



## Death penalty: the Council must do more for abolition. Oral intervention at the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council (10-28 September)

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### Item 2 and 3<sup>1</sup>: General Debate *Oral statement on the question of the death penalty*

Madam President,

Amnesty International welcomes the Secretary-General's report on the "Question of the death penalty" (A/HRC/21/29). In a written statement to this session we have provided information complementary to that report.<sup>2</sup>

We share the Secretary General's assessment that there is a growing trend towards abolition, with states representing different legal systems, traditions, cultures and religious backgrounds having abolished the death penalty or moving towards abolition. It is important that supporters of the abolition of the death penalty work to ensure that this trend continues unabated.

A minority of countries continue to execute but it is still an intolerable too many. Among the countries that carried out executions in 2011, an isolated group did so at an alarming rate. In 2012, executions have increased further in Iran, Iraq, in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and in Saudi Arabia for drug offences. They were resumed in Botswana, in Japan, and after a long suspension, in the Gambia. The Human Rights Council must play a part in halting executions in these and all other countries that still execute.

Amnesty International urges members and observers of the Human Rights Council to:

- voice concerns over the continuing use of the death penalty in debate in the Council and in their bilateral relations with retentionist countries;
- call on all countries that still maintain the death penalty to immediately impose a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty, and to commute all death sentences to terms of imprisonment;
- use the full range of the Council's procedures, including the Universal Periodic Review, to promote abolition of the death penalty;
- ensure that the Council complements action by the General Assembly towards universal abolition, including by taking further steps to address specific concerns such as those highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (A/HRC/21/29).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Item 2 on the Human Rights Council agenda: *Annual Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General*; Item 3: *Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development*.

<sup>2</sup> See Amnesty International written statement to the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, *The Question of the Death Penalty* (Index: ACT 50/008/2012), available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ACT50/008/2012/en>

Finally, Madam President,

Amnesty International urges all Council members and observers to give their full support to the upcoming General Assembly resolution on a moratorium on executions.

Thank you Madam President.

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<sup>3</sup> The concerns are:

- ongoing difficulties in gaining access to reliable information regarding the use of the death penalty and the secrecy surrounding executions in some countries;
- the use of the death penalty for persons under 18 at the time of the alleged offence, for people with mental or intellectual disabilities and for members of other vulnerable groups;
- the expansion of the application of the death penalty in certain countries, including to vaguely-defined “terrorist” and “religious” crimes, as well as to drug offences;
- imposition of death sentences in violation of fair trial standards, including by military courts or in violation of rules guaranteeing access to consular services.