

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Official moratorium on the death penalty – an opportunity for Laos

Amnesty International and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) urge the Lao government to introduce an official moratorium on executions.

As of 2007, both Amnesty International and FIDH were pleased to publicly categorize the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos) as abolitionist in practice. In a recent letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs the organizations welcomed the absence of executions in Laos since 1989, but pressed the government to go a step further by formalising the current de facto moratorium.

Amnesty International and FIDH also called on the Lao government to take a lead in supporting this trend across Southeast Asia, by promoting a moratorium as a step towards abolition, which in turn is part and parcel of promoting human rights and reforming criminal justice policy.

In December 2007 the Lao government abstained in the vote on UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 62/149 "Moratorium on the use of the death penalty" which was adopted by an overwhelming majority of states. Unfortunately, a month later it went on to support a statement circulated as a Note verbale on 11 January 2008 to the General Assembly, in which 58 countries, including Laos, disassociate themselves with the resolution.

Momentum towards abolition is gathering across the world. As of June 2008, 92 countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes; 11 other countries have abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes and retain the death penalty only for exceptional crimes such as crimes under military law or crimes committed in wartime. In Asia and the Pacific, 27 of 41 countries are now abolitionist in law or practice. The adoption of the UNGA resolution was an important milestone underlining this trend, as only 24 countries carried out executions in 2007. FIDH and Amnesty International call on the Lao government to support this momentum and consider practical steps towards abolishing the death penalty.

Background

FIDH and Amnesty International oppose the death penalty in all cases and without exception, believing it to be a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. The death penalty legitimizes an irreversible act of violence by the state. There is no clear evidence that the death penalty deters crime any more effectively than other forms of punishment, it denies the possibility of reconciliation or rehabilitation and has been inflicted on the innocent. FIDH and Amnesty International support a global moratorium on executions as a step towards the abolition of the death penalty.

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