

Beat: Miscellaneous

Iraq hangs 18 terror convicts in latest mass executions

-, 27.03.2013, 23:48 Time

USPA News - Iraqi authorities have hanged eighteen people in two mass executions this month, the country's justice ministry confirmed Wednesday, defying international calls from governments and human rights groups to declare a moratorium on all executions. A justice ministry official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said eighteen unidentified men were hanged during two mass executions at undisclosed locations in Iraq.

He said eight of the men were hanged on March 14 while the ten remaining convicts were hanged days later on March 17. Details about the cases for which the men were convicted were not released, although the judicial official said they had all been sentenced to death for terrorism-related offenses. Earlier this month, Al Qaeda's Iraqi affiliate claimed responsibility for a wave of attacks on March 19 that killed at least 56 people and injured more than 220 others. The statement from the group, posted on Islamist Internet forums, threatened "revenge" for those executed by Iraqi authorities. The eighteen executions this month were the first confirmed this year but follow at least 123 executions last year. "I deeply regret that the authorities have chosen to re-start executions now, when the Iraqi government had committed to re-examining the cases of prisoners and detainees," said European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, urging the Iraqi government to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. "Iraq is aware of the EU's unequivocal position against the death penalty." Iraq lists 48 crimes for which the death penalty can be imposed, including crimes such as terrorism, kidnapping and murder, but also a number of non-fatal offenses such as damage to public property. The United Nations (UN) believes at least 1,200 people have been sentenced to death since 2004, but the Iraqi government is reluctant to release official figures. In January 2012, Human Rights Watch warned that Iraq risks falling back towards authoritarian rule amid allegations that security forces have tortured detainees at a secret prison, cracked down on freedom of expression and attacked peaceful protesters as well as journalists. Executions were commonly used by the government of Saddam Hussein. The opposition in Iraq previously compared Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to a dictator as he failed to appoint defense, interior, and national security affairs ministers, giving him full control over those ministries. He appointed Saadoun al-Dulaimi as acting defense minister in August 2011, but he retains control over the other two ministries.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-702/iraq-hangs-18-terror-convicts-in-latest-mass-executions.html>

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United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org

info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com