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Belarus must stop the execution of man on death row

The Belarus authorities must stop the execution of a man who was this week sentenced to death for murder, Amnesty International said.

The homeless man originally from Ukraine, who has not been named, is a jail inmate who was sentenced on 30 April for killing a fellow prisoner in Mahiliou, eastern Belarus.

The death sentence enters into force on 3 May, and the man could be executed within months.

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns about the right to a fair trial in Belarus, the only country in Europe and Central Asia that still carries out executions.

Death row prisoners are not informed beforehand about the day of their execution.

"Belarus' status as Europe's sole executor is shameful. The authorities must immediately commute this death sentence and establish an official moratorium on executions, with a view to abolishing the death penalty," said David Diaz-Jogeix, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia.

Two prisoners were sentenced on Tuesday in connection with the murder of a prisoner by a group of inmates.

Both are serving sentences for previous crimes, and for one the cumulative sentence is the death penalty, the prosecutor's office said.

The condemned man is from the Zhytomyr region, Ukraine and was homeless in Belarus. There is little further information on the case.

It is Belarus' first death sentence since the high profile case of Uladzslau Kavalyou and Dzmitry Kanavalau, who were sentenced to death in November 2011 and executed in March 2012.

"The Belarus authorities must provide more objective information on this case, rather than carrying out this cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment in a typically secretive manner," said David Diaz-Jogeix.

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns about the secrecy surrounding the death penalty in Belarus.

Prisoners risk being tortured into "confessing", while those condemned to death do not have access to adequate appeal procedures.

Executions are carried out by shooting the condemned person in the back of the head. Prisoners are only informed hours, or even minutes, before they are executed.

Prisoners' bodies are not returned to their families for burial, and families are not told where they are buried.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception.