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EL SALVADOR: LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY EXTENDS DEATH PENALTY BREACHING  
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES

Amnesty International is appalled that the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador yesterday approved a motion to extend the scope of the death penalty to include kidnapping, aggravated homicide and rape.

“As more and more countries are abolishing the death penalty, we are dismayed that El Salvador is taking the backward step of expanding the application of this cruel and inhuman form of punishment,” Amnesty International said today.

Amnesty International considers that by extending the scope of the death penalty El Salvador is in serious breach of its international commitment, including the American Convention of Human Rights, which has been ratified by El Salvador in June 1978 and which states in Article 4(2): “[the Application of the death penalty] shall not be extended to crimes to which it does not presently apply.”

Any constitutional reforms passed by the Legislative Assembly must be ratified by two-thirds of the next elected Assembly before it can take effect. Elections for a new Legislative Assembly will take place in March 1997. If the new Legislative Assembly ratifies the extension of the scope of the death penalty, it could become entrenched in the Constitution in just over six months from now.

Amnesty International is unconditionally opposed to the death penalty, which it considers the ultimate violation of the right to life.

“There is overwhelming evidence that the death penalty does not provide the solution to violent crime,” Amnesty International said. “The irrevocability of the death penalty carries with it the inherent risk of judicial errors that can never be reversed.”

**BACKGROUND**

The death penalty was abolished in El Salvador in 1983 for all but exceptional crimes in times of international war.

The proposal was introduced before the Legislative Assembly on 19 September by members of the ruling party *ARENA (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista)*, following the 13 September execution in Guatemala of two men found guilty of raping and killing a four-year-old.

Article 144 of the Constitution of El Salvador prohibits the legislature from imposing legislation which is contrary to international treaties which have been signed by the country. In case of conflict, these treaties prevail over national legislation.

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