

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Afghanistan: Resumption of executions condemned**

Amnesty International condemned the execution of two male prisoners by the Afghan authorities on Monday 20 June 2011. The two men were executed by hanging at Pul-e-Charki prison outside Kabul at 11am local time.

The men, Zar Ajam, a Pakistani national from North Warizistan, and Mateullah from Kunar province in Afghanistan, were convicted of killing approximately 40 people and injuring some 78 others during a raid at a branch of Kabul Bank in the eastern city of Jalalabad on 19 February 2011. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.

Amnesty International strongly condemns all attacks targeting civilians without exception. Such an attack by any party to an armed conflict constitutes a war crime and at all times is a serious abuse of human rights and runs counter to basic principles of humanity. Amnesty International calls for those who commit such atrocities to face investigation and prosecution for such crimes, and if found guilty to be punished.

However, atrocious crimes do not justify cruel punishments. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, believing it to be a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Although Afghan courts continued to impose death sentences, Amnesty International has not recorded executions in the country in the past two years. The death penalty was widely used by the Taliban regime until its overthrow in 2001. The new government's reduction in executions was welcomed by the abolitionist movement as an encouraging sign from the Asia region. The recent executions in Afghanistan are contrary to the global trend towards abolition of the death penalty.

On 11 November 2008, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, called on the Afghan government to halt all planned executions in view of "law enforcement and judicial systems" which "fall short of internationally accepted standards guaranteeing due process and fair trial".

Amnesty International calls on the Afghan government to immediately impose an official moratorium on executions as the first step toward abolition of the death penalty in the country.

### **Background**

A total of 139 countries from all regions of the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice and there is an overall decline in the number of reported executions.

In 2010, less than half of the 58 retentionist countries were known to have carried out executions.

Since 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted, with increased cross-regional support, three resolutions calling upon UN Member States to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.