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Belarus/Uzbekistan: The last executioners

Belarus and Uzbekistan are the last countries from the former Soviet Union that carry out the death penalty. They are the last remaining obstacles to turning Europe and Central Asia into a death penalty - free zone, Amnesty International said today launching its latest report *Belarus and Uzbekistan: the last executioners. The trend towards abolition in the former Soviet space.*

"The criminal justice system in both countries is flawed and provides ample opportunities for judicial error. People are sentenced to death in unfair trials, often on the basis of 'confessions' extracted through torture and ill-treatment. Neither death row prisoners, nor their relatives are informed of the date of execution in advance, denying them a last chance to say goodbye. The place of burial remains a secret," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is concerned that the secrecy surrounding the death penalty as well as the conditions on death row lead to immense suffering. Prisoners are frequently beaten by prison officials and held in small cells with only limited and monitored contacts with the outside world.

"It is one of the worst things for me that I do not know where Dmitry is buried. If I knew I would at least have a place where I can go with my grief and where I can talk to him."

Tamara Chikunova whose son was executed in 2000 in Uzbekistan

"Honestly, they treat us here not like human beings but as if we were cattle or small mosquitoes."
Zhasur Madrakhimov in a letter he managed to smuggle before being executed in 2004, eight days after the UN Human Rights Committee had urged the authorities of Uzbekistan to stay his execution

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty worldwide in all cases without exception.

"The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment meted out by the state in the name of justice and as long as it is maintained, the risk of executing the innocent can never be eliminated. It has been proved that the death penalty is not an effective preventive measure," the organization said.

In 2001, President Karimov publicly stated that around 100 people were being executed in Uzbekistan each year. Local human rights activists put the figure closer to 200. In recent years, at least 14 death row prisoners in Uzbekistan have been executed despite interventions by the UN Human Rights

Committee.

In Belarus, it is believed that the number of death sentences has decreased since 1999. Thirteen people were sentenced to death in 1999 and between four and seven per year until 2003.

The number of individuals executed, or the number of prisoners on death row, is not known as neither country publishes comprehensive statistics, contravening their commitment as members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Case studies in the report:

On 12 March 1999 Dmitry Yefremenko was sentenced to death in Vitebsk, north-east Belarus, for a murder committed in July 1998. Dmitry Yefremenko's lawyer claims that his client's "confession" was obtained under considerable duress, that he was not given full access to his client during his client's detention and that when he was allowed to see him, police officials were constantly present making his client too afraid to speak about ill-treatment. No independent investigation is reported to have been carried out into the allegations of ill-treatment.

Aleksey Buryachek was sentenced to death by a court in Uzbekistan in December 2002 for the murder of a woman and her daughter whom he knew. Reportedly, he was beaten by police after his detention to force him to "confess" to the murders. He signed the "confession" after police allegedly beat his eight months' pregnant girlfriend in front of him. No investigation is believed to have been carried out into the allegations of torture.

Amnesty International calls upon the governments of Belarus and Uzbekistan among other things to:

- as a first step introduce a moratorium on death sentences and executions;
- commute all outstanding death sentences and fully abolish the death penalty;
- improve prison conditions on death row according to international standards.

Background

Apart from Belarus and Uzbekistan, Amnesty International's report *Belarus and Uzbekistan: the last executioners. The trend towards abolition in the former Soviet space* (AI Index: EUR 04/002/2004) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur040022004> examines the situation in the other republics and territories of the former Soviet Union where there are either moratoria on the death penalty and executions, or the abolition of the death penalty.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1999, all newly independent states retained the death penalty. Since then, nine have abolished it (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Turkmenistan and Ukraine) and four countries have moratoria in place (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan).

Abandonment of the death penalty is a key requirement for membership of the Council of Europe. Russia is the only country in the Council of Europe that has not abolished the death penalty, which it had promised to do within three-years of joining the Council of Europe in 1996.

The internationally unrecognized regions of Abkhazia, the Dnestr Moldavian Republic, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia have not abolished the death penalty.

Many countries in the region have deported people to countries where they were sentenced to death, often in unfair trials accompanied by torture allegations. Amnesty International has documented cases in which, for example, Russia deported people to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan where they were sentenced to death, in violation of Russia's obligations as a member of the Council of Europe.

Public Document

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