

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## Secretary Clinton Urges a Halt to Iranian Executions

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — Iran has international human rights obligations to halt its planned executions of political prisoners and other individuals charged with adultery and homosexuality, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says, and she also urged the Iranian government to release all of its political prisoners and human rights defenders.

In an August 10 statement, Clinton highlighted the case of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, who was sentenced to death by stoning after being found guilty of adultery. Although the Iranian government has since said Ashtiani would not face execution by stoning, her fate remains unclear, Clinton said.

“We are also troubled by reports that Ebrahim Hamidi, an 18-year-old charged with homosexuality, faces imminent execution despite the fact that he is currently without legal representation,” she said. “Neither case has proceeded with the transparency or due process enshrined in Iran’s own constitution, and their lawyer, Mohammad Mostafaei, felt that he had to flee Iran after he was questioned by authorities and his family members were detained.”

According to press reports, Mostafaei, who has defended many juvenile offenders and political prisoners, is in Norway seeking asylum after he learned that Iranian officials intended to arrest him.

As of August 11, there have been 162 known executions in Iran during 2010, according to the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, a Washington-based organization that promotes human rights in Iran. The foundation reported there were 399 executions in 2009, giving Iran the world’s second-highest number of executions after China.

Clinton said the Obama administration is also concerned over the fate of Iranians who face imminent execution after their participation in protests against Iran’s June 2009 presidential election.

President Obama has praised Iranian demonstrators who cited voting irregularities in the June 11, 2009, vote and whose peaceful protests were met by violent government reprisals.

The rights of Iranians to assemble and speak freely are “universal aspirations,” Obama said on June 26, 2009.

“A government that treats its own citizens with that kind of ruthlessness and violence, and that cannot deal with peaceful protesters who are trying to have their voices heard in an equally peaceful way, I think has moved outside of universal norms, international norms, that are important to uphold,” Obama said.

Clinton cited the cases of Jafar Kazemi, Mohammad Haj Aghaei and Javad Lari, who have been condemned to death for protesting the election result. She urged the Iranian government “to halt these executions in accordance with its obligations to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

She also called for “the immediate release of all political prisoners and imprisoned human rights defenders.”

Expressing deep concern over the continued denial of civil rights, intimidation and detentions in Iran, Clinton said the United States “will continue to stand with people around the world who seek to exercise their universal rights and speak out in defense of human liberties.”

## U.N. Flash Appeal for Pakistan Brings More U.S. Aid

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — In response to a \$459.7 million flash appeal for Pakistan launched by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Obama administration announced it is providing an additional \$16.25 million to help the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross assist flood victims.

The new funding, which is being provided by the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, comes in addition to the \$55 million the United States has already committed to the relief effort, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley told reporters August 11. The United States has now pledged \$71.25 million for Pakistan flood relief.

“This funding should help support Red Cross relief distributions including food, tents and shelter, water purification, restoration of community water supplies, preventive health measures and the like,” Crowley said.

U.N. aid agencies and their partners announced a flash appeal for nearly \$460 million earlier in the day to help millions of Pakistanis who have been affected by flooding caused by monsoon rain. According to an August 11 U.N. News Centre article, flash floods and river valley floods have devastated large parts of the country and caused an estimated 1,200 deaths, damaged or destroyed at least 288,000 homes, and left millions displaced and in need of

emergency food, shelter and medical assistance. At least 14 million people have been affected by the floods, U.S. officials say.

The U.N.'s appeal for Pakistan is expected to be revised within 30 days into a larger "consolidated appeal" that will reflect a longer-term assessment of needs as the situation evolves, according to press reports.

The Obama administration will be looking into the specifics of the flash appeal. Crowley said, "I would expect that we'll have ... a higher contribution to make as we understand exactly what is needed." He added that officials at the U.S. Department of Defense are expected to commit additional helicopters for the relief efforts. The six helicopters currently in the country have evacuated 2,305 people and delivered 211,000 pounds (95,708 kilos) of relief supplies since they arrived August 5, according to an August 10 State Department fact sheet.

Announcing the U.N.'s humanitarian response plan in New York, John Holmes, the U.N.'s emergency relief coordinator, said the international community has "a huge task in front of us to deliver all that is required as soon as possible."

