

THE DEATH PENALTY

THE ULTIMATE PUNISHMENT

Every day, prisoners – men, women, even children – face execution. Whatever their crime, whether they are guilty or innocent, their lives are claimed by a system of justice that values retribution over rehabilitation.

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Five men are publicly hanged in Mashhad, Iran, in August 2007.

The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. It violates the right to life. Whatever form it takes – electrocution, hanging, gassing, beheading, stoning, shooting or lethal injection – it is a violent punishment that has no place in today's criminal justice system.

Yet it persists.

In many countries, governments justify the use of the death penalty, claiming it deters crime. But there is no evidence that it is any more effective in reducing crime than other harsh punishments.

The death penalty is discriminatory. It is often used disproportionately against the poor, minorities and members of racial, ethnic and religious groups. It is imposed

and carried out arbitrarily. In some countries it is used as a tool of repression – a swift and brutal way of silencing political opposition.

The death penalty is irrevocable; coupled with a justice system that is prone to human error and prejudice, the risk of executing an innocent person is ever present. Mistakes like that cannot be unmade.



Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and works for its abolition in all countries.

A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** – adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1948 – recognizes each person’s right to life (Article 3) and categorically states that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” (Article 5).

The UN reaffirmed and strengthened its position against the death penalty in December 2007 when the General Assembly passed a resolution calling upon member states to establish a moratorium on executions “with a view to abolishing the death penalty.”

A SYMPTOM, NOT A SOLUTION

To end the death penalty is to recognize that it is a destructive and divisive public policy that is not consistent with widely held values. It promotes simplistic responses to complex human problems and distracts from effective measures being taken against criminality. It offers a superficial answer to the suffering of the murder victim’s family and extends that suffering to the loved ones of the condemned prisoner. It diverts resources

that could be better used to work against violent crime and assist those affected by it. It is a symptom of a culture of violence, not a solution to it. It is an affront to human dignity. It should be abolished.

The world is turning its back on state judicial killing. Since 1979, over 70 countries have abolished the death penalty for all or ordinary crimes. Over 130 nations no longer have the death penalty in law or practice and only a handful of governments carry out executions each year.

Amnesty International calls for:

- A moratorium on executions throughout the world.
- Abolition of the death penalty for all crimes.
- Universal ratification of treaties providing for abolition, including the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.
- All countries that retain the death penalty to comply with their international obligations not to use it on child offenders.

THE DEATH PENALTY IS A SYMPTOM OF A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE, NOT A SOLUTION TO IT.

FIND OUT MORE

- For the latest on Amnesty International’s campaign against the death penalty, including up-to-date global facts and figures and information on what you can do to help, go to www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty
- For general information about the death penalty worldwide, go to www.worldcoalition.org
- Take action on 10 October, World Day against the Death Penalty. Find out how on Amnesty International’s website.

