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Benin ratifies key UN treaty aiming at the abolition of the death penalty

Benin has taken another important step towards abolishing the death penalty yesterday by acceding to an international treaty banning capital punishment.

Benin is the 75th state worldwide to join the [Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) of 1989, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

The ratification of the Second Optional Protocol by the government of Benin is another vital step forward, and Benin should follow up by immediately implementing laws that remove the death penalty from its national statute books altogether.

In moving further away from the death penalty, Benin is setting the standard for other countries in the region to follow.

Amnesty International has campaigned extensively for the abolition of the death penalty in Benin.

By acceding to the Protocol, Benin promises not to execute anybody, and to take all necessary measures to abolish the death penalty within its jurisdiction.

The death penalty remains part of the law in Benin until the Beninese National Assembly removes provisions in national legislation that still retain the death penalty.

While Benin's penal code still allows for the death penalty to be handed down for various offences, Beninese authorities have not executed anyone for almost 25 years.

To Amnesty International's knowledge, the last executions in Benin took place in September 1987, when two people were shot after receiving death sentences for ritual murder. In 1986, six people were executed by shooting after being convicted of armed robbery and murder. The last death sentence was handed down in 2010 to a woman sentenced in absentia for murder.

At the end of 2011, at least 14 people were on death row in Benin's prisons.

Benin joins other countries in moving towards the abolition of the death penalty in Africa. To date, 16 African countries have abolished the death penalty for all crimes, including three – Burundi, Togo and Gabon – in the last three years. Another 22 countries, including Benin, are considered by Amnesty International to be abolitionist in practice.

This means that on the regional level in Africa, as on the global level, more than two thirds of all countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

In Ghana, the government has reportedly accepted a recommendation by the Constitutional Review Commission to abolish the death penalty in the new Constitution. In September 2011 Sierra Leone accepted a United Nations recommendation to ratify the Second Optional Protocol, and no person is on death row anymore in that country after a series of commutations. Existing bills to abolish the death penalty are still awaiting full discussion in Burkina Faso and Mali.

In March of this year, Mongolia already acceded to the Second Optional Protocol, and Tajikistan supported recommendations at the United Nations to do the same.

Despite these important advances, work remains to be done to abolish the death penalty worldwide.

In 2011, 21 countries carried out executions and 63 imposed new death sentences. Among the methods of execution used were beheading, hanging, lethal injection and shooting.

Those countries that still execute offenders are increasingly isolated as they battle against the changing tide of global public opinion and legal practice on the death penalty.

All countries that still maintain the death penalty should immediately establish a moratorium, as called for by the United Nations, and join the international trend against this ultimate cruel and inhumane punishment.