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EU-ASEM: INVOLVE ASIAN NATIONS IN EFFORTS TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY

(Brussels, 28 May) The EU should make a special effort to address the death penalty at today's EU-ASEM meeting and involve Asian nations in moves towards the abolition of the death penalty, says Amnesty International.

Asia continues to be the leading continent performing executions. Hanging, shooting or administering lethal injections are examples of the execution methods used by some countries taking part in today's meeting.

China continues to execute "in secret", refusing to disclose the number of executions. Amnesty International believes that in 2006 at least 1,010 people were executed in China although credible sources suggest it was far higher at around 8,000 executions.

Singapore for example, has one of the highest rates of execution per capita of any country in the world.

Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Vietnam are other ASEM countries that still practice capital punishment - worryingly Indonesia resumed executions last year after a 15 months pause.

"At a time of renewed initiatives to bring about universal abolition it is vital to involve the ASEM, as a regional forum, in these processes" said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

In a letter to the German EU Presidency (available at www.amnesty-eu.org), Amnesty International noted the progress that has already been achieved, with the creation of the "Anti Death Penalty Asia Network" and the fact that last year, with EU support, the Philippines abolished the death penalty for all crimes. South Korea also considered a parliamentary bill to ban capital punishment.

"The EU should challenge Asia's execution rates but also build on the positive signs within the continent and suggest ways in which Europe and Asian can work together towards abolition"

In many Asian countries, the "war on terror" as well as the fight against drugs has served as pretext to perpetuate the use of death penalty. Additional concerns include unfair trials, mandatory use of the death penalty, its use for economic crimes and its discriminatory use against disadvantaged groups including ethnic minorities and the poor.

For further comment/background and interviews:

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