

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 36/002/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 008
14 January 2004

Embargo Date: 14 January 2004 22:00 GMT

Singapore: High execution rate shrouded in secrecy

Amnesty International exposed today the shockingly high, hidden toll of executions in Singapore as it launched a new report about the death penalty in that country.

Singapore is believed to have the highest per capita rate of executions the world. A UN Report found that Singapore had three times the number of executions, relative to the size of its population, as the next country on the list - Saudi Arabia.

"It is high time for the government to seriously reconsider its stance claiming that the death penalty is not a human rights issue," Amnesty International said. "It is the cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state in the name of justice, and violates one of the most fundamental of all human rights: the right to life. By imposing death sentences and carrying out high numbers of executions, Singapore is going against global trends towards abolition of death penalty."

The small city-state has hanged more than 400 prisoners in the last 13 years. Official information about the use of the death penalty is shrouded in secrecy and the government does not normally publish statistics about death sentences or executions. It is not known how many prisoners are currently on death row, but the deplorable death toll from executions continues.

Amnesty International's new report "*Singapore: The death penalty: A hidden toll of executions*" examines how the death penalty often falls disproportionately and arbitrarily on the most marginalized or vulnerable members of society. Many of those executed have been migrant workers, drug addicts, the impoverished or those lacking in education. The report includes a number of illustrative cases including Rozman Jusoh, a 24 year old labourer from Malaysia executed in 1996 despite having sub-normal intelligence with a reported IQ of 74.

Drug addicts are particularly vulnerable. Many were hanged after being found in possession of relatively small quantities of drugs. Singapore's Misuse of Drugs Act contains several clauses which conflict with the universally guaranteed right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, and provides for a mandatory death sentence for at least 20 different drug-related offences. For instance, any person found in possession of the key to anything containing controlled drugs is presumed guilty of possessing those drugs and, if the amount exceeds a specified amount, faces a mandatory death penalty for "trafficking".

"Such provisions erode the right to a fair trial and increase the risk of executing the innocent," Amnesty International stressed. "Moreover, it is often the drug addicts or minor drug pushers who are hanged, while those who mastermind the crime of trafficking evade arrest and punishment."

Despite claims by the government that the death penalty has been effective in combatting the trade in illicit drugs, drug abuse continues to be a problem particularly among socially marginalized young people. Observers have drawn attention to the need to combat the social conditions which can give rise to drug abuse and addiction, rather than resorting to executions as a solution.

"We call on the Government of Singapore to impose an immediate moratorium on executions and commute all pending death sentences to prison terms," Amnesty International said. "We are also calling on the authorities to end the secrecy about the use of the death penalty and encourage public debate."

Background

According to the UN Secretary-General's quinquennial report on capital punishment (UN document: E/CN.15/2001/10, para. 68), for the period 1994 to 1999 Singapore had a rate of 13.57 executions per one million population, representing by far the highest rate of executions in the world. This is followed by Saudi Arabia (4.65), Belarus (3.20), Sierra Leone (2.84), Kyrgyzstan (2.80), Jordan (2.12) and China (2.01). The largest overall number of executions for the same period took place in China, followed in descending order by the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, Nigeria and Singapore.

For the full text of the report, please go to:

"Singapore: The death penalty: A hidden toll of executions"
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa360012004>

Other recent Amnesty International reports in the death penalty in Southeast Asia include:

"Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: The death penalty - inhumane and ineffective"
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa410232003>

and

"Viet Nam: Death penalty -- a dirty secret"
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa410032004>

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>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>