

Key messages for Death Sentences and Executions in 2009

INTERNAL DOCUMENT

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Below are the key global messages for the publication of Amnesty International's report Death Sentences and Executions in 2009.

The report provides a world overview on the death penalty in 2009. It is **embargoed until Tuesday 30 March 2010, 00:01 GMT.**

The key messages are in the grey area with talking points to back up the message underneath.

For the first time, Amnesty International will not publish figures for the number of executions and death sentences in China.

The death penalty in China remains shrouded in secrecy. Such secrecy is indefensible. We challenge the Chinese authorities to publicly provide statistics to prove their own claims of a reduction in use of the death penalty.

The lack of publicly available official statistics only allows for estimates that grossly under represent the actual number of executions and death sentences.

- Information on the number of executions in China is classified as a state secret, so Amnesty International does not know the exact number of executions carried out in 2009. Individuals disclosing state secrets can be held criminally responsible.

We have closely and consistently monitored the application of the death penalty in China for many years, including in 2009 and we will continue to do so. Based on evidence from previous years and from various current sources it is likely that the number of executions in China over the last year was in the thousands, and therefore that the majority of the world's executions took place there.

- The Chinese authorities, while stating that their overall goal is to reduce the use of the death penalty, continue to use executions to demonstrate that activities deemed to be harmful to social stability will be treated harshly.
- Based on limited domestic media reports, issues and cases that generate considerable public debate and concern are often dealt with more visibly and swiftly.
- Only certain cases are reported in domestic media and are often promoted as evidence of the government's serious efforts to tackle and supposedly deter crime. In 2009 these included:

Nine people - eight Uighur ethnic minority and one of Han Chinese ethnicity – who were executed in November 2009 were amongst the first to be sentenced to death in connection with the unrest which broke out in the XUAR in western China in July 2009.

Six people were executed on 25 June in China on charges of drug trafficking. The Supreme People's Court (SPC) announced the executions at a high profile press conference one day later on the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking saying "Severely punishing the crime of drug trafficking has always been the stance of the SPC."

Zhang Yujun and Geng Jinping were executed for 'endangering public safety' and 'producing and selling toxic food' respectively following the tainted milk scandal which emerged in 2008

Two men were also executed for their involvement in the unrest in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 2008

The death penalty was used to send political messages, to silence opponents or to promote political agendas in China, Iran and Sudan in 2009

China

- The Chinese authorities continue to use executions to demonstrate that activities deemed to be harmful to social stability will be treated harshly. In 2009, this included:

Responding swiftly and forcefully to unrest in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) which broke out in July 2009. Nine people - eight of Uighur ethnic minority and one of Han Chinese ethnicity – who were executed in November 2009 were amongst the first to be sentenced to death in connection with the unrest. These executions were announced just 4 weeks after the ruling by the court of first instance.

Two men were executed for their involvement in the unrest in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 2008

Six people were executed on 25 June in China on charges of drug trafficking. The executions were announced by Supreme People's Court at high profile press conference as part of anti-drug campaign.

Iran

- An increase in the rate of executions was registered in the eight-week period between the presidential election on 12 June and the inauguration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for a second term as President on 5 August. Amnesty International recorded 112 executions in this period. Many of those executed were convicted in flawed legal proceedings.
- In Iran, the death penalty continued to be applied in political cases, in which individuals are commonly accused of "enmity against God":

Three alleged members of the People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI) were hanged in public in Zahedan on 30 May 2009, less than 48 hours after an explosion, claimed by the PRMI, killed up to 25 worshippers in a Shi'a mosque. The three men were in detention at the time of the bombing.

Ehsan Fattahian was executed despite domestic and international pressure to save his life. He had been convicted of "enmity against God" for being a member of a Kurdish opposition group. He was initially sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment to be served in internal exile, but this was increased on appeal to the death penalty. At least 21 other Kurds are known to be on death row for political offences.

Two men, Mohammadreza Alizamanli and Arash Rahmanipoor, were executed in January 2010 for 'enmity against God'. They were tried in the 2009 "show trial" which followed the disputed presidential elections in spite of the fact they had been arrested prior to the election. Their execution followed opposition protests on Ashura in December 2009. At least ten others have also been sentenced to death in relation to the ongoing protests. The Iranian authorities have threatened future demonstrators with the possibility of the charge of "enmity against God" which can carry the death penalty being brought against them.

Sudan

- In Sudan the application of the death penalty continued to be marked by judicial flaws and arbitrariness, often based on unfair trials and evidence extracted through torture and as a means to repress political opposition in the country.
- Between April 2009 and January 2010, 56 people were sentenced to death for their alleged membership in the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a Darfur-based armed opposition group, and for their alleged participation in an attack on the capital, Khartoum, in May 2008.

Less countries than ever before are carrying out executions, as the world witnessed further progress to abolishing the death penalty in 2009.

- More than two-thirds of the countries in the world have now abolished the death penalty in law or practice.
- 18 countries carried out executions in 2009; the vast majority of were carried out in China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and USA
- 714 people were known to have been executed in 2009 – this does not include the thousands of executions that were likely to have taken place in China
- At least 2001 people were sentenced to death in 56 countries
- For the first year since Amnesty International began keeping records, no executions took place in Europe
- The USA was the only country in the whole of the Americas to carry out executions
- The number of countries that have removed capital punishment entirely from their laws increased to 95. 2009 saw Burundi and Togo both abolish the death penalty
- In Asia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Mongolia and Pakistan refrained from executions in 2009, the first execution-free year in those countries in recent times
- In sub-Saharan Africa only two countries executed prisoners: Botswana and Sudan
- In Kenya the government announced that more than 4,000 condemned prisoners would have their sentences commuted to imprisonment; the largest mass commutation of death sentences known to Amnesty International

Iran and Saudi Arabia continued to execute juvenile offenders* - the only two countries known to have carried out this practice in 2009

- At least seven juvenile offenders were executed in 2009:
 - 'Issa bin Muhammad 'Umar Muhammad and Sultan Bin Sulayman Bin Muslim al-Muwallad, who were both 17 at the time of the offence, were executed in Saudi Arabia on 10 May 2009.
 - Five others were executed in Iran, all of whom were 17 at the time of the offence: Mola Gol Hassan was executed on 21 January 2009; Delara Darabi on 1 May 2009; Ali Jafari on 20 May 2009; Behnoud Shojaee on 11 October 2009 and Mosleh Zamani on 17 December 2009.
 - Juvenile offenders remain on death row in Iran, Myanmar, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Uganda and Yemen
- * Juvenile offenders are people under the age of 18 at the time of their alleged offence. Such executions are a violation of international law and, globally, have become increasingly rare in recent years as states reject the judicial killing of juvenile offenders.

Amnesty International believes that the death penalty violates the right to life and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to kill the prisoner

Death Penalty 2009 Facts and Figures

Overall

- At least 714 were executed in 2009 – this does not include the thousands of executions that were likely to have taken place in China.
- 18 countries carried out executions in 2009.
- At least 2001 people were sentenced to death in 56 countries.

For background:

2008: at least 672 were executed in 24 countries excluding China.

2007: at least 782 were executed in 23 countries excluding China.

Progress towards abolition in 2009

- More than two-thirds of the countries in the world have now abolished the death penalty in law or practice.
- 95 countries have abolished the death penalty for all crimes - Burundi and Togo both abolished the death penalty in 2009.
- No executions took place in Europe - the first year since Amnesty International began keeping records.
- In Asia: Afghanistan, Indonesia, Mongolia and Pakistan refrained from executions - the first execution-free year in these countries in recent times.
- In the Americas, the USA was the only nation to carry out executions in 2009.
- In sub-Saharan Africa only two countries executed prisoners: Botswana and Sudan.
- In the Middle East: Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco/Western Sahara, and Tunisia - maintained longstanding moratoriums on executions.

Executions in 2009

- 18 countries carried out executions; the vast majority were carried out in China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and USA.
- The Middle East and North Africa region had the highest per capita rate of executions in the world.
- Iran executed at least 112 people in the 8 weeks after the presidential election.
- 7 prisoners who were under 18 at the time of the offence were executed in Iran and Saudi Arabia.
- 69 people were publicly beheaded in Saudi Arabia.
- 58 countries retain the death penalty.
- Methods of execution in 2009 included: hanging, shooting, beheading, stoning, electrocution and lethal injection.

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