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ORAL STATEMENT

ITEM 3: GENERAL DEBATE

UN Human Rights Council
Forty second session
9 September – 27 September 2019

Mr. President,

The death penalty violates the right to life and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Amnesty opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception - regardless of who is accused, the nature or circumstances of the crime, guilt or innocence or method of execution. We remain concerned by the continued use of the death penalty, including for crimes that do not meet the threshold of the 'most serious crimes'¹ in clear violation of International Law.

In 2018, the death penalty was used in many countries for crimes that did not meet this threshold, which the Human Rights Committee has made clear "must be read restrictively and appertain only to crimes of extreme gravity, involving intentional killing."² For drug-related offences, at least 98 executions were carried out in China, Iran, Singapore and Saudi Arabia,³ representing 14% of global total of known executions last year; at least 226 death sentences are known to have been imposed in 14 countries for such offences.⁴ In the same year, China, Iran and Viet Nam used the death penalty for economic crimes;⁵ Pakistan used it for blasphemy;⁶ Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia used it for kidnapping;⁷ and Nigeria used it for armed robbery not resulting in death.⁸

In the context of drug-related offences, our research has found that people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are often at greater risk of the death penalty because of limitations in access to effective legal assistance, language barriers and the denial of the right to seek clemency.

¹ Article 6(2), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

² Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life, UN Doc.CCPR/C/GC/36, 30 October 2018, para. 35.

³ China (+), Iran (25), Singapore (11), Saudi Arabia (60).

⁴ Bahrain (2), Bangladesh (2), China (+), Egypt (11), Indonesia (39), Iran (+), Iraq (1), Kuwait (2), Malaysia (136), Pakistan (2), Singapore (16), Sri Lanka (6), Thailand (3+), Viet Nam (+).

⁵ China (+), Iran (3) and Viet Nam (+).

⁶ Pakistan (3).

⁷ Iraq (6+), Iran (3) and Saudi Arabia (1).

⁸ (11+).

Amnesty International calls on all countries that retain the death penalty to take steps towards abolition. In the meantime, we call on all retentionist States to prohibit the use of the death penalty for armed robbery (not resulting in death), drug-related offences and all other crimes that do not meet the threshold of the 'most serious crimes'. In this regard, we welcome the draft resolution under consideration this session and urge all States to support it.

Thank you, Mr. President.