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UN adopts landmark decision on global moratorium on executions

Today's call for a global moratorium on executions by the UN General Assembly's Third Committee is an "historic resolution and major step towards the abolition of the death penalty worldwide", Amnesty International said.

The landmark decision had cross-regional support and was co-sponsored by 87 states from around the world.

The resolution was adopted by 99 countries in favour, 52 against and 33 abstentions. The General Assembly is expected to endorse the decision in a plenary session in December.

"Amnesty International calls on all countries to establish a moratorium on executions as soon as the General Assembly endorses the resolution later this year," said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

In 1971 and 1977 the General Assembly adopted two resolutions on capital punishment, saying that it was "desirable" for states to abolish the death penalty.

Today's resolution goes further, calling on states that still maintain the death penalty "to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty". It urges these states "to respect international standards that provide safeguards guaranteeing the protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty" and "progressively restrict the use of the death penalty and reduce the number of offences for which it may be imposed."

The resolution also requests the UN Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly in 2008 on the implementation of the resolution.

Today's decision -- adopted by the UN's highest political body with universal membership -- is a clear recognition of the growing international trend towards worldwide abolition of the death penalty, endorsed by the UN Secretary-General," said Irene Khan. "It is a crucial step forward in creating a death penalty free-world -- as envisaged by the General Assembly three decades ago."

Although the resolution is not legally binding on states, it carries considerable moral and political weight, as it was adopted by the UN's principal organ in which all UN members participate.

"Establishing a moratorium on executions is an important tool to convince states still using the death penalty to engage in a nationwide debate and to review their laws on capital punishment. If death penalty laws are under review, it is only fair to stop executing people in the meantime," said Irene Khan.

The cross-regional initiative for a global moratorium on executions was led by ten countries: Albania, Angola, Brazil, Croatia, Gabon, Mexico, New Zealand, the Philippines, Portugal (for the EU) and Timor Leste.

Background information

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, without exception. The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights -- the premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state in the name of

justice. It violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

So far, 133 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Only 25 countries actually carried out executions in 2006. In 2006, 91 percent of all known executions took place in China, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Sudan and the US. Amnesty International's statistics also show an overall decline in the number of executions in 2006 -- a recorded 1,591 executions, compared to 2,148 in 2005.

Public Document

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