial, including in complex cases involving serious felonies resulting in sentences of life imprisonment or the death penalty.” In some cases, convicted people were not informed that appeals had to be lodged within 30 days and missed the opportunity.

The Central Criminal Court has held 2,211 such trials since April 2004, resulting in the convictions of 1,957 people, including at least 256 death sentences. US-occupied Iraq is now executing people at rate exceeded only by China, Iran and Pakistan.



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