

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# DEATH PENALTY: CLOSE TO TWO-THIRDS OF UN MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTING CALL FOR MORATORIUM ON EXECUTIONS

An overwhelming majority of states supported a UN call to halt executions today, when the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a draft resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Amnesty International welcomes the continued support for UN resolutions on this issue, which offers further confirmation that it is just a matter of time before the death penalty is abolished globally; and urges all UN member states to support the draft resolution when it comes for final adoption at the plenary session of the UNGA in December.

A total of 126 UN member states voted in favour of the proposal at the Third Committee today, while 37 voted against the proposal and 24 abstained at the vote. This resolution was proposed by Australia and Costa Rica on behalf of an Inter-Regional Task Force of member states and co-sponsored by 79 states.

Several states changed their vote positively. Ghana, Liberia, Myanmar voted in favour after abstaining at the UNGA plenary in 2020. Palau, Solomon Islands, and Somalia also voted in favour after not voting at the plenary two years ago. Papua New Guinea and Uganda abstained after voting against in 2020.

North Macedonia, Sao Tome and Principe, and Venezuela, which were 'yes' votes two years ago, did not vote this time around. Burundi, Gabon and Nigeria abstained on the vote after not voting in the plenary in 2020. Afghanistan, which voted against in December 2020 did not vote at the Committee level this year.

Two countries negatively changed their votes, with Lesotho and Yemen switching from abstention to voting against.

In spite of consistent efforts by the co-facilitators and other countries to achieve an acceptable compromise, Singapore, on behalf of a group of countries, tabled and managed to pass an amendment that would reintroduce a reference to the "sovereign right" of countries to develop legal systems and impose the penalties they believe appropriate. Amnesty International opposes the inclusion of references to sovereignty in human rights resolutions as a way of shielding countries' human rights records from scrutiny and good-faith implementation of UNGA recommendations. Sovereignty arguments have been historically used by repressive governments to stem progress of human rights law at the international level.

Since 2007, the UNGA has adopted eight resolutions calling for the establishment of a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty, with increased cross-regional support. UNGA resolutions carry considerable moral and political weight and the continued consideration of resolutions on this issue has kept scrutiny on the use of this cruel punishment as a human rights priority for the international community.

The overall number of votes in favour of these resolutions has risen from 104 in 2007 to 123 in 2020, results that reflect the global trend recorded in state practice. The number of countries classified by Amnesty International as abolitionists for all crimes has, in fact, also grown from 90 in 2007 to the current figure of 111. In 2021, executions were recorded in a minority of countries – 18 in total. Of these executing countries, 11 were "persistent" executioners, meaning that they carried out executions every year in the previous five years. Since the adoption of the last UNGA moratorium resolution in 2020, progress towards abolition continued to be recorded in all regions. Central African Republic, Kazakhstan and Papua New Guinea became abolitionists for all crimes in 2022, while Equatorial Guinea removed the death penalty from its Penal Code. In 2021, the Parliament of Sierra Leone adopted a bill to fully abolish the death penalty and Virginia became the 23rd state and the first southern state to abolish the death penalty in the USA. Armenia and Kazakhstan became state parties to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, in 2021 and 2022, respectively. The US administration established a temporary moratorium on federal executions in July 2021 and the Gambia, Malaysia, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan have continued to observe official moratoriums on executions.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature or circumstances of the crime; guilt, innocence, or other characteristics of the individual; or the method used by the state to carry out the execution.

Following today's voting at the Third Committee, the plenary session of the UN General Assembly is expected to endorse the ninth draft resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in mid-December. Amnesty International urges all UN member states to support this draft resolution when it comes for final adoption in December; and countries still retaining the death penalty to immediately establish an official moratorium on executions as a first step towards full abolition.