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World Day Against the Death Penalty

Today Amnesty International marks the World Day Against the Death Penalty 2005 by calling on all African states to abolish the death penalty.

The World Day Against the Death Penalty provides an opportunity to mobilise against capital punishment in the continent. People from many countries including Benin, Congo, DRC, Mali, Morocco, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Uganda as well as Austria, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Japan, Norway, Puerto Rico, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA will be involved in the event through demonstrations, petitions, concerts and televised debates. A petition to be signed by people around the world will be presented to Heads of State in Africa following the World Day.

The focus of the World Day Against the Death Penalty on 10 October this year is on Africa as a continent on the road to abolition. Despite the numerous human rights problems that beset the region, recent developments show a growing trend towards abolition among African countries. Senegal abolished the death penalty for all crimes in December 2004 and Liberia in September 2005. Thirteen of the continent's 53 states have permanently abolished the death penalty and another 20 countries no longer carry out executions. Thus a majority of African countries have abandoned using this cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Amnesty International welcomes the recent abolition of the death penalty for all crimes by Senegal and Liberia and the October 2004 report of the National Study Group on the Death Penalty, initiated by President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, which recommended a moratorium on executions until the justice system could guarantee fair trials and due process.

Other welcome developments include a statement by President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya during the UN Commission on Human Rights in March 2005 that Kenya was "committed to abolishing the death penalty" and the authorities were taking steps to "commute all death penalties to life imprisonment". Also welcome was the recent ruling by the Ugandan Constitutional Court in favour of ending mandatory death sentences for certain crimes. Benin and Morocco both have moratoria on executions: in Morocco abolition of the death penalty features among the issues being considered in current debates on legal reform and in Benin a draft bill to reform the penal code will be debated in parliament this month. Amnesty International urges the Benin Government to include a provision outlawing the death penalty.

While progress has been made towards abolition in Africa there is still a lot of work to be done. At least 200 people, including child offenders, have been executed since 1997 in the Democratic Republic of Congo alone, most following trials in which the fundamental standards for fair trial were not respected. A

moratorium instituted in 1999 was suspended in 2002.

In July 2005, Sudan adopted an interim constitution which contained a provision for the execution of child offenders. A moratorium on executions in Mali which lapsed in 2004 has yet to be renewed and courts continue to pass death sentences.

The World Day is organised by the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (WCADP) a coalition of over 38 human rights 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 alternative places that symbolically represent the city 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.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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