Although the death toll from the flooding thus far has been "relatively low compared to other major natural disasters," Holmes said, "the numbers affected are extraordinarily high." He added, "If we don't act fast enough, many more people could die of diseases and food shortages."

According to the United Nations, \$105 million of the \$459.7 million appeal is needed to provide tents or plastic sheeting, as well as basic household goods, for an initial target of more than 2 million Pakistanis.

The United Nations says that more than 65,000 tents, serving at least 450,000 people, have already been delivered, along with plastic sheets that will serve an estimated 60,000 people.

The organization says more than 6 million people are in need of \$110 million of clean water and \$150 million of food assistance, and \$5.7 million is needed to ensure the survival of livestock. The flash appeal also calls for \$56 million to provide emergency health care for up to 14 million people, and \$14 million is needed to provide proper nutrition for children under the age of 5 and for pregnant or lactating women.

According to the State Department, the Obama administration so far has provided a month's ration of food to about 168,500 people through the World Food Programme. U.S.-funded food rations are reaching about 20,000 people per day and include 436,000 halal meals.

The United States has also provided 12 prefabricated steel bridges as temporary replacements for those that have washed out, 18 Zodiac rescue boats, six water filtration units that each can produce enough clean water for 10,000 people per day, a 25-kilowatt electric generator, 10 water storage bladders and 30 concrete-cutting saws.

U.S. officials have been urging American citizens to join the relief effort. By texting "SWAT" to the number 50555, U.S.-based callers can make a \$10 contribution that will help the U.N. provide tents, clothing, food, drinking water and medicine to the Pakistani people displaced by the floods.

### **Building New Nuclear Plants, Companies Hit Bumps in the Road**

By Andrzej Zwanecki  
Staff Writer

Washington — Advanced nuclear reactors could be the U.S. power industry's key to a new era of expansion.

Because of their simpler designs, Generation III+ reactors — as they are known — are safer and more fuel efficient than their predecessors, engineering experts and industry executives say. The simpler designs of Generation III+ reactors also promise to make them easier and less costly to assemble and operate.

U.S. energy companies are considering ordering five types of such reactors designed by French, U.S. and Japanese manufacturers. So far, only one — Westinghouse's AP1000 — has been approved by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), the industry's main regulator. From the engineering point of view, the quality of Generation III+ designs is "quite good," according to Michael Corradini, a professor of nuclear engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. However, because no such reactor has been built yet (the first is scheduled to start producing electricity in China in 2013), it is too early to say if they will live up to their promise in terms of performance.

#### **THE ROAD AHEAD**

As of May, 17 energy companies and consortia in the United States had applied for permits and licenses related to 22 planned reactors, according to the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI), an industry group. Several more companies are mulling applications. Most are "reserving places in a [regulatory] queue as placeholders to keep future options open," according to Nuclear Engineering International, a trade magazine. That is because "the moment you start digging and pouring concrete you must spend much more money," Corradini said. The ultimate number of units actually built will depend on how

successfully nuclear projects navigate the new licensing process and meet cost, schedule and performance targets, said Steve Kerekes, a spokesman for the institute.

Despite design and regulatory improvements, the road is still arduous. A power company must get the NRC to approve the site of a new plant and its design as well as to issue a license to build and operate it. Once the company receives the required permissions from the NRC, it can proceed with ordering components and construction. The entire process — from submitting the application to completing the construction — is likely to take 10 years for the first few units, and six years thereafter at best, according to Marvin Fertel, the head of the NEI.

The government has tried to streamline the licensing process to make it faster, more efficient and thus less costly for the industry. For instance, now, companies can re-evaluate their decisions at various points in the process without heavy financial losses. They also can apply for a combined construction and operating license known as COL, which before required two separate steps. “The new process is working,” Corradini said. “But it hasn’t been tested all the way through” as the NRC is yet to issue the first COL (expected by the industry in 2011 or 2012). Some companies already have slightly delayed their projects due to receiving more inquiries than expected from the NRC.

Energy companies believe that standardized designs will help them expedite licensing and lower the cost of procuring components and constructing, operating and maintaining plants. NRC Chairman Gregory Jaczko called the failure to standardize the current fleet of nuclear reactors “one of the greatest missed opportunities.”

“We have approximately 104 unique nuclear reactors in the United States,” he said. In contrast, the U.S. Navy and power companies in France have standardized their nuclear fleets with good results.

