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Taiwan: Broken promises as six executed

Taiwan's execution of six people on Friday makes a mockery of the authorities' stated commitment to abolish the death penalty, Amnesty International said.

Zeng Si-ru, Hung Ming-tsung, Huang Hsien –cheng, Chen Chin-huo, Kuang Te-chiang and Tai Te-ying were executed earlier today at different locations across Taiwan.

The executions by shooting are the first in the country this year. Five people were executed in 2011 and 55 people are awaiting execution and have exhausted all appeals.

"This is cold-blooded killing by the Taiwanese authorities. How can the government credibly claim it wants to see an end to the death penalty when it continues to conduct such actions?" said Roseann Rife, Head of East Asia at Amnesty International.

The authorities have repeatedly declared their intention to move away from using the death penalty and lead a public debate on the issue.

Deputy Justice Minister Chen Shou-huang said on 19 December that the authorities would carry out death sentences on its own schedule and will not be influenced by foreign experts.

Last month, Manfred Nowak, a former UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and Eibe Riedel, a member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, called on President Ma Ying-jeou urging that Taiwan implement a moratorium on executions.

This came ahead of their scheduled visit to Taiwan next year to review the government's report on implementation of the two UN Human Rights Treaties – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

"It is abhorrent to justify taking someone's life because prisons are overcrowded or the public's alleged support for the death penalty. The death penalty is never the right answer and must never be used, including as a tool for crime prevention, repression or any other policies," said Rife.

"Instead of offering feeble excuses the authorities should deliver on their commitments to respect everyone's human rights, and move to end the use of the death penalty."

Taiwan provides no procedure that would allow people on death row to seek a pardon or for the sentence to be commuted – a right recognized by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the Taiwanese parliament has voted to implement.

Family members are not informed about scheduled executions in advance. They only find out when they are invited to collect the body from the mortuary.

In addition, serious fair trial concerns have marked the imposition of the death penalty in Taiwan. In April, Taiwan's High Court quashed the convictions of three men sentenced to death over the murder of a couple 21 years ago, as it found that the convictions were based on unreliable confessions:

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to carry out the execution.