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## **No Executions for Five Years Takes India Closer to Death Penalty Moratorium**

Amnesty International is calling on the Indian authorities to take more concrete steps to end the death penalty and join the growing number of countries around the world to abolish this practice in law.

No execution has been carried out in India for five consecutive years but more than 50 people were sentenced to death in 2009, as detailed in Amnesty International's annual global death penalty report released today.

With the publication of the death penalty report Amnesty International interim Secretary General, Claudio Cordone, welcomed India's lack of executions but urged the government to "improve its mixed record and move faster on the incremental path to abolition."

"A crucial step is for the Indian government to accept the Supreme Court's suggestion to empower bodies such as the Law Commission of India or the National Human Rights Commission to carry out comprehensive research into the death penalty," said Claudio Cordone. "This would allow for informed discussion and debate on issues such as innocence and wrongful convictions, and the arbitrary application of the death penalty."

"India is stuck between joining the abolition trend and clinging to the misapprehension that the death penalty is an effective measure against crime and terrorism. It's time for India's leaders to focus the death penalty debate on the futility of capital punishment and the need to protect human rights."

The Amnesty International interim Secretary General expressed disappointment that India had included the death penalty in a proposed amendment to the Anti-Hijacking Act and that the country had voted against a death penalty moratorium in the UN General Assembly in 2007 and 2008.

"The General Assembly vote was a missed opportunity for India. Even the Indian Supreme Court observed that the resolution was another step in the global move away from capital punishment, while noting that India's neighbours – Nepal and Bhutan – had also abolished the death penalty, along with other Asian countries," said Claudio Cordone.

Amnesty International strongly urges the Indian government to place a moratorium on executions and death sentences.

Amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure and the landmark Supreme Court judgment in Bachan Singh have reduced the number of death sentences in India, but capital sentencing in India remains uneven and arbitrary. In a report published in 2008, Amnesty International referred to the Indian process as a "lethal lottery" – a view subsequently adopted by judgments of the Indian Supreme Court.

Although India acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights more than 30 years ago, which limits the death penalty for the “most serious” crimes as a step towards the eventual abolition of capital punishment, instead of a reduction, the past decades have seen the introduction of many new Indian laws that carry the death penalty.