

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: POL 30/045/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 253
10 October 2006

Embargo Date: 10 October 2006 00:01 GMT

The fourth World Day Against the Death Penalty: Executions as a failure of justice

Thousands of people in numerous countries will mark the fourth World Day Against the Death Penalty today by calling for a world without executions.

The theme for this year's day, organised by the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, is "The Death Penalty: A Failure of Justice".

Amnesty International said that the countries that use the death penalty do so in a manifestly unfair manner in violation of international laws and standards.

Amnesty International and the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty want to bring attention to the appallingly low standards of justice used in the application of capital punishment in many countries. This is another compelling reason why the world must turn its back on state judicial killings.

The day highlights failures in the judicial systems of China, Iran, Nigerian, Saudi Arabia and the USA; all of which are failing to meet the standards required by the international community – via numerous international treaties – when using the death penalty.

Amnesty International believes the death penalty is never acceptable and every execution constitutes an extreme violation of the right to life. The organization also said the violation is exacerbated when human life is taken by the state via an unfair judicial process.

China has executed persons who later transpired to be innocent after the alleged murder victim reappeared alive and well.

Iran is one of only two countries which currently execute child offenders -- the other being Pakistan. In Saudi Arabia foreign nationals face discrimination and disadvantage from the judicial system, often being tried in a language they do not understand.

The USA has sentenced individuals to death who clearly suffered from mental health disabilities. In Nigeria a woman was sentenced to death after a trial at which she had no legal representation.

To take human life after such appallingly low standards of justice makes the case for the abolition of death penalty all the more compelling and urgent.

However, the momentum for a world free of executions gathers pace and 2006 has witnessed further

progress towards a death penalty free world, with the Philippines and Moldova having abolished the death penalty. This takes to 129 the number of countries that no longer have capital punishment in law or practice.

Once abolished, very few countries consider reintroducing executions. However, the authorities in Peru and Poland are currently considering attempting the retrograde step of amending their laws to bring back the death penalty.

Amnesty International said that the World Day provides advocates of the death penalty the opportunity to re-examine their support for this outmoded form of punishment. The movement away from the death penalty has been dramatic and the small minority of states that continue to execute should ask themselves what is achieved by such a brutal act as the killing of a defenceless prisoner.

The World Day Against the Death Penalty will be marked by the launch of the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) at events and activities across Asia Pacific, including in Seoul, South Korea, where a parliamentary bill to abolish the death penalty is currently being considered. The network of activists, NGOs, civil society groups and lawyers from many countries across the region -- including India, Singapore and Japan -- aims to draw attention to the inequities and unfairness inherent in the administration of the death penalty by appealing on individual cases and campaigning to support national and regional initiatives to end capital punishment

In relation to the situation in Asia Pacific, Amnesty International said that it is a region that has bucked the worldwide trend to abolish the death penalty. The organization is working with ADPAN to urge Asia Pacific countries to abolish the death penalty and warned that even periods without executions can quickly and apparently easily be ended – as seen in Indonesia where a state firing squad executed three men in September 2006 after fifteen months with no known executions.

Asian countries that have taken a lead on the death penalty include the Philippines, which abolished the death penalty in June. ADPAN will campaign for other countries in Asia to make real their pronouncements to respect human rights, through the protection of the most fundamental right of all: the right to life.

Background Information

The World Day is organised by the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (WCADP) a coalition of over 53 organisations, including Amnesty International, bar associations, trade unions and local and regional authorities which have joined together in an effort to rid the world of the death penalty.

The World Day will be followed by the Cities for Life event which takes place on 30 November. Cities for Life is an annual event involving the illumination of public buildings or other localities that symbolically represent the community in cities and towns around the world, as an affirmation of the value of life and a sign of opposition to the death penalty. Cities for Life is organized by the Rome-based Community of Sant Egidio, with the endorsement of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty.