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## **Asia: Time to move towards abolition of the death penalty**

With Asia executing more people each year than any other part of the world, Amnesty International called today, on World Day Against the Death Penalty, for India, South Korea and Taiwan to join the global trend and establish a moratorium on the death penalty immediately.

China, Iran, Saudi Arabia Pakistan and the USA accounted for 88 per cent of the 1,252 known executions that Amnesty International recorded in 2007.

In Asia, 14 countries still carry out executions but 27 countries have now abolished the death penalty in law or in practice.

"There is a window of hope and a chance for change in Asia. Today we are urging India, South Korea and Taiwan to join the global trend towards ending executions and set an example for the rest of the continent to follow," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

- India has not executed anyone since 2004, although death sentences are still handed down -- at least 100 in 2007 -- often in trials where poorer defendants have inadequate legal representation.
- South Korea last executed people in December 1997, when 23 people were put to death. On 31 December 2007, six people had their sentence commuted to life imprisonment by the President. However, 58 prisoners remain under sentence of death.
- Taiwan has not carried out any executions since December 2005. This year two individuals have been sentenced to death, meaning Taiwan now has 30 people on death row.

"Death sentences continue to be imposed for a wide range of crimes and people executed often after unfair trials in a number of countries in Asia. There is also a terrible lack of transparency about the use of the death penalty," said Irene Khan.

- In Japan there have been 13 executions so far in 2008 -- compared to a total of nine in 2007 -- and more than 100 people are currently on death row. Hangings in Japan are typically shrouded in secrecy, with a prisoner being notified hours before the execution.
- In Pakistan at present there are around 7,500 persons, including children, under sentence of death, mostly for murder, with at least 130 people executed in 2007 after trials that are often marked by their

unfairness and lack of justice for defendants.

- In Viet Nam, a total of 29 offences in the country's Penal Code carry the optional death penalty, including drug trafficking crimes. Statistics on executions, by firing squads, are classified as a state secret but from January 2007 to the end of May 2008, Amnesty International documented, from media sources, 91 people, including 15 women, sentenced to death.

"A year ago the vast majority of countries voted in favour of a moratorium on the death penalty at the UN. This year we ask Asian leaders to take steps towards making this a reality," said Irene Khan. "They should listen to the calls of people, worldwide, who are joining together today to demand an end to this cruel and inhumane punishment."

Amnesty International believes the death penalty violates the right to life, has no clear deterrent effect on crime and has no place in a modern criminal justice system.

The organization recorded at least 1,252 executions in 24 countries in 2007, with at least 3,347 people sentenced to death in 51 countries. China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the USA executed the most people, with China the world's leading state executioner.

## **Background**

Amnesty International, the [World Coalition Against the Death Penalty](#), the [Anti Death Penalty Asia Network \(ADPAN\)](#) and other anti-death penalty campaigning groups are organizing local actions around the world on 10 October. Founded in May 2002, the WCADP is a coalition of 74 human rights organizations, bar associations, trade unions and local and regional authorities which have joined together in an effort to rid the world of the death penalty.

In 2007, China executed at least 470 people, Iran 317, Saudi Arabia 143, Pakistan at least 135, Viet Nam 25, Afghanistan 15 and Japan nine.

More than two thirds of the countries in the world have now abolished the death penalty in law or practice. At the end of June 2008, the figure stood at 137. Out of these 137 countries, 92 are abolitionist for all crimes, 11 are abolitionist for ordinary crimes only and 34 are abolitionists in practice.

In Asia the 27 countries to have abolished the death penalty in law or practice are Australia, Bhutan, Cambodia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federal States), Nepal, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are abolitionist for all crimes. Fiji is abolitionist for ordinary crimes only. Brunei, South Korea, Laos, Maldives, Myanmar, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Tonga are abolitionist in practice.

In December 2007 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 62/149 "Moratorium on the use of the death penalty" by an overwhelming majority: 104 in favour, 54 against and 29 abstentions. This is how countries in the Asia region voted:

- In favour (15): Australia, Cambodia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Nepal, New Zealand, Palau, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.
- Abstained (5): Bhutan, Fiji, South Korea, Laos and Viet Nam.
- Against (18): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Thailand and Tonga.

Also this month:

On 14 October, Amnesty International is issuing a report on the death penalty in Saudi Arabia;  
On 21 October, Amnesty International is highlighting the use of the death penalty in Nigeria.

[More information on the death penalty.](#)