

UA 40/96

Death penalty

16 February 1996

**PHILIPPINES Lethal injection bill may herald a return to executions**

On 14 February 1996, the Philippine House of Representative approved a bill to allow for those on death row to be executed by lethal injection. President Fidel Ramos must sign the bill if it is to become law, which he is likely to do within two to three weeks. Amnesty International fears that, if this happens, the first executions in the Philippines for 20 years may be carried out before the end of 1996. At least 120 prisoners are currently under sentence of death.

Supporters of the bill have claimed that lethal injection is both the cheapest and the most "humane" method of execution. House speaker, Jose de Venecia is reported to have said that the approval of the bill would clear the way for long-delayed death penalties to be carried out and would "send a powerful message to killers in the battle against crime and terrorism".

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and a violation of the most fundamental of human rights - the right to life, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The death penalty is inherently unjust and arbitrary, however heinous the crime for which it is provided. Moreover, it is often imposed on those with fewer resources available for their defence, or whose social status has made them vulnerable to unfair conviction. The risk of error in applying the death penalty is inescapable, yet the penalty is irrevocable. In addition, the overwhelming conclusion from studies on the topic is that there is no reliable evidence that the death penalty has any significant deterrent effect on crime.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The last execution to take place in the Philippines, by electrocution, was in 1976. The death penalty was abolished by the 1987 Constitution, but restored in December 1993, despite opposition by human rights groups and the Roman Catholic Church. It can be imposed for 13 "heinous" crimes, including murder, rape, drug offences, kidnapping and arson. In certain aggravated circumstances a mandatory death penalty is stipulated. Since 1994 at least 120 death sentences have been passed - mostly for rape, murder or drugs offences - and the rate of new death sentences imposed has steadily increased to a current average of around six per month.

According to the death penalty law, sentences are automatically reviewed by the Supreme Court and executions are to be carried out within one year of affirmation of the verdict. The vast majority of those sentenced to death are believed to be still waiting for the Supreme Court to review their cases. Furthermore, no executions have been carried out so far because the original death penalty law stipulated execution by electrocution until a gas chamber could be built. The country's only electric chair was destroyed by fire.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Philippine authorities reintroduced the death penalty in reaction to rapidly rising crime rates, without addressing the root causes of criminality or considering a thorough reform of the judiciary with to bring suspected criminals to justice more effectively. Furthermore, despite reintroduction of the death penalty, the high crime rate continues to be a cause for public concern.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- expressing dismay at the House of Representative's recent decision to approve execution by lethal injection and calling on President Ramos not to sign the bill into law;
- expressing unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of the most fundamental of all human rights - the right to life, and emphasizing that no form of execution can ever be considered humane
- recognizing the need to combat the high crime rate in the Philippines but emphasizing that studies have concluded that the death penalty has no known deterrent effect in countries where it is imposed;
- urging the authorities to commute all death sentences - however heinous the crimes - and to abolish the death penalty.

**APPEALS TO:**

President Fidel V. Ramos  
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Philippines

**Faxes: +63 2 731 1325 (via Press Secretary to the President)**

**Telegrams: President Ramos, Manila, Philippines**

**Salutation: Dear President**

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**Telegrams: Secretary of Justice Guingona, Manila, Philippines**

**Salutation: Dear Secretary Guingona**

Senator Paul Roco  
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Executive House  
P. Burgos, Corner Finance Street  
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**Telegrams: Senator Roco, Congress, Manila, Philippines**

**Salutation: Dear Senator Roco**

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and to diplomatic representatives of the Philippines accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 April 1996.