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## **Democratic Republic of Congo: 61 people face imminent execution**

Sixty one people on death row in Kinshasa may soon be executed, despite assurances given to an Amnesty International delegation in August 1999 by the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that a moratorium on executions was in place.

Amnesty International urges President Laurent-Désiré Kabila to grant a presidential pardon sparing the lives of the 61 prisoners on death row and to impose an immediate and binding moratorium on any further executions.

Many of the 61 men, who are on death row at the *Centre pénitentiaire et de rééducation de Kinshasa* (CPRK), Kinshasa Penitentiary and Reeducation Centre, were reportedly convicted by a military court known as the *Cour d'ordre militaire* (COM), Military Order Court, of violent offences, including murder and armed robbery. At least one of them, Kasilibani Kabamba, was reportedly found guilty of treason.

The court's proceedings have consistently contravened both international standards for fair trial and United Nations standards protecting the rights of those facing the death penalty. Its statute prohibits appeal to a higher jurisdiction, leaving defendants with no opportunity to challenge convictions and sentences, except to appeal for presidential clemency.

"Despite the government's pledge to halt executions, these 61 men now face an imminent appearance before the firing squad after being convicted by a military court in proceedings that contravene international standards of fair trial," Amnesty International said.

According to sources in Kinshasa the 61 prisoners have been moved from Block (*pavillon*) Six to Block Two of the CPRK. Other death row prisoners are reported to have been moved to Block Two before they were executed.

"The DRC government must stand by its declaration of June 1999 to the United Nations that it would abolish the death penalty and its declaration to Amnesty International in July and August 1999 that it would also abolish the military court," the organization stressed. "In a country ravaged by conflict, further state-sanctioned killing and other repressive measures can only exacerbate the already dire human rights situation."

### **Background**

Although the COM was set up in 1997 to try soldiers accused of military offences, it has also tried civilians accused of political and economic offences, many of whom are political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. It has sentenced hundreds of people to death, of whom up to 200 have been executed.

No executions are known to have taken place between July 1999 and 28 January 2000. However, nineteen other prisoners were executed in and around Kinshasa between 28 January and 2 February 2000.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all circumstances as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.

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**For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on + 44 171 413 5808 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>**