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Pakistan: Justice in Sialkot lynching case must be consistent with human rights

Amnesty International calls on Pakistan authorities to ensure justice for those guilty of the brutal lynching death of Mughees and Muneeb Butt in Sialkot last year is served without recourse to the death penalty in proceedings which comply with international due process standards.

Amnesty International further calls on Pakistan authorities to urgently ensure the Butt family, who claim to have received threats from relatives of the men convicted for the two brothers' murder, is provided with adequate protection.

On 21 September an Anti-Terrorism Court in Gujranwala, Punjab province, sentenced seven out of 22 convicts to death on four counts for murdering the two teenage brothers.

Amnesty International has previously criticized the Anti-Terrorism Court for falling short of internationally accepted standards of due process.

Pakistan has not carried out an execution since 2008, but courts continue to sentence people to death. It is estimated that there are around 8,000 prisoners currently on death row.

The court handed down life sentences on four counts to six others and gave three-year prison sentences to nine policemen. Another policeman implicated in the case reportedly died of a heart attack three days before the sentences were pronounced. Five other men were acquitted of their charges owing to insufficient evidence.

The family of the two brothers have appealed the decision to the Lahore High Court arguing the six men sentenced to life and five who were acquitted should all be sentenced to death.

Under Pakistan law, all of the convicted men have a right to appeal the decision to the Lahore High Court, including those sentenced to death. Pakistan's President also has the power to pardon convicts sentenced to death.

On 15 August 2010, an angry crowd beat teenagers Mughees, aged 17, and Muneeb, aged 15, to death using hockey sticks, iron rods and other improvised weapons. The crowd believed them to have earlier murdered 20-year-old milkman Bilal Shaukat Ali and injured his 30 year old brother Javed Shaukat Ali in the course of a robbery.

Video footage of the lynching shows the boys being killed by the crowd in the presence of several police officials. After the footage was broadcast on national television, eleven police officials and 17 others were arrested on suspicion of involvement.

Ensuring the accountability of all those directly or indirectly involved in the incident, including police officials, is integral to maintaining the rule of law. But as Amnesty noted in August, authorities must ensure that justice is served without recourse to the death penalty.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and under any circumstances, regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the

state to carry out the execution. The death penalty violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

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