By Christine Little
Staff Writer

The last time Sam Hannoun saw his nephews, they were preschool-aged children.

Today they are young men, 22 and 23, and they have been sentenced to death in Kuwait for allegedly collaborating with the Iraqis during the 1990-91 occupation that led to the Persian Gulf War.

SOUTHTOWN REGION

Hannoun, a southwest suburban resident and business owner who said he had always avoided politics, is now collecting signatures on petitions that will be sent to U.S. senators and urging people to send mailgrams to the Emir of Kuwait asking for commuted sentences.

"Their only crime is that they are Palestinian," Hannoun said. "I don't want anybody, especially the Kuwaiti government, to think they can execute these boys unnoticed."

Hussein Rashid, 22, and his cousin, Muayyed Yasser Hussein, 23, were among 10 Palestinians sentenced to death June 12 for joining the Arab Liberation Front, a Palestinian faction bankrolled by Iraq, and for bearing arms in support of the Iraqi occupying forces.

A total of 16 Iraqi and Palestinian men have been sentenced since June 5 to hang in Kuwait, according to Middle East Watch, a division of New York-based Human Rights Watch.

Middle East Watch is working alongside Hannoun and a local committee called Stop the Execution in Kuwait to pressure the Kuwaiti government into commuting the sentences. None of the executions has been carried out because the cases are being appealed.

A spokesman for Middle East Watch contended that none of the men received fair trials and that they were tortured into signing confessions.

Art Vassy/Daily Southtown

A suburban business owner, Sam Hannoun is trying to free two nephews who have been sentenced to death in Kuwait for allegedly collaborating with Iraqis during the 1990-91 occupation that led to the Gulf War.

Hannoun said his brothers were finally able to see their sons just before moving from Kuwait to Jordan last year. They said the younger cousin had been shot twice in the leg and the older cousin had a bruised and swollen face.

Middle East Watch also claims the defendants did not get fair trials because:

- They did not get to meet with their defense lawyers, in most cases, until the day of the trial.
- The courts did not take into account that many of the defendants would have been killed or imprisoned by the Iraqi occupiers if they had not cooperated.
- The courts also should have considered that all of the defendants were foreigners, and therefore may have owed no more allegiance to the exiled Kuwaiti government than to the occupying government.

In fact, before the occupation, it was legal in Kuwait to be a member of the Arab Liberation Front, according to Middle East Watch spokesman Aziz Abu-Hamad.

A spokesman for the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States said he was not familiar with the recent death penalty cases but was confident the defendants had received fair trials.

"Torture, coercion, is inadmissible in Kuwaiti courts, and Kuwaiti lawyers will argue that," Raid Al-Rifai said.

He said capital punishment was still rare in Kuwait.

Al-Rifai said he did not know how many alleged Iraqi collaborators were arrested during the months after the liberation of Kuwait, nor how many of them still awaited trial. May 1991 reports said there were an estimated 300 foreigners awaiting trial in Kuwaiti prisons.

Most of the alleged collaborators, including Hannoun's nephews, were arrested during four months of martial law imposed in spring 1991 after the liberation of Kuwait.

At the time, Kuwait came under intense Western scrutiny because of widespread reports that alleged collaborators with Iraq were being abused, even tortured and killed, by Kuwaiti security forces.

Al-Rifai acknowledged there were some abuses that came out of the "collective psyche of a nation that has undergone a brutal occupation." But he said vengeance was not at work in the Kuwaiti court system.

Hannoun said he was hopeful that petitions and letters to Sens. Paul Simon and Carol Moseley-Braun (both D-Ill.) would force more Western attention on the proposed executions.

SOUTHTOWN
WED. JUNE 30, 1993 -
TITLED
"SOME AREA ARABS STILL FIGHTING GULF WAR BATTLES"