

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Nigeria: Lagos state government should not retain the death penalty**

Amnesty International expresses its disappointment and concern at the decision of the Lagos state government to retain the death penalty in its criminal laws following the outcome of a survey commissioned by the government on the death penalty in the state.

On 18 February 2015 the Lagos State Attorney-General and Commission for Justice announced the decision of the government to retain the death penalty in the criminal laws of Lagos state, after considering the outcome of the survey which indicated that majority of the respondents surveyed supported the use of the death penalty in the state. The survey was conducted on 2,000 random members of the public and 100 persons with close contact with the criminal justice process and systems. According to the government, the majority of the people surveyed believed the death penalty had a deterrent value.

Amnesty International emphasizes that scientific studies have consistently failed to find convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments. For instance, a survey of research findings on the relation between the death penalty and homicide rates, conducted for the United Nations in 1988 and updated in 1996 and 2002, concluded: "...research has failed to provide scientific proof that executions have a greater deterrent effect than life imprisonment. Such proof is unlikely to be forthcoming. The evidence as a whole still gives no positive support to the deterrent hypothesis".

Public support for the death penalty is most often based on the erroneous belief that it is an effective measure against crime. What the public overwhelmingly want is truly effective measures to reduce crime. It is the responsibility of the government to address criminality effectively and without resorting to abusing human rights through the use of the death penalty. The government should ensure that investigations into alleged crimes are timely and intelligence-led, that arrests are based on reasonable suspicion that the individual committed an offence, and that those accused of crimes are brought before a court within the constitutionally-mandated period.

An informed public opinion is shaped by education and moral leadership. The Lagos state government should lead public opinion in matters of human rights and criminal policy. The decision of the Lagos state government is retrogressive for a state that prides itself as a pacesetter in legal reform and the centre of excellence in Nigeria.

The world is moving towards abolition of the death penalty. In 1977, only 16 countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes. As of December 2014 the figure had gone up to 98 and more than two thirds of the countries in the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. In the USA, a federation like Nigeria, the state of Maryland abolished the death

penalty in 2013 becoming the 18<sup>th</sup> US state to do so. On 10 December 2014, the National Assembly in Madagascar adopted a bill abolishing the death penalty. In December 2014, 117 of the UN's 193 member states -a record number- voted in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty globally.

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. The death penalty violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment; and should be abolished.

Amnesty international is calling on the Lagos state government to immediately establish an official moratorium on the signing of execution warrants and take all necessary measures to abolish the death penalty in Lagos state.