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World: International medical experts urge an end to child executions

Amnesty International and medical experts from eight countries have sent an open letter to the heads of government in China, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Philippines, Iran, Sudan and the USA urging them to stop using the death penalty against children.

The letter has been signed by 20 medical experts with outstanding credentials in the field of child and adolescent psychology, psychiatry and social development.

"Although adolescents generally know the difference between right and wrong, they can suffer from diminished capacities to reason logically, to control their impulses, to think through the future consequences of their actions, and to resist the negative influences and persuasion of others," says the letter. "They should face punishment for criminal actions, but the sanctions which can be imposed on mentally competent adolescent offenders should not be the same as those faced by adults found guilty of the same offences."

Endorsing the call of the experts to abolish juvenile executions, Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, said, "Child offenders should not be punished as if they were adults. Governments must amend their laws and practices to conform with international human rights standards and end the death penalty for offenders under the age of 18."

Background Information

International standards prohibit the execution of child offenders -- people who were under 18 years old at the time of the crime. These standards include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the American Convention on Human Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. This prohibition is now so widely accepted as to constitute a principle of customary international law. The relevant standards are respected by the overwhelming majority of the 80 countries which still retain and use the death penalty.

For a full copy of the open letter, please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGPOL300342004>

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