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## **Zimbabwe: Appointment of new hangman raises spectre of imminent executions**

Reports by Zimbabwean state media that a new hangman has been appointed raises fears that the country may be preparing to start executions again after a seven year hiatus, Amnesty International said today.

Zimbabwe hasn't conducted any executions since 2005, the same year that the country's last hangman retired.

"This macabre recruitment is disturbing and suggests that Zimbabwe does not want to join the global trend towards abolition of this cruel, inhuman and degrading form of punishment," said Noel Kututwa, Amnesty International's southern Africa director.

"The death penalty is a violation of the right to life which is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments to which Zimbabwe is a state party."

Zimbabwe's new draft Constitution, which will be put to referendum in the next few months, exempts women, men under 21 at the time of the crime and the over 70s from the death penalty. It also prohibits the imposition of the death penalty as a mandatory punishment.

While these proposed limitations to the application of the death penalty are welcome, Amnesty International calls for the death penalty to be abolished fully in the new Constitution regardless of gender and the circumstances in which a crime was committed.

"The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights. It is the premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state," said Kututwa.

"We oppose the death penalty in all cases without exception regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to kill the prisoner."

Amnesty International is aware of at least 76 people on death row in Zimbabwe at present. Of these 76, only two are women. The practical impact of the provisions under the current draft to exempt women would therefore not significantly reduce the use of the death penalty.

Amnesty International has been campaigning for total abolition of the death penalty in the context of the constitution-making process since 2009, and for the recognition of economic, social and cultural rights in a new constitution.