

AI Index: PRE 01/311/2012  
27 June 2012

## **Pakistan: Death penalty u-turn ‘exceptionally cruel’**

Pakistan’s flip-flop over a decision to commute Indian national Sarabjit Singh’s capital sentence to a life term is a cruel blow to him and his family, Amnesty International said today.

The country’s authorities had announced yesterday that following the commutation of his sentence Singh would be released – having served two decades in jail.

But on Wednesday it emerged it was not Sarabjit Singh they meant but rather Surjit Singh – who has spent more than 20 years in prison after his death sentence was commuted to life term in 1989 - who will be released.

“The decision to back down on commuting Sarabjit Singh’s death sentence - whether due to a mistake or something else - is exceptionally cruel to Sarabjit Singh and his family in the Indian state of Punjab who were getting ready to welcome him home,” said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Director.

“That Sarabjit Singh remains under sentence of death having filed five mercy petitions is gravely disappointing.”

“While we welcome Pakistan’s announcement that it is going to release another Indian national, Surjit Singh, the authorities must do more – they should stand by yesterday’s announcement and commute Sarabjit Singh’s death sentence, and further commute all death sentences in Pakistan,” she added.

Behram Khan, a Pakistan national, is scheduled to be executed in Karachi this Saturday. He was sentenced to death by an Anti-Terrorism Court on 23 June 2003 for the murder of lawyer Mohammad Ashraf.

“The execution of Behram Khan would be the first in Pakistan in nearly four years and would open the door to further executions. President Zardari must now act urgently to commute the death sentence of Behram Khan,” said Baber.

“The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment – Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception.”

More than 8,300 prisoners are currently under sentence of death in Pakistan.

“Both Pakistan and Indian authorities should commute all death sentences and introduce an official moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition of the death penalty,” Baber added.

### **Notes to Editors**

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