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An eye for an eye?

Poll shows death penalty is linked to the crime

The first executions to take place under Emile Lahoud's presidency were carried out at Roumieh Prison on 17 January, with the hanging of Ahmad Mansour and death by firing squad of Badih Walid Hamadeh and Remi Antoine Zaatar.

Mansour was convicted in 2002 for killing eight employees of the Private School Teachers' Pension Fund. Hamadeh was convicted by military tribunal for the murder of three military intelligence officers in Saida the same year. Zaatar, who was also convicted by military tribunal, was executed for the armed robbery and murder of two Civil Defense officials. His execution had been put on hold since the Hoss administration.

The executions have re-ignited the debate on capital punishment in Lebanon, whose government has carried out fifty death penalty sentences since 1947, 14 of which were under the Hrawi administration. See [Table 1](#) on the following page for death sentences carried out since 1994.

Pressure from the European Union, which has ties with Lebanon through the Euro-Med Agreement and which advocates abolition of the death penalty as part of that agreement, as well as appeals by human rights groups to reverse the decision, did not stop implementation of the decrees mandating the executions. The decrees were signed by President Lahoud, subsequent to the approval of Prime Minister Hariri and Justice Minister Bahij Tabbara.

EU policy on the death penalty argues that the sentence is often imposed on the basis of trials which do not conform to international standards of fair-

ness and to the minimum procedural guarantees under the International Covenant on Civil Rights, including the right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal. This was the contention of some of the family members of those executed. They claimed that the trials and decisions were unfair and based on political motivations.

Legislation

Legislation enforcing capital punishment was passed following the civil war under Law No. 302 (21 March 1994). It was initially intended for cases of the premeditated murder of a family member, but later was broadened to include politically-motivated homicides and other types of premeditated murder.

In 2001, however, that law was repealed and Law No. 338 (9 August 2001) was adopted, reinstating the former legislation that had annulled the death penalty—i.e. Articles 198 and 547-549 of the Penal Code, which commute death penalty sentences to life sentences in cases of politically-motivated crimes, and pass a lighter sentence of 15-20 years of hard labor in premeditated murder cases.

Even before this development, several death penalty sentences had been put on hold during the Hoss administration, with the former Prime Minister citing categorical opposition to the practice.

Public opinion

A poll carried out by Information International between 10-14 January 2004 (random sample carried out with 600 respondents in the Greater Beirut area, which had a margin of error of

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