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Thailand: resumption of executions a backwards step

As country after country abandons its use of judicial state killing, Amnesty International deeply regrets the resumption of executions in Thailand after a six-year hiatus.

On 24 August 2009 two men were executed by lethal injection at Bang Khwang prison, central Thailand.

Bundit Jaroenwanit, aged 45, and Jirawat Poompreuk, aged 52, were convicted of drug trafficking on 29 March 2001 and subsequently sentenced to death. They were reportedly only given 60 minutes' notice before their executions were carried out.

Although Thailand continued to hand down death sentences, they did not execute anyone for six years, which the abolitionist movement had welcomed as an encouraging sign from the Asia region.

In the last 10 months, the UN General Assembly has voted overwhelmingly for a moratorium on executions, while Burundi, Togo and the US state of New Mexico have abolished the death penalty. The government of Thailand should follow their example and urgently review its use of the death penalty.

There is no evidence that the death penalty deters crime. The government of Thailand must join the international trend away from capital punishment.

Background

The last executions in Thailand were carried out in 2003, when four people were executed by lethal injection. These were the first executions by lethal injection, which had replaced execution by shooting in the same year.

In its 2005 Consideration of Thailand's report, the United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed concern that the death penalty was not restricted to the most serious crimes and was applicable to drug trafficking in Thailand.

Sixteen countries in Asia still have laws that provide for the death penalty for drug-related offences. As many countries in the region do not make information on the death penalty publicly available, it is impossible to calculate exactly how many drug-related death sentences are imposed there. However, in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, reports indicate that a high proportion of death sentences are imposed on those convicted of drug offences.

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