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Viet Nam: Death penalty - a dirty secret

Amnesty International is shocked by the news that the Vietnamese government, in a decision signed by the Prime Minister on 5 January, has made the reporting and dissemination of statistics on the use of the death penalty a state secret.

"Hiding behind draconian decrees protecting so-called 'state secrets', the Vietnamese authorities are flouting international human rights standards and basic rights surrounding freedom of expression and freedom of access to information," the organization said today.

Amnesty International is opposed to the death penalty worldwide and regards it as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and a breach of the right to life.

According to official Vietnamese media sources monitored by Amnesty International, over 100 people were given the death sentence and more than 60 people were executed in 2003. The organization regards these figures as incomplete and believes that the true number of those put to death by the Vietnamese state to be far higher. Both figures represent an increase of at least 100% over the previous year.

"The dramatic rise in the reported use of the death penalty in 2003 for crimes including economic offences is of grave concern and unjustified," emphasized Amnesty International. "In just the first week of 2004, six people have already been executed and three sentenced to death," the organization added.

In Amnesty International's report *"Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: The death penalty - inhumane and ineffective"*, published in August 2003, the organization outlined its concerns surrounding the imposition of the death penalty in Viet Nam which the organization believes are in contravention of international human rights standards. Routinely unfair trials mean that the death penalty is imposed under conditions which may lead to irreversible miscarriages of justice.

The organization reminds the Vietnamese authorities that the United Nations in an April 2003 resolution on the use of the death penalty calls for "information with regard to the imposition of the death penalty and to any scheduled execution" to be made "available to the public". In Viet Nam, even the relatives of those facing execution are not informed beforehand.

"It is ironic that a government that clearly believes in the deterrent effect of the death penalty is now attempting to muzzle the reporting of its use. This lack of transparency renders invalid any such claim. What have the Vietnamese authorities got to hide," asked Amnesty International today.

For the full text of the report on death penalty ,please go to:
"Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: The death penalty - inhumane and ineffective"
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa410232003>

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