

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### Sierra Leone to speed up death penalty abolition

Sierra Leone's announcement that it will present a law to end the death penalty within weeks is a great step forward for the country.

Minister of Justice Franklyn Bai Kargbo last week told the United Nations that Sierra Leone will abolish the death penalty. President Ernest Bai Koroma has asked for legislation to be drafted to end the death penalty as a matter of urgency, and the Minister of Justice stated that he anticipated that the law would be ready "in the space of a few weeks".

Franklyn Bai Kargbo also announced that the sentences of the country's last death row prisoners have been commuted to life imprisonment.

The authorities of Sierra Leone have been discussing the abolition of the death penalty over several years. The welcome announcement that a law is being drafted to end this ultimate cruel and inhuman punishment is a clear demonstration of Sierra Leone's commitment to human rights.

Amnesty International now urges the government to follow up with concrete action by presenting a draft law that parliament can discuss and adopt as soon as possible. Amnesty International also calls on the government to rapidly ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the global abolition of the death penalty.

If Sierra Leone follows through on its promise, it would become the sixth African country in the past 10 years to have fully abolished the death penalty in law, confirming the clear regional trend of moving away from capital punishment. Worldwide, 98 countries already have abolished the death penalty for all crimes.

Although 37 of the African Union's 54 member States have already abolished the death penalty in law or practice, five Sub-Saharan African countries executed a total of at least 64 people in 2013. Three of these countries – Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan – accounted for more than 90% of all reported executions and two thirds of all reported death sentences.

Sub-Saharan Africa, and West Africa in particular, has seen steady progress on abolishing the death penalty over the past decades. More and more countries are coming around to the fact that the death penalty is a human rights violation and has no special deterrent effect on crime. Amnesty International welcomes the fact that Sierra Leone is becoming serious about moving away from state-sanctioned killing. The death penalty remains a deadly risk as long as it is kept on the books.

While the last execution in Sierra Leone took place in October 1998, the death penalty is retained for treason and aggravated robbery, and is mandatory for murder. Death sentences continued to be handed down, including one in 2013.