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Pakistan: Sarabjit Singh release defies inhumanity of death penalty

A decision to commute the death sentence of Indian national Sarabjit Singh after 20 years on death row in Pakistan for a bombing in Punjab is an encouraging move against the death penalty, said Amnesty International.

“Not often does a man on death row for twenty years – more than a life term under Pakistan law – find himself walking free. President Ali Zardari’s decision to commute the death sentence of Sarabjit Singh, whose case was highly politicised, is a welcome strike against the inhumanity of the death penalty,” said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Director.

Sarabjit Singh always proclaimed his innocence and filed five mercy petitions while on death row.

“The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment – Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception.”

Over 8,300 prisoners are currently under sentence of death in Pakistan.

Behram Khan, a Pakistan national, is scheduled for execution in Karachi this Saturday. He was sentenced to death by an Anti-Terrorism Court on 23 June 2003 for the murder of lawyer Mohammad Ashraf.

“The execution of Behram Khan would be the first in Pakistan in nearly four years and would open the door to further executions. President Zardari must now act urgently to commute the death sentence of Behram Khan.”

“Both Pakistan and Indian authorities should commute all death sentences and introduce an official moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition of the death penalty,” said Catherine Baber.