

Worldwide executions doubled in 2001

During 2001 over 3,048 people were executed in 31 countries, Amnesty International said today. The figure was more than twice the total of 1,457 executions recorded in 2000.

Releasing its statistics for the number of worldwide executions carried out during 2001, Amnesty International called on the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to take strong action against the death penalty at its annual session, currently in progress in Geneva, and to establish a universal moratorium on executions.

"The Commission on Human Rights, currently sitting in Geneva, will hopefully soon pass another strong resolution reiterating its call for an immediate worldwide moratorium on executions and urging states to respect international standards, including the ban on executing child offenders. The UN should take the lead and take firm and positive measures to protect those facing the death penalty."

Amnesty International stressed that the figures released today only include cases known to the organization. "It is impossible to give a complete total because many countries deliberately keep the true numbers of those executed secret, belying the supposed deterrent value of the death penalty," the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International also recorded over 5,265 people who were sentenced to death in 68 countries during 2001.

"Many cases were in blatant violation of international standards on the application of the death penalty," Amnesty International said. "Prisoners were sentenced to death following unfair trials. In violation of

international law, there were executions of child offenders -- people convicted of crimes committed when they were under the age of 18." Three such executions were recorded in 2001 - in Iran, Pakistan and the USA.

The dramatic increase in worldwide executions was due to the intensified use of the death penalty in China after the government launched a national "strike hard" campaign against crime. Between April and July 2001 alone at least 1,781 people were executed in that country -- more than the total number of people executed in the rest of the world in the previous three years. Many of those condemned to death could have been tortured to extract confessions. Condemned prisoners were often shackled and humiliated by being paraded in public.

Amnesty International recorded 139 executions in Iran, but the true number was believed to be much higher. In Saudi Arabia, 79 executions were reported. Sixty-six people were executed in the USA, down from 85 in 2000.

"The figures for China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the USA accounted for 90 per cent of all known executions in 2001," Amnesty International said.

"Yet there has also been progress towards abolition. By the end of the year, 111 countries had abolished the death penalty in law or practice, three more than at the end of the previous year."

During 2001, Chile abolished the death penalty for peacetime offences. Turkey adopted a constitutional amendment reducing the scope of the death penalty.

Amnesty International welcomed the decision by the President of Pakistan in December 2001 to commute the death sentences of approximately 100 child offenders.

Additionally, during 2001 Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) -- a treaty providing for the total abolition of the death penalty -- bringing the number of state parties to the Second Optional Protocol to 46.

"The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and a violation of the right to life," Amnesty International said. "Protecting the right to life is an international responsibility."

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