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Nigeria: Halt hangings of five men in Edo State

The Nigerian authorities must spare the lives of five death row inmates at imminent risk of execution, Amnesty International urged after a court in the southern state of Edo allowed the execution by hanging of three men to proceed and the Governor of Edo state signed the execution warrants of two others.

The Federal High Court in Benin City today rejected a lawsuit filed by local NGOs against three execution warrants signed by the Governor of Edo State in October 2012. Two other death row inmates – whose execution warrants were reportedly signed by the Governor in May 2013 – are also included in this group and are at imminent risk of execution.

It is unclear when the authorities at the state's Benin Prison plan to carry out the killings, but two executioners were reportedly called in on Monday morning and security around the prison is tight.

"Today's court decision is a major setback for justice and human rights in Nigeria," said Lucy Freeman, deputy director for Africa at Amnesty International.

"The Nigerian authorities must immediately halt the execution of these five men and allow them to appeal their cases in the courts."

A lawyer for the men told Amnesty International that they will appeal today's judgement.

According to Amnesty International's Death Sentences and Executions 2012 report, Nigeria has not carried out any known executions since 2006, but sentenced 56 people to death last year. Approximately 1000 people are reportedly on death row in the country.

The organization reiterated its call for the Nigerian authorities to stop all executions immediately and respect a moratorium on executions in the country. It opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature or circumstances of the crime, or the individual's guilt or innocence because it is a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.