

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 95/91 (AMR 19/09/91, 12 March 1991 and follow-up AMR 19/17/91, 13 May 1991) - Death Penalty

BRAZIL: Possible reintroduction of the Death Penalty

Amnesty International has learned that the parliamentary debate on the proposal for a constitutional reform to allow Brazilians to vote in a plebiscite to reinstate the death penalty for kidnappings, burglaries and rapes resulting in the victim's death presented by Congressman Amaral Netto has been postponed until August 1991.

On 12 December 1990, a Congressional Commission from the House of Deputies (Comissão Especial da Câmara dos Deputados) approved the proposal which is to be debated and voted on in Congress in the 1991 Parliamentary sessions which started on 15 March. The proposal needs to be voted on twice in each house in Congress and to gain a majority of three-fifths of votes. Once the constitutional amendment is passed by parliament, public opinion will be polled within 18 months.

Since the issue of UA 19/09/91 of 12 March 1991, increasing publicity has been given by the Brazilian media to the death penalty issue. As press coverage is gathering momentum the adoption of the death penalty seems to be portrayed as a solution to violent crimes.

Brazilian human rights groups fear that the rising level of crime throughout the country, coupled with the kidnappings of business people in recent years, will be used as effective arguments to replace existing legislation with the death penalty. Were the proposal to be passed by parliament, a majority of voters might approve the reintroduction of the death penalty as an appropriate means to fight violent crimes.

An opinion poll published at the end of April indicated that 60% of the Brazilian population were in favour of the reintroduction of the death penalty and 84% were in favour of a plebiscite on the issue. The parliamentary debate on the death penalty proposal will now take place in August 1991. Amnesty International is therefore requesting that appeals be sent as before regarding our concern over the reintroduction of the death penalty.

Amnesty International opposes in all cases the imposition and infliction of the death penalty, on the grounds that it violates the right to life and that it is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading form of punishment. The organization believes that it is a punishment which violates fundamental human rights, which may discriminate against the under privileged and disadvantages sectors of society, and which serves no useful penal purpose which would not equally be served by lesser penalties

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The last judicial execution in Brazil was carried out in 1855 on a man convicted of murder, later discovered to have been innocent of the crime. After this case, death sentences were systematically commuted to life imprisonment. In 1890 the death penalty was excluded from the Penal Code. In the first republican

Constitution of 1891 the death penalty was abolished for common crimes but retained under military legislation for application in wartime.

Since the abolition of the death penalty for common crimes was enshrined in the 1988 Constitution, there has been one attempt to reintroduce it and a proposal to hold a plebiscite on the issue. Both motions were defeated by the Constituent Assembly in 1988.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes and airmail letters: Participants are kindly requested to continue their appeals as before because new information indicates that the parliamentary debate on the reintroduction of the Death Penalty will take place in August 1991. Please write courteously worded appeals, in Portuguese IF FLUENT, otherwise in English, French or Spanish:

- expressing concern at the proposal to reintroduce the death penalty, which Amnesty International believes is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, and which brutalizes all those involved in the process of applying it;
- recognizing Brazil's opposition to the death penalty in the past and their vote at the UN General Assembly in December 1989 in favour of adoption of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the first international treaty aimed at the abolition of the death penalty;
- urging the Brazilian Parliament to maintain Brazil's principled opposition to the death penalty and to oppose firmly its reintroduction;
- stressing that reintroducing the death penalty would be contrary to both world and regional trends towards the abolition of the death penalty, both in practice and in law.

APPEALS TO:

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE:

Presidente do Senado
Exmo. Sr. Senador Mauro Benevides
Praça dos Tres Poderes
70.160 Brasilia, DF Brazil

**Telegrams: Presidente Senado,
Brasilia, Brazil**

Telexes: 611357/611146

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PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF
DEPUTIES:

Presidente Da Camara dos Deputados
Exmo. Dr. Ibsen Pinheiro
Praça Tres Poderes
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**Telegrams: Presidente Camara Deputados
Brasilia, Brazil**

Telexes: 612082 CDEPA BR

PARTY LEADERS OF THE SENATE:

Líder do Partido do Movimento
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(PMDB) (Party of the Brazilian
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Exmo. Sr. Humberto Lucena
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(FAX +55 61 226 8042)
- Conferencia Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB), Caixa Postal 132067
70000 Brasilia DF, Brazil
- Jornal do Brasil, Avenida Brasil 500, 20940 Rio de Janeiro RJ, Brazil
- Folha de São Paulo, Al. Barão de Limeira, 425, 01202 São Paulo, SP,
Brazil

and to diplomatic representatives of Brazil in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 August 1991.