

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO): Put human rights at the centre of ECO activities and end the death penalty

Amnesty International today called on ministerial representatives of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) who have been meeting in Islamabad on 29 and 30 January to put human rights at the centre of ECO's activities.

The ECO ministerial meeting, which will pave the way for a summit of the heads of ECO member states, is the time when ECO should consider making the end of the death penalty an objective for every ECO member state that has not already abolished it, Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International acknowledges and welcomes the fact that Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan abolished the death penalty in 1998 and 1999 respectively; that Kazakstan declared a moratorium on executions in December 2003; and that Kyrgyzstan on 2 January 2004 extended the moratorium on executions in place since 1998.

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakstan to now fully abolish the death penalty.

The organization also expresses its hope that Turkey will soon ratify Protocol Number 13 of the European Convention concerning the use of the death penalty during wartime. Turkey, which signed up to the protocol on 9 January 2004, would then join the growing ranks of abolitionist states.

Amnesty International has, however, repeatedly voiced concern over continuing executions and the use of the death penalty in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

* Afghanistan's new constitution, adopted on 26 January, continues to allow for the imposition of the death penalty yet courts in the country do not have the capacity to ensure minimum standards for fair trial.

* The execution of a child offender by Iran, on 25 January, was met with dismay by Amnesty International. The execution flew in the face Iran's obligations as a state party to the UN's Children's Convention and a judicial bill passed by parliament in December 2003 which ends the legal basis for executing child offenders.

* Pakistan, also a state party of UN's Children's Convention, introduced legislation entitled the Juvenile Justice Ordinance (JJO) in July 2000 which provides for the prohibition of the death penalty for minors. Nevertheless, reports from Pakistan indicate that minors continue to be handed down death sentences. Despite an announcement from President Pervaiz Musharraf in December 2002 commuting death sentences passed on 125 minors sentenced before the introduction of the JJO, many still remain on death

row.

* In Tajikistan executions take place in secret while family members and friends are denied the chance meet with their loved ones one final time. Families are not informed where the individual executed is buried and therefore do not even have a location over which to grieve.

* In Uzbekistan scores of people are executed each year in secret following unfair trials. Many of them underwent torture in a system where in such cases corruption is an integral part of the investigation, trial and appeal.

The ECO comprises of ten states: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.