

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# DEATH PENALTY: MAJORITY OF STATES CONTINUE TO SUPPORT UN CALL FOR MORATORIUM ON EXECUTIONS AT COMMITTEE VOTE

An overwhelming majority of states continued to support a UN call to halt executions today, when the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) considered a draft resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Amnesty International welcomes the continued support for UN resolutions on this issue, which offers further confirmation that it is just a matter of time before the death penalty is abolished globally; and urges all UN member states to support the draft resolution when it comes for final adoption at the plenary session of the UNGA in December.

A total of 120 UN member states voted in favour of the proposal at the Third Committee of the UNGA today, while 39 voted against the proposal and 24 abstained at the vote. This resolution was proposed by Mexico and Switzerland on behalf of an Inter-Regional Task Force of member states and co-sponsored by 77 states.

For the first time, Djibouti, Lebanon and South Korea positively changed their vote to support the resolution. Congo (Republic of), Democratic Republic of the Congo, eSwatini, Guinea, Nauru, the Philippines and Sierra Leone once again voted in favour, after they did not do so in December 2018; Zimbabwe returned to abstention, from vote against.

Nine countries negatively changed their votes, with Dominica, Libya and Pakistan switching from voting in favour to against and Niger and Solomon Islands to abstaining; Antigua and Barbuda, South Sudan, Tonga and Uganda – countries that had all abstained at the vote in December 2018 – voted against the resolution. Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Gabon, Palau, Somalia and Vanuatu were not present at the vote, although they had voted in favour in December 2018.

Since 2007, the UNGA has adopted seven resolutions calling for the establishment of a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty, with increased cross-regional support. UN General Assembly resolutions carry considerable moral and political weight and the continued consideration of resolutions on this issue has kept scrutiny on the use of this cruel punishment as a human rights priority for the international community.

The overall number of votes in favour of these resolutions has risen from 104 in 2007 to 121 in 2018, results that reflect the global trend recorded in state practice. The number of countries classified as abolitionist for all crimes has, in fact, also grown from 90 in 2007 to the current figure of 106. In 2019, executions were recorded in a minority of countries – 20 in total. Of these executing countries, 13 were “persistent” executioners, meaning that they carried out executions every year in the previous five years.

Since the adoption of the last UNGA moratorium resolution in 2018, progress towards abolition continued to be recorded in all regions. Chad abolished the death penalty in the Penal Code in June 2020 and in the USA, New Hampshire and Colorado became the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> states to abolish the death penalty for all crimes; and the Governor of California – the US state with the highest number of people under sentence of death nationally – established a moratorium on executions. Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Malaysia and Gambia continued to observe official moratoriums on executions; Barbados removed the mandatory death penalty. Angola and the State of Palestine acceded to, while Armenia and Kazakhstan signed, the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty – committing irreversibly to the abolition of the death penalty under international law.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature or circumstances of the crime; guilt, innocence or other characteristics of the individual; or the method used by the state to carry out the execution.

Following today's voting at the Third Committee, the plenary session of the UN General Assembly is expected to endorse the eighth draft resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in mid-December. Amnesty International urges all UN member states to support this draft resolution when it comes for final adoption in December; and countries still retaining the death penalty to immediately establish a moratorium on executions as a first step towards full abolition.