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Thailand: Executions will not curb drug trade

The execution of five men by machine gunfire in Bangkok Prison, Thailand, yesterday shows a disturbing disregard for human life, Amnesty International said today shocked by the news. Three Thais, one Taiwanese and one Hong Kong national were killed, all but one of whom were convicted drugs traffickers.

"It is outrageous for the new Thaksin government to flaunt its tough anti-drugs stance by executing people. The death penalty provides no solution to growing crime rates. Instead it entrenches a culture of violence in society," the organization said.

On 11 April, Somkid Namkaew, a 25-year-old Thai man, was executed for trafficking in methamphetamines. His execution was the first under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra, which took office in February this year.

"Amnesty International recognizes the gravity of the illicit drug problem in Thailand, and the need for the government to uphold the rule of law. However there is no evidence that the death penalty acts as a more effective deterrent than other punishments."

Amnesty International is also concerned that Laos is for the first time intending to apply the death penalty for drug trafficking offences in line with other countries in the region such as Vietnam which regularly sentences drug traffickers to death.

Background

The use of methamphetamines in Thailand has increased dramatically during the last four years. The Thai authorities claim that neighbouring Myanmar is the source of these drugs, but has been seemingly unable to restrict their entry into Thailand.

According to recent press reports, Siwa Saengmanee, the Corrections Department Director General, stated that a series of executions for drug traffickers would begin after the traditional Buddhist new year in mid-April. He also said that executions would be carried out daily, except for Buddhist holidays.

The authorities also announced that they intend to speed up the execution of people condemned for drug offences, to act as a deterrent against the increasing production and trafficking of illegal drugs. At present once a death sentence has been upheld by the Supreme Court, the prisoner has 60 days in which to lodge an appeal for clemency with the King. This final stage of the appeals process can take some time. The government is believed to be seeking to remove the right to appeal for a Royal Pardon from people convicted of drug offenses, in contravention of international standards guaranteeing the rights of people facing the death penalty.

After a moratorium of nine years, the Thai Government resumed executions in January 1996. Since then 28 people have been executed. There are now reportedly 212 people on death row who have not yet completed the appeals process, including 145 people convicted of drug offenses.

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