

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Sierra Leone: President Koroma must commute all death row prisoners**

Amnesty International is calling on President Koroma to use his constitutional power provided for in article 63 of the Constitution on Sierra Leone's 48<sup>th</sup> Independence Day to commute all 12 sentences to terms of imprisonment, including the three women currently on death row.

As of 24 April 2009, 138 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Amnesty International calls on the Government of Sierra Leone to join this worldwide trend to abolish the death penalty and remove the capital punishment from national legislation.

In 2005 Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report found the continued existence of the death penalty on the country's statute books to be "an affront to civilised society based on the right to life". The TRC made the abolition of the death penalty an imperative recommendation of the report, requiring that the government implement it without delay. The Government of Sierra Leone is under a legal obligation to implement all the recommendations of the TRC report.

Sierra Leone is a state party to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. In November 2008, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights at its 44<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session in Abuja, Nigeria, adopted a resolution calling on state parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to observe a moratorium on the death penalty.

Brima Sheriff of Amnesty International in Freetown states that "President Koroma should show leadership and abide by its international and national obligations and abolish the death penalty in Sierra Leone. First and foremost he should make history in Sierra Leone by commuting the sentences of all those currently on death row".

There are twelve people on death row including three women. The last execution in Sierra Leone was carried out in 1998, and three new death sentences were imposed in 2008.

Pending steps towards total abolition of the death penalty, Sierra Leone must ensure that in death penalty cases, the most rigorous internationally recognized standards for fair trial are respected, and provisions in legislation providing for mandatory death sentences are removed.

### **Background**

The resolution of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights expressed concerns about the failure of some African states "to give effect to the UN resolutions and African Commission's own 1999 resolution calling for a moratorium on executions". By adopting the resolution, the African Commission aligned itself with the global trend towards abolishing the death penalty, and supported the call for African states that still retain the death penalty to demonstrate commitment to observing a moratorium on executions as the first necessary step towards abolition.

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