

## **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

### **LEBANON**

#### **Amnesty International calls for immediate death penalty moratorium**

After the suspension of two executions, Amnesty International today called for an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty in Lebanon and the commutation of these and all other death sentences while the government considers the abolition of the death penalty.

“This would be in line with the call of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights for a ‘moratorium on executions with a view to completely abolishing the death penalty’”, Amnesty International said today.

“The suspension of these executions should be used as an opportunity for Lebanon to end the degrading and brutalizing practice of judicial executions.”

Amnesty International supported Prime Minister Salim El Hoss’s recent statement on his personal opposition to the application of the death penalty in Lebanon. He stated: *"I cannot act against my convictions. I cannot imagine signing anyone's death warrant. God gives life and He alone can take it away."*

President Emile Lahoud has suspended the two executions while the Minister of Justice determines the legality of execution decrees which have not been signed by the Prime Minister.

Mahmud Ahmad Husayn, a Syrian national, was sentenced to death in 1998 by the Criminal Court for killing a police inspector. His appeal was rejected by the Court of Cassation. Fadi Ahmad Mur’ish, an army conscript from Tripoli, was due to have been executed by firing squad this week after being found guilty of raping a woman before burning her alive. He was tried in 1998 before the Military Court. The Military Court of Cassation refused to send the case to higher appeal.

In the case of Fadi Ahmad Mur’ish, Amnesty International has serious concerns about the lack of guarantees for fair trial before military courts where judges are mostly regular army officers and trials are often summary. Furthermore, cases before the military courts are not subject to independent judicial review.

Amnesty International recognizes the responsibility of governments to bring the perpetrators of crime to justice. However, no matter the gravity of the crime, Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the fundamental right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“There is no reliable evidence that the death penalty helps to deter crimes. The risk of error is inescapable, yet the penalty is irrevocable. No measure that may be devised can ever make it less inhumane,” Amnesty International said.

Lebanon has a history of opposition to the death penalty. Between 1972 and 1994 one judicial execution was carried out. At least 13 people have been executed since 1994, two of them publicly. However, no executions have taken place in Lebanon since President Emile Lahoud took office in November 1998.

A 1994 law (no. 302) abrogates the judge's right to take mitigating circumstances into account when considering imposing a death sentence, making the death sentence mandatory for first degree murder. It extends the number of offences for which the death penalty can be imposed and amends the Penal Code to allow the application of the death penalty in cases of political murder. There has been increasing criticism of the death penalty law by judges and politicians since its introduction.

"We welcome the growing movement in Lebanon in opposition to the death penalty," Amnesty International said.  
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UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>**