

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL INDIA

PRESS RELEASE

19 September 2013

AI Index: ASA 20/052/2013

India: Thousands support anti-death penalty campaign.

Over 65,000 people have supported an Amnesty International India campaign seeking abolition of the death penalty in India.

G. Ananthapadmanabhan, Chief Executive of Amnesty International India, delivered the campaign petition with all signatures to V. Narayanasamy, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, on 18 September 2013.

"This campaign shows that there are thousands of people in this country who believe that the use of death penalty is arbitrary, flawed and biased," said Ananthapadmanabhan. The campaign was launched in April 2013.

"There is no evidence to prove that the death penalty is a particular deterrent to crime. It is indeed the government's responsibility to ensure public safety and address rising crime. But this will require sustained commitment and action from the police and the judiciary to ensure that the justice system responds promptly and effectively at every level," said Ananthapadmanabhan. For years, the death penalty has been awarded in India in ways the Supreme Court has described as inconsistent, subjective and judge-centric. Convicts who commit similar crimes are given the death penalty by some judges and life imprisonment by other judges.

The Supreme Court has also pointed out that courts have made mistakes in using the 'rarest-of-rare' test to determine if the death sentence should be given. At least 13 people have been sentenced to death by the Supreme Court in judgements that did not apply the test correctly, and at least two – Ramji Rao and Surja Ram – have been subsequently hanged.

"The use of the death penalty has a class bias and discriminates against powerless people in our society. The poorer a person is, the more likely he is to be sentenced to death," said Ananthapadmanabhan.

Since assuming office in 2012, President Pranab Mukherjee has rejected the mercy petitions of at least 20 people. At least 23 people are now at risk of execution.

In July 2013, a nationwide survey in India conducted by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies, a prominent research institute, found that 40 per cent of those surveyed favoured ending the death penalty, 30 per cent disagreed and 30 per cent were unsure.

Amnesty International India urges the government to take immediate steps to commute all death sentences to terms of imprisonment, and impose a moratorium on executions as a step towards abolishing the death penalty in India.

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.

For media queries: Durga Nandini, Media Officer, +919711994035

For membership enquiries or to become a supporter of Amnesty International India: + 91 88828 84442

ENDS