Beat: News

14 hanged as Afghan government returns to executions

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USPA News - At least fourteen Afghans have been executed by hanging so far this week, and two more are due to be executed soon, officials said on Wednesday, ending a four-year virtual moratorium on the use of the death penalty which was common during the rule of the Taliban regime. Eight men were executed on Tuesday and six more were hanged on Wednesday after Afghan President Hamid Karzai signed off on their death warrants.

He has also signed the death warrants of two other prisoners who are expected to be hanged at an undisclosed location within the next few days. It was not immediately clear what prompted the sudden surge of executions, which marks the end of a four year period during which only two people were executed. Executions in Afghanistan have been infrequent since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, but some 200 prisoners are believed to be on death row. "The Afghan government`s near total moratorium on the death penalty in recent years was a major departure from Taliban rule," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The eight hangings in a single day are a terrible step backwards for Afghanistan. President Hamid Karzai should stop future executions and commit to a formal moratorium." Human Rights Watch said the Afghan legal system routinely fails to meet international fair trial standards, making Afghanistan`s use of the death penalty especially troubling. The men who were executed this week were said to have been convicted of murder, rape, sexual assault, kidnapping, and robbery. Prior to Tuesday, the last executions took place in June 2011 when two men were hanged after being convicted of participating in an attack on a bank in eastern Afghanistan that resulted in the deaths of 38 people. Several people were executed in 2008, fifteen people were executed by firing squad at a prison in Kabul in 2007, and one execution took place in 2004. Other human rights organizations and governments also condemned the spate of executions, which is likely to please many Afghans who often complain that the death penalty is necessary to serve as a deterrent against serious crime. "The death penalty should never be used to achieve political gain or popularity," said Polly Truscott, Asia-Pacific Deputy Director at Amnesty International. Truscott added: "President Karzai would earn much higher credibility if he made greater effort to ensure the rule of law in Afghanistan where detainees are frequently tortured, the judiciary has little independence and serious human rights violations and crimes often go unpunished." The European Union Delegation to Afghanistan, in a statement also supported by the governments of Norway and Switzerland, expressed its "serious concern" over the executions. "The European Union is opposed to the use of capital punishment in all cases and under any circumstances," the delegation said in its statement.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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