

39/96

AI INDEX: EUR 46/12/96

28 FEBRUARY 1996

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES RUSSIA'S  
COMMITMENT TO HALT EXECUTIONS

Amnesty International welcomes the Russian Government's commitment to stop executions starting today -- the day of Russia's official accession to the Council of Europe -- and to abolish the death penalty within three years.

Russia is joining the Council of Europe as its 39th member state, and officially signing the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

"The Russian Government should ensure that all relevant government and judicial bodies on all levels are informed that a moratorium is in force, and that no further executions take place until the death penalty is abolished in law," Amnesty International said today.

To date Russia has one of the highest execution rates in the world. According to the Ministry of Justice 223 people were sentenced to death in 1991; 159 people in 1992; 157 death sentences were handed out in 1993; and at least 160 people were sentenced to death in 1994.

Amnesty International has been able to confirm that at least 28 people were executed during 1995 and a further 34 faced imminent execution in November 1995, after their petitions for clemency were reportedly turned down by President Boris Yeltsin. According to unofficial sources in the Presidential Clemency Commission, the number of executions in 1995 was 90. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, however, has stated that only 16 executions were carried out in 1995.

Amnesty International learned that since March 1992, when the Clemency Commission was first established, 338 petitions for clemency had been upheld. However, in 1995 there was a decline in the number of successful petitions for clemency. President Yeltsin, reportedly, granted clemency to only five prisoners during 1995. Amnesty International estimated that between 500 and 600 prisoners were held on death row at the end of last year.

Amnesty International is also calling on the Government of the Russian Federation to develop a strategy to respect and implement its pledged commitments on a wide range of human rights issues -- both in peace time and during armed conflicts. It urges the government to work closely with the relevant international bodies, as well as with the national NGOs, in developing a comprehensive action program for implementation of all of their human rights commitments.

This includes legal and justice system reform, protection of national minorities, improving conditions of detention, adoption of a law on alternative military service, elimination of incidents of ill-treatment and deaths in the armed forces in peace time, and respect for freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. The organization is also urging the government to implement its commitment to the Council of Europe to bring to justice those found responsible for human rights violations in the context of the conflict in Chechnya.

ENDS\

