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ASIA VOTES FOR THE DEATH PENALTY

Amnesty International today expressed its disappointment that Asian countries formed a majority of those voting against a United Nations Human Rights Commission resolution calling on all states to consider suspending executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.

Eight of the eleven countries who voted against the resolution were Asian -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan and South Korea. The other three were Algeria, Egypt and the United States.

“Asian governments are standing out against the tide of opinion towards abolition of the death penalty,” Amnesty International said. “At the Commission, Malaysia went as far as to claim that the death penalty is not a human rights issue.”

In the past two years, the Philippines has reintroduced the death penalty, Thailand and Indonesia resumed executions, and Singapore and Viet Nam escalated the number of death sentences each year.

The human rights organization is seriously concerned about trials in death penalty cases which fall far below international standards in all these countries. In some Southeast Asian countries, the presumption of innocence is weakened by legislation, and there are mandatory death sentences for particular crimes which do not allow for mitigating circumstances. In Pakistan and China death sentences have been handed down on the basis of confessions extracted under torture.

“Responding to the resolution on the use of the death penalty, a Chinese government spokesman stated that “[China] *exercises strict limitations on the use of its application.*” How can sentencing more than 6,000 people to death and executing at least 3,500 -- more than the rest of the world put together -- people during 1996 be exercising strict limitation?” Amnesty International said.

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