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Thailand: Resuming executions -- a step backwards for human rights

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Amnesty International today expressed grave concern at the execution of four men in Thailand, in the country's first use of lethal injection as a method of execution.

In addition, sixty four people have exhausted legal appeals and therefore may be executed imminently. At least 970 men and women are under sentence of death, which is reportedly the highest figure in Thailand's history. Since 2001, the total number of those sentenced to death has nearly tripled.

Many of those under sentence of death were sentenced for drug offences. Citizens of Ghana, Hong Kong, Laos, Myanmar and Singapore, and members of Thailand's hill tribes, including the Hmong and Yao are believed to be among those on death row.

"Resuming executions represents a step backwards for human rights in Thailand," Amnesty International said. "We urge authorities to impose an immediate moratorium on executions, with a view to abolishing capital punishment."

"Execution is a grave violation of the right to life. Moreover, it is an irreversible punishment, and has not been proven to have any unique deterrent effect on crime," the organization reiterated.

"We acknowledge the need to combat serious crime, but urges that authorities do so without violating human rights."

Thailand replaced death by firing squad with lethal injection as a method of execution in October 2003. Thai authorities have characterized the introduction of lethal injection technology as a humane measure that will ensure less "accidents" take place during execution. A growing number of legal and medical experts in the United States have also recently expressed concern that the cocktail of drugs used in lethal injections may leave the condemned prisoner conscious, paralysed, suffocating and in intense pain before death.

Background

Boonlue Nakprasit, 46, a businessman, Panthapong Sinthusung, 41, Wibul Panasutha, 49, and Panom Thongchanglek were executed today by lethal injection. The first three men were sentenced for the production of amphetamine tablets, and Panom Thongchanglek, who was arrested in June 1999 was sentenced for murder.

Amnesty International has received credible reports of police ill treating and torturing suspects in pre-trial detention to extract confessions. Confessions are frequently used as evidence in capital trials, and defendants have maintained in court that police have used force to make them confess.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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