

Head of judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei

c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium

Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,

I am deeply concerned about the surge in arbitrary drug-related executions following grossly unfair trials before Revolutionary Courts, with at least 481 such executions recorded in 2023, representing over half of overall executions that year and an 89% rise from 2022. As the Iranian authorities refuse to publish statistics on the death penalty, the exact number of people sentenced to death or undergoing criminal proceedings for drug-related offences that incur the death penalty is not known. However, based on official statements, including announcements of drug-related arrests across the country, it is feared that thousands of individuals have been sentenced to death and are at risk of execution, or are being prosecuted or investigated for capital drug-related offences. Fears of further drug-related executions have mounted amid an alarming upward trajectory in such executions since Ebrahim Raisi's rise to the presidency in 2021, coupled with recent statements by top officials criticizing the 2017 reforms to the Anti-Narcotics Law which had resulted in a fall in drug-related executions from 2018 to 2020. In January 2024, a parliamentary committee approved a new bill to reform this law which, if adopted, will expand the range of drug-related offences incurring the death penalty. International human rights law prohibits the death penalty for drug-related and other offences that do not meet the threshold of "most serious crimes," which are crimes involving intentional killing.

The authorities' use of the death penalty for drug-related offences disproportionately impacts poor and marginalized communities, contributing to a cycle of poverty and injustice and further entrenching discrimination. In 2023, the oppressed Baluchi ethnic minority accounted for 29% of all drug-related executions while making up about 5% of Iran's population and were often executed in secret without notice to families and lawyers. Revolutionary Courts, which exercise jurisdiction over drug-related offences, lack independence and operate under the influence of security and intelligence bodies. Individuals tried before such courts are systematically denied their fair trial rights, including to adequate defence, to meaningfully challenge the legality of their detention, to presumption of innocence, to not self-incriminate, to a meaningful review, and to a fair and public hearing. Revolutionary Courts also persistently rely on torture-tainted "confessions" to convict and sentence people to death.

I urge you to immediately halt all drug-related executions, quash convictions and death sentences issued following grossly unfair trials before Revolutionary Courts, and establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to fully abolishing the death penalty. Pending this, take steps to bring national legislation in line with international law and standards, including by removing the death penalty for drug-related offences and repealing mandatory death sentences.

Yours sincerely,