

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Trinidad and Tobago: Parliament's rejection of legislation allowing for the resumption of executions welcomed

On 28 February the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago voted against a Bill to amend the Constitution that would have allowed for the resumption of executions in the country. Following debates in the Trinidadian Parliament over the past two weeks, the Bill was defeated because of the lack of support from the opposition. Twenty-nine members of Parliament voted in favour of the Bill and eleven against. There were no abstentions. To be enacted the Bill needed 31 votes.

Amnesty International welcomes the rejection of the Bill. Amnesty International was concerned that the proposed Bill would have allowed death sentences to be carried out when appeals are still pending and would have ultimately put dozens of people on death row in immediate danger of execution in violation of international human rights laws and standards. As a consequence, the organization urged members of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to vote against the constitutional amendment Bill.

While Amnesty International welcomes the rejection of the Bill, the organization regrets that the reason given by the opposition for voting against the proposed amendments was the presumed ineffectiveness of the Bill in facilitating the implementation of the death penalty, rather than the evident contradiction with international human rights law and standards.

The Bill can only be reintroduced at the Parliament after six months. Amnesty International hopes that no further attempts are made in the near future to facilitate the implementation of the death penalty.

The need to resume executions is presented both by the ruling coalition and by the opposition as a crime-control measure. Amnesty International reiterates that there is no convincing evidence of the deterrent effect of the death penalty on crime. A recent public opinion survey on the mandatory imposition of the death penalty in Trinidad and Tobago revealed that 36% of those supporting the mandatory death penalty and 54% of those in favour of a discretionary sentencing rated 'greater number of executions of murderers' as the least likely policy to reduce violent crimes leading to death. Amnesty International believes that the rise in crime affecting much of the Caribbean islands will only be solved by initiating urgent reforms to police and justice systems and by implementing effective measures to tackle the root causes of crime and violence, not with state killings.