#### THE DISAPPEARANCE OF AN INDUSTRY

The U.S. nuclear power industry faces problems dating to the previous era of an interrupted expansion.

Most U.S. manufacturers of heavy components for reactors that operated in the 1970s and 1980s have closed down or moved operations overseas because U.S. business dried up. Now, many are overwhelmed by demand. Attempts at rebuilding the U.S. nuclear manufacturing base have started: In 2007-2009, the number of U.S. companies certified to manufacture nuclear-grade equipment increased by a quarter, according to the NEI. In 2009, two overseas and three U.S. companies announced several ventures to manufacture heavy components and build a new uranium enrichment

plant in the United States. But even if most nuclear projects take off, these efforts will not suffice, analysts say.

In addition, the industry faces a dearth of skilled labor to run and maintain even the existing plants. During recent decades, colleges and universities stopped producing nuclear engineers and skilled nuclear workers as there was little work for them. In 2005, encouraged by incentives from the power industry and governments, higher education reintroduced nuclear programs of study.

“The engineers who built the last generation of nuclear plants are graying, and replacing them presents a potential bottleneck for the nuclear sector for a few years,” said Deborah Mann, director of IHS Cambridge Energy Research Associates.

George Vanderheyden, president of the UniStar Nuclear Energy consortium, which plans to build four nuclear plants in the United States, believes that the first few new projects should not have major problems with qualified labor or timely supplies as they have planned how to deal with the constraints in advance. For example, Bechtel, UniStar’s builder, has entered into agreement with labor unions to train construction workers to build a new reactor at the Calvert Cliffs plant in Maryland.

“But further down the road — if we decide to build 100 plants or more — people are going to struggle getting what and who they need,” he said.

#### Muslim-American Charitable Efforts Extend Beyond Ramadan

By M. Scott Bortot  
Staff Writer

Washington — As is the case with Muslim communities around the world, Ramadan for Muslims in America is marked by fasting and charity. But while fasting is observed one month of the year, many Muslim Americans make charity and giving back to their communities year-round activities.

Muslim-American relief organizations highlight Islam’s charitable spirit, and their role this past year has taken them overseas. In Haiti, both Islamic Relief USA and the Zakat Foundation continue their efforts to help Haitians who still struggle in the aftermath of last January’s catastrophic earthquake. Both groups are now working to help Pakistanis suffering from the latest devastating floods that have displaced millions of people.

Khalil Demir, executive director of the Zakat Foundation, said his organization’s relief work in Haiti is supported by people’s generosity, which it continues to receive. “There has been a huge response from people to our

request for aid," Demir said. "It is the same here as it would be in Muslim countries – we have been receiving donations nonstop."

For Ramadan, the Zakat Foundation holds a program to bring relief to people in 34 countries, including the United States.

And it's not only Muslim-American organizations that choose Ramadan as a time to help others. Individual citizens, like New York's Yusuf Ramelize, tap into their spirit of generosity to help those who are less fortunate.

For the second year in a row, Ramelize will undertake his Homeless for One Week project. Ramelize, a graphic artist and photographer, uses the event to draw attention to the plight of the homeless on New York's streets. But unlike last year, his week on the street will include fasting for Ramadan starting from August 15.

"Fasting puts me in touch with my connection to humanity on a very deep level. It allows me to feel a sense of gratitude for all of my blessings and to realize the pains of those who go without the bare minimum every day," Ramelize writes on his Homeless for One Week website.

During his week on the streets, Ramelize documents his experiences and interviews homeless people with a video camera. He also uses the program to raise money for a charity that works with the homeless. Last year, he raised money for the Coalition for the Homeless, and this year he will collect funds for the Food Bank for New York City.

While Ramelize raises awareness and funds for the homeless, two Muslim-American women are making sure that Muslim children in the United States who are living at or below the poverty line receive an Eid Al-Fitr gift.

Hadayai Majeed, co-founder of the Baitual Salaam Network, started the National Eid Toy Drive last year when she saw a need for it in her community. This year, Debbie Al-Harbi, of Muslim Toys & Dolls, joined her in not only raising money for the project, but also in sending the presents nationwide.

"I wish I could be there when they open the gifts to see the joy on their faces," Al-Harbi said. "I just believe that it is Allah working with me. I don't take credit."

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