

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Death penalty: Executions fall as pressure grows for universal moratorium**

(Rome) A death penalty free world is possible if key governments are willing to show political leadership, said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"Amnesty International is calling for a universal moratorium on executions. Only six countries -- Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Pakistan, the USA and China -- were responsible for 90 percent of all executions carried out in 2006. These hard core executioners are isolated and out of tune with global trends," said Ms Khan.

In 1977 only 16 countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes. Ten years on, the number of abolitionist countries continues to rise which is creating a momentum to end capital punishment. In 2006, the Philippines was the latest to join the 99 countries that have abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes. Many more, including South Korea, stand on the brink of abolition.

In Africa only six countries carried out executions in 2006. Belarus is the only country that continues to use the death penalty in Europe. The USA is the only country in the Americas to have carried out any executions since 2003.

According to Amnesty International figures, the number of executions worldwide fell from 2,148 in 2005 to 1,591 in 2006.

Iraq joined the list of the world's top executioners in 2006. The use of capital punishment has increased rapidly following its reinstatement in Iraq in mid-2004. Since then, more than 270 people have been sentenced to death and at least 100 people have reportedly been executed. There were no executions reported in 2004 and at least three men were executed in 2005. In 2006, global attention on the televised hanging of Saddam Hussein in December belied the reality that the execution rate in Iraq had dramatically escalated over the year with more than 65 hangings, of which at least two of those put to death were women.

Iran's execution rate nearly doubled compared to 2005, with at least 177 people killed. In 2006, Pakistan joined the list of top executioners with at least 82 executions. Sudan executed at least 65 people, with the true number believed to be higher, and 53 people were executed in 12 states

across the USA. Iran and Pakistan were the only countries that executed child offenders during 2006 – in violation of international law -- four and one respectively.

China continues to be the world's top executioner. Amnesty International recorded more than 1,000 executions in China in 2006. Figures on the use of the death penalty are a state secret in China and the true number is believed to be as high as 8,000.

"The 2006 death penalty figures are inexcusable but even officials in Iraq and China, two of the world's top-executioners, have spoken of their desire to see an end to the use of the death penalty in their respective countries," said Irene Khan.

Amnesty International also highlights a number of cases which expose the cruel, arbitrary and unfair nature of the death penalty and the appalling suffering caused by every execution:

- Sri Lankan national Sanjaya Rowan Kumara was executed last November in Kuwait. He was initially declared dead immediately after the hanging, but when he was taken to the morgue, medical staff noticed he was still moving. Further examinations found a weak heartbeat. He was eventually pronounced dead five hours after the execution had begun.
- In the US last December, Florida Governor Jeb Bush suspended all executions in the state and appointed a commission "to consider the humanity and constitutionality of lethal injections". The decision came after the execution of Angel Diaz, who suffered for 34 minutes before being pronounced dead. It was later discovered that the deadly chemicals had been injected into soft tissue rather than the vein.
- In Iran, a man and a woman were stoned to death last May for having sex outside of marriage -- despite a moratorium on executions by stoning declared by the Head of the Judiciary in 2002. In Iran, the size of the stones are predetermined so as not to cause instant death but to kill slowly.

The ever present danger of executing those innocent of the crime for which they were condemned exists wherever the death penalty is used. In 2006, three people were declared innocent after spending years on death row in Jamaica, Tanzania and the USA.

Around 20,000 people are estimated to be currently on death row across the world, waiting to be killed by the state.

"The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. It is arbitrary, it has proven ineffective in reducing crime and it perpetuates a climate of violence in which justice can never be truly achieved," said Irene Khan.

"The death penalty must be abolished and a universal moratorium will be an important step forward", said Ms Khan.

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