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Viet Nam: The death penalty -- inhumane and ineffective

Today Amnesty International issued a report outlining the organization's concerns regarding an apparent dramatic increase in the use of the death penalty in Viet Nam this year. Sixty-two death sentences and 19 executions have been recorded by Amnesty International so far in 2003, more than double last year's rate for the same period. These figures are based on information from Vietnamese official press sources.

"The real number of executions as well as death sentences is undoubtedly a great deal higher than the official statistics available to Amnesty International," the organization said.

Executions in Viet Nam are carried out by a firing squad of five people, often in public, followed by quick burial. Relatives are not informed beforehand, but are asked to collect executed prisoner's belongings two to three days after their death.

Twenty-seven offences, which are punishable by death, remain on the statute books including robbery, embezzlement and fraud. At least one third of all death sentences recorded by Amnesty International are for drugs-related crimes.

The report "*Viet Nam: The death penalty -- inhumane and ineffective*" details Amnesty International's argument that the death penalty, which the organization regards as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and a violation of the right to life, has not been proved to be effective as a deterrent, actually increasing the likelihood of armed resistance to arrest in some cases.

"We are also deeply worried that flawed trials, which frequently fall below international standards of fairness, inevitably lead to grave and irreversible miscarriages of justice," the organization added.

Amnesty International issues a set of recommendations with this report, including a call for the Vietnamese authorities to reduce the number of capital offences with the aim of total abolition and in the interim urges the authorities to make publicly available all information about the imposition of the death penalty.

For the full text of the report, please go to:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa410232003>

Public Document

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