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## Facts and Figures on the Death Penalty

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### 1. Abolitionist and Retentionist Countries

Over half the countries in the world have now abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

Amnesty International's latest information shows that:

- ! **73** countries and territories have abolished the death penalty for **all crimes**
- ! **13** countries have abolished the death penalty for **all but exceptional crimes** such as wartime crimes
- ! **22** countries can be considered **abolitionist in practice**: they retain the death penalty in law but have not carried out any executions for the past 10 years or more

making a total of **108** countries which have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

- ! **87** other countries **retain** and use the death penalty, but the number of countries which actually execute prisoners in any one year is much smaller.

### 2. Progress Towards Worldwide Abolition

More than **three** countries a year on average have abolished the death penalty for all crimes in the past decade.

Over **30** countries and territories have abolished the death penalty for all crimes since 1990. They include countries in **Africa** (examples include Angola, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa), the **Americas** (Canada, Paraguay), **Asia** (Hong Kong, Nepal) and **Europe** (Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Poland, Turkmenistan, Ukraine).

### **3. Moves to Reintroduce the Death Penalty**

Once abolished, the death penalty is seldom reintroduced. Since 1985, over **40** countries have abolished the death penalty in law or, having previously abolished it for ordinary crimes, have gone on to abolish it for all crimes. During the same period only **four** abolitionist countries reintroduced the death penalty. One of them - Nepal - has since abolished the death penalty again; one, the Philippines, has resumed executions, but there have been no executions in the other two (Gambia, Papua New Guinea).

### **4. Death Sentences and Executions**

During 1999, at least **1,813** prisoners were executed in **31** countries and **3,857** people were sentenced to death in **63** countries. These figures include only cases known to Amnesty International; the true figures are certainly higher.

In 1999, **85 per cent** of all known executions took place in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the USA. In China, the limited records available to Amnesty International at the end of the year indicated that at least **1,077** people were executed, but the true figure was believed to be much higher. At least **165** executions were carried out in Iran. As many as **100** people were executed in the Democratic Republic of Congo after being sentenced to death by a military court. In Saudi Arabia, **103** executions were reported, but the total may have been much higher. **Ninety-eight** people were executed in the USA. In addition, hundreds of executions were reported in Iraq, but many of them may have been extrajudicial.

### **5. Use of the Death Penalty Against Child Offenders**

International human rights treaties prohibit anyone under 18 years old at the time of the crime being sentenced to death. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child all have provisions to this effect. More than **110** countries whose laws still provide for the death penalty for at least some offences have laws specifically excluding the execution of child offenders or may be presumed to exclude such executions by being parties to one or another of the above treaties. A small number of countries, however, continue to execute child offenders.

Six countries since 1990 are known to have executed prisoners who were under 18 years old at the time of the crime - Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, USA and Yemen. The country which carried out the greatest number of known executions of child offenders was the USA (13 since 1990).

## 6. The Deterrence Argument

Scientific studies have consistently failed to find convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments. The most recent 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, concluded: "Research has failed to provide scientific proof that executions have a greater deterrent effect than life imprisonment and such proof is unlikely to be forthcoming. The evidence as a whole still gives no positive support to the deterrent hypothesis..."

(Reference: Roger Hood, *The Death Penalty: A World-wide Perspective*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1996, p. 238, paragraph 328)

## 7. Effect of Abolition on Crime Rates

Reviewing the evidence on the relation between changes in the use of the death penalty and crime rates, a study conducted for the United Nations in 1988 and updated in 1996 stated that "the fact that all the evidence continues to point in the same direction is persuasive *a priori* evidence that countries need not fear sudden and serious changes in the curve of crime if they reduce their reliance upon the death penalty".

Recent crime figures from abolitionist countries fail to show that abolition has harmful effects. In Canada, the homicide rate per 100,000 population fell from a peak of **3.09** in 1975, the year before the abolition of the death penalty for murder, to **2.41** in 1980, and since then it has remained relatively stable. In 1993, 17 years after abolition, the homicide rate was **2.19** per 100,000 population, **27** per cent lower than in 1975. The total number of homicides reported in the country fell in 1993 for the second straight year.

(Reference: Roger Hood, *The Death Penalty: A World-wide Perspective*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1996, p. 187, paragraph 253)

## 8. International Agreements to Abolish the Death Penalty

One of the most important developments in recent years has been the adoption of international treaties whereby states commit themselves to not having the death penalty. Three such treaties now exist:

- ! The **Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, which has now been ratified by **43** states. **Three** other states have signed the Protocol, indicating their intention to become parties to it at a later date.
- ! **Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms** (“**European Convention on Human Rights**”), which has now been ratified by **36** European states and signed by **four** others.
- ! The **Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights to Abolish the Death Penalty**, which has been ratified by **seven** states in the Americas and signed by **one** other.

Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights is an agreement to abolish the death penalty in **peacetime**. The other two protocols provide for the **total abolition** of the death penalty but allow states wishing to do so to retain the death penalty in wartime as an exception.

## 9. Execution of the Innocent

As long as the death penalty is maintained, the risk of executing the innocent can never be eliminated.

Since 1973 more than **85** US prisoners have been released from death row after evidence emerged of their innocence of the crimes for which they were sentenced to death. Some had come close to execution after spending many years under sentence of death. Recurring features in their cases include prosecutorial or police misconduct; the use of unreliable witness testimony, physical evidence, or confessions; and inadequate defence representation. Other US prisoners have gone to their deaths despite serious doubts over their guilt.

The Governor of the US state of Illinois, George Ryan, declared a moratorium on executions in January 2000. His decision followed the exoneration of the **13th** death row prisoner found to have been wrongfully convicted in the state since the USA reinstated the death penalty in 1977. During the same period, **12** other Illinois prisoners had been executed.

Announcing the moratorium, Governor Ryan said: “I cannot support a system which, in its administration, has proven so fraught with error and has come so close to the ultimate nightmare, the state’s taking of innocent life... Until I can be sure that everyone sentenced to death in Illinois is truly guilty, until I can be sure with moral certainty that no innocent man or woman is facing a lethal injection, no one will meet that fate.”

## 10. The Death Penalty in the USA

- ! **98** prisoners were executed in the USA in 1999, bringing to **598** the total number executed since the use of the death penalty was resumed in 1977.
- ! Over **3,600** prisoners were under sentence of death as of 1 September 1999.

! **38** of the 50 US states now provide for the death penalty in law. The death penalty is also provided under US federal military and civilian law.

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