

18 December 2000

AI Index MDE 18/016/2000 - News Service Nr. 238

Lebanon: Death Penalty Moratorium must be the priority for the new century

"Lebanon should start the new century by declaring an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty and commute all outstanding death sentences as a first step towards its abolition," Amnesty International said today.

"The memory of the years of bloodshed suffered by the Lebanese people is all too recent, all too painful," Amnesty International's Secretary General Pierre Sané said. "We are looking to the state and to the people to reinforce the precious values of tolerance and respect for human life and dignity historically associated with Lebanon. A moratorium on the death penalty would be a symbolic gesture for the future of the country and for the start of the new century."

Lebanon has a history of opposition to the death penalty. One death sentence was carried out between 1972 and 1994, but at least 13 executions took place during the period 1994 - 1998. No executions have taken place since President Emile Lahoud took office in November 1998.

Amnesty International unconditionally opposes the death penalty under all circumstances. It believes every death sentence is an affront to human dignity: the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

No study, including those carried out by the United Nations, into the use of the death penalty, has demonstrated that its use is an effective

deterrent against even the most heinous crimes. Indeed, in those countries where the death penalty has been reintroduced capital crimes have not been reduced as a result.

Amnesty International believes that miscarriages of justice happen in all systems of the world. The death penalty is sometimes inflicted on those innocent of the crime for which they were condemned. For example, in 1998, an appeal court in the United Kingdom posthumously overturned the conviction of Mahmoud Hussein Mattan, a Somali national executed in 1952 after a trial strongly tainted by racism. The judge concluded that "capital punishment was not a prudent culmination for the criminal justice system which is human and therefore fallible."

"The death penalty dehumanizes our world, it actually legitimizes an irreversible act of violence by the state and society which cuts off human life," Pierre Sane said. "More than half the countries of the world do not use the death penalty, they have abolished it in law or no longer implement it in practice. We hope that Lebanon will be joining them very soon."

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>