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## **Executions in The Gambia giant leap backwards**

Amnesty International has received credible reports that nine persons were executed last night in Gambia, and that more persons are under threat of imminent executions today and in the coming days.

According to reliable sources nine persons, including one woman, were removed from their prison cells last night and executed. Two of those said to have been executed are supposed to have been Senegalese.

In Gambia, capital punishment can be imposed for murder and treason. Three of the reportedly executed have been sentenced for treason.

“The decision of the Gambian president Yahya Jammeh to execute nine prisoners after more than a quarter of a century without execution would be a giant leap backwards”, said Paule Rigaud, Amnesty International’s Africa deputy director.

“If confirmed the reported executions are a hugely retrograde step – they would bring The Gambia back into the minority of countries which are still executing, and we are urging the authorities to immediately halt any further possible executions” said Rigaud.

The last execution in the country took place in 1985, 27 years ago. Amnesty International had classified Gambia as abolitionist in practice, and therefore as one of the more than two thirds of states worldwide which have abolished the death penalty either in law or practice.

In Africa, 22 of the 54 member states of the African Union are abolitionist in practice, and 16 are abolitionist in law for all crimes.

On both 19 and 20 August, in a television address broadcast to mark the Muslim feast of Eid-al-Fitr, President Jammeh had announced to the nation that by the middle of September all existing death sentences would be “carried out to the letter”.

According to The Gambian government, there were 42 men and two women on death row as of 31 December 2011, 13 of whom had been sentenced during that year. This year, three men have reportedly also received the death sentence, making a total of 47 people currently on death row.

“President Jammeh should establish an immediate moratorium on the death penalty, in line with resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights,” said Rigaud.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.