

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: ACT 50/018/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 320
29 November 2005

Light a city for life

On 30 November 2005 over 300 cities around the world are celebrating "Cities for Life -- Cities against the Death Penalty". Amnesty International welcomes the city of Batumi in Georgia as the first city from the former Soviet Union to join the network of cities celebrating this day and to become a City for Life.

Amnesty International calls on the citizens of other cities of the former Soviet Union region to lobby their city authorities to express their affirmation of the value of life and their opposition to the death penalty and announce their city as a "City for Life -- City against the Death Penalty".

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty unreservedly in all cases. Every death sentence is an affront to human dignity, every execution a symptom of a culture of violence, rather than a solution to it. Today, 120 countries are abolitionist in law or practice. The risk of error in applying the death penalty is inescapable, yet it is irrevocable. For instance, in the USA many convicted persons were executed while serious doubt remained concerning their guilt -- to date 122 people have been released from death rows across the country on grounds of wrongful conviction.

Amnesty International recognizes the need to address serious crime all over the world, including murder. However, the organization is convinced that the death penalty will not provide a solution. There is no clear evidence that the death penalty acts as a more effective deterrent against crime than other forms of punishment.

By illuminating a monument or special building such as the Colosseum in Rome, Italy and the Moneda Palace in Santiago, Spain, whole cities call for the universal abolition of the death penalty. In Batumi, the municipal authorities plan to organize a city march and planting of a tree called "Tree of Life" in the Ninth of April Garden. Over 300 cities celebrating the "Cities for Life -- Cities against the Death Penalty" event include 29 capital cities, such as Seoul in South Korea, Canberra in Australia, Ljubljana in Slovenia, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Bogota in Colombia and Cincinnati, Ohio in the USA. Millions of people, including Nobel Peace Prize winners and internationally famous figures form a united moral front to stop all executions worldwide.

"Cities for Life -- Cities against the Death Penalty" is an annual event organized by the Rome-based Community of Sant'Egidio, supported by Amnesty International and other associate members of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty. It was first celebrated on 30 November 2002, on the anniversary of the first abolition of the death penalty in a European state, the Great Duchy of Tuscany in 1786.

Background

The trend towards abolition of the death penalty continues in the former Soviet space. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, all 15 newly independent states retained the death penalty in their

legislation. Since then nine newly formed states have abolished it and four have moratoria on death sentences and/or executions in place.

Kyrgyzstan and Kazakstan have maintained moratoria on executions since December 1998 and December 2003 respectively; and Tajikistan's moratorium on death sentences and executions took effect from April 2004. In the Russian Federation, in 1999, Constitutional Court ruled that all death sentences would be unconstitutional until there were jury trials throughout the Federation, in effect introducing a moratorium on new death sentences being passed. However, Russia has yet to abolish the death penalty *de jure*.

The only two states that still execute people in the region are Belarus and Uzbekistan. Recently, on 1 August 2005 the President of Uzbekistan signed a decree stipulating the abolition of the death penalty in Uzbekistan from 1 January 2008. However, the significance of this move is undermined by the failure to promptly introduce moratoria on passing new death sentences and carrying out executions and commuting death sentences of prisoners currently held on death row.

Amnesty International is concerned that scores of people could be sentenced to death and executed before the designated date of abolition in Uzbekistan.

Many of those currently on death row in territories that have moratoria on executions in place without commuting death sentences and without introducing moratorium on passing new death sentences (such as Kyrgyzstan and the self-proclaimed entities of Abkhazia and the Dnestr Moldavian Republic) may have been waiting years in a state of continued uncertainty as to their ultimate fate, a situation which Amnesty International believes to amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Amnesty International is concerned that the conditions on death row in the region fall far short of international standards. The organization is also concerned that many countries in the former Soviet Union have deported people to countries where they were sentenced to death, often following alleged torture and unfair trials.

See also:

For more information about the international events on this day, please see website of Community of Sant'Egidio - <http://www.santegidio.org>

Amnesty International's report, *Uzbekistan: Questions of life and death cannot wait until 2008* (AI Index: EUR 62/020/2005) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur620202005>

Amnesty International's Public Appeal, *Deadly Secrets: a heritage from the Soviet Union* (AI Index: EUR 04/011/2004) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur040112004>

Amnesty International's report, *Belarus and Uzbekistan: the last executioners - The trend towards abolition in the former Soviet space* (AI Index: EUR 04/009/2004) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur040092004>