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UN General Assembly reinforces call for moratorium on executions

Amnesty International welcomes today's adoption by the General Assembly's Third Committee of a second resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on the use of the death penalty. More countries voted for the resolution and less voted against it this year compared to last year, and the resolution attracted more co-sponsors.

"The increased support for this year's resolution is very important. It demonstrates once again that the world is on a steady path towards abolishing the death penalty," said Yvonne Terlingen, Head of Amnesty International's Office at the UN.

It is significant that in the League of Arab States one country voted in favour, ten abstained or were absent and ten voted against. This is a remarkably better result than last year (when one country voted in favour, five abstained or were absent, and 15 voted against the resolution. Compared to last year, no less than five countries in the League changed their position from voting against to abstaining or being absent. In total 105 countries voted in favour of the resolution, 48 against and 31 abstained. (Last year's figures were 104 – 54 -29) 89 countries co-sponsored the resolution, two more than last year. A range of amendments proposed by a small minority of pro death penalty countries were all, overwhelmingly, defeated.

"We applaud those states that have imposed a moratorium or taken steps to restrict the death penalty. We urge all states that still carry out executions, including Japan that actually increased the rate of executions last year, to take immediate steps to implement the resolution and establish a moratorium on executions," said Yvonne Terlingen.

Background information

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty because it is irrevocable and there is always a chance that innocent men and women will be executed in any country that maintains this punishment. The death penalty is inherently arbitrary and discriminates against those who are poor, marginalized or belong to minority communities.

137 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice, as of November 2008. During 2007, at least 1,252 people were executed in 24 countries. At least 3,347 people were sentenced to death in 51 countries. [<http://www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty>]

The decrease in countries carrying out executions is dramatic. In 1989, executions were carried out in 100 states. In 2007 Amnesty International recorded executions in 24 countries.

In December 2007 the UN General Assembly adopted its first resolution "Moratorium on the use of the death penalty" (62/149), reaffirming the UN's commitment towards abolition of the death penalty. That

resolution was adopted by 104 votes in favour, 54 against and 29 abstentions.

To coincide with the death penalty debate Amnesty International organized a panel discussion with judges and prosecutors from Japan, Jordan, Nigeria and the USA. The panellists told UN delegates why judicial systems, even the most developed ones, fail to prevent fatal mistakes in death penalty cases and why they now oppose the death penalty.

[<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ACT50/018/2008/en>]

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