

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Rwanda: Abolition of the death penalty

Amnesty International today welcomed the promulgation of legislation by Rwanda to abolish the death penalty. Rwanda is the first country in the Great Lakes region to abolish the death penalty and strongly confirmed the worldwide trend to end capital punishment by becoming the 100th country to abolish the death penalty in law, with another 30 countries abolitionist in practice. Fourteen countries in Africa, including Rwanda, are abolitionist for all crimes and a further 18 are abolitionist in practice.

Amnesty International hopes that such moves reflect the beginning of an overall regional pattern in Central Africa to abolish the death penalty. Encouragingly, a revised version of the Penal Code in Burundi, currently pending promulgation, has excluded the death penalty as punishment for all crimes. In light of the recent promulgation of the abolition of the death penalty for all crimes in Rwanda, Amnesty International calls upon the Rwanda government to co-sponsor the resolution on a global moratorium on executions that will be introduced at the United Nations General Assembly this October, and to encourage other countries in the region to support such resolution.

The last death sentences were imposed in 2003. The last executions of people sentenced to death took place in 1998 when 22 people found guilty of genocide-related crimes were executed. Rwanda currently holds approximately 600 prisoners on death row. Despite their sentences being commuted with the enactment of the legislation, there are continuing concerns regarding the cruel, inhumane and degrading prison conditions in which these prisoners remain detained.

Background

The continued existence of the death penalty constituted one of the main obstacles preventing the transfer of detainees held by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), or indicted genocide suspects living abroad, to Rwanda's national jurisdiction. Other obstacles have also been the capability of the Rwandan justice system to provide fair trials as well as additional concerns regarding its independence, impartiality and transparency. The abolition of the death penalty is taking place in this context.

The initiative to table a resolution calling for a global moratorium at the UN General Assembly this year is supported by countries from all regions of the world, including Africa. Amnesty International believes that such a resolution would be an important milestone towards the worldwide abolition of the death penalty.