

News Service: 024/99  
AI Index: ASA 35/0799  
3 February 1999

**MEDIA ADVISORY**  
**Amnesty International appeals to President Estrada**  
**not to resume executions in the Philippines**

Amnesty International today sent an open letter to President Joseph Estrada of the Philippines expressing deep regret at the planned execution by lethal injection of Leo Echegaray on 5 February 1999 -- the first execution in the Philippines in 23 years.

The appeal, written on behalf of Amnesty International's one million members worldwide, in the Philippines as well as throughout Asia, urged President Estrada to grant clemency to Leo Echegaray and all others who are scheduled to die.

"The execution of Leo Echegaray could set in motion a conveyor belt of judicial executions," Amnesty International wrote. "Twenty-three other convicts whose sentences have been confirmed are due to be strapped to a bed and injected with poison."

"A historic crossroads has been reached. We call on the government to lead Philippine society away from a course which will not serve our common struggle for justice and human rights, or offer the Philippine people real protection from crime."

Until now, the Philippines has been a positive model for the protection of human rights in Asia and worldwide -- at the forefront of a clear worldwide trend towards the progressive restriction and eventual abolition of use of the death penalty. Amnesty International therefore deeply regrets the decision to reimpose the death penalty and to resume executions.

In the letter, the human rights organization expressed profound sympathy for 'Baby' Echegaray, whom Leo Echegaray was found guilty of raping when she was 10 years old, and for the many other victims of appalling crimes.

However, it argued that the death penalty is not a more effective deterrent against crime than other punishments; it will instead further reduce respect for the value of human life and risk entrenching a culture of violence deeper into society.

It is applied in an arbitrary, selective way which falls disproportionately on the disadvantaged, the ill-educated and those unable to afford competent legal defence; and there is an ever-present risk of trial errors leading to the irrevocable judicial murder of the innocent.

**ENDS... (To receive a copy of the letter, or to arrange an interview, please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 171 413 5566, or +44 (0) 486 670 247, or e-mail [tparritt@amnesty.org](mailto:tparritt@amnesty.org)**