

[Front page]

The Death Penalty

"The forfeiture of life is too absolute, too irreversible, for one human being to inflict it on another, even when backed by legal process... It is tragic that, while the nations debate this problem, people continue to be executed."

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, 18 December 2000

[Page 2 inside]

Why abolish the death penalty?

Every day, prisoners - men, women, even children - face execution. Whatever their crime, and whether they are guilty or innocent, their lives are lost to a system of justice that values retribution over rehabilitation.

The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. It violates the right to life. It is irrevocable and can be inflicted on the innocent. It has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments. In country after country, it is used disproportionately against the poor or against racial or ethnic minorities. It is used as a tool of political repression.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and works for its abolition in all countries.

The death penalty v. human rights?

All major international human rights treaties guarantee an individual's right to life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments adopted since 1948 prohibit all forms of "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". Amnesty International considers the death penalty to be incompatible with these human rights standards. Whatever the reason a government gives for executing prisoners and whatever the method of execution used, the death penalty remains a violation of fundamental human rights.

[Quote]

"Thank you so much for your support. I wouldn't have been able to go through all of this on my own."

Abror Isaev's mother speaking to Amnesty International. Abror Isaev was sentenced to death in December 2002 in Uzbekistan. In April 2004, his sentence was commuted to 20 years' imprisonment. Uzbekistan and Belarus are the only countries in Central Asia and Europe still carrying out executions.

[end Quote]

[Box]

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights. It is independent of any government, political persuasion or religious creed.

Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

[end Box]

[Page 3 inside]

Mentally ill man executed in USA

"[I]t was the darkest moment of my professional life. This is a case that should never have happened. He should have been institutionalized a long time ago. The system failed him. But they don't indict the system."

Kelsey Patterson's trial lawyer recalling the moment his client was sentenced to death, Houston Chronicle, 14 November 1999

Kelsey Patterson, a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic, was executed in Texas on 18 May 2004. During his trial, he frequently interrupted the proceedings with rambling comments, alleging that everyone, including his lawyers, was conspiring against him and that "implants" had been placed in his body. He was charged with the murder of two people.

There is no doubt that Kelsey Patterson committed the crime, but the act was without motive and almost certainly a result of his mental deterioration. Yet despite clear manifestation of his mental illness, he was declared fit for trial and execution. People with mental illness can be executed in the USA unless they are found to be legally insane. But the standards used to determine the sanity of a person are minimal.

[Photo captions]

Cover: Woman with restraining rope around her neck cries out as she is sentenced to death, Ghangzhou, China, April 2001.

Above: From the first page of a 13-page letter to a federal court from Kelsey Patterson, February 2004.

Right: Members of Amnesty International, in Brno, the Czech Republic take action on the World Day against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2003.

[end captions]

[Page 4 inside]

Facts and figures

Over half the countries in the world have now abolished the death penalty in law or in practice. Once abolished, the death penalty is rarely reintroduced.

Figures show that abolition does not adversely affect crime rates. In Canada, the homicide rate per 100,000 fell from 3.09 in 1975 (the year before abolition) to 1.73 in 2003, the lowest rate in three decades.

In 2004, 97 per cent of all known executions took place in China, Iran, Viet Nam and the USA.

In 2004 at least 3,797 people were executed in 25 countries. At least 7,395 people were sentenced to death in 64 countries. The true figures are believed to be much higher.

For latest information see www.amnesty.org/deathpenalty

How close are we to abolishing the death penalty?

Across the world, people are making a bold and vocal stand against the death penalty. Individuals - from doctors, lawyers and legislators to Amnesty International members and ordinary citizens - are taking action to stop executions and abolish the death penalty in law. In October 2004, people from over 20 countries - including Burundi, Morocco and the Philippines - marked the annual World Day against the Death Penalty by taking part in conferences and public debates on the subject.

Over 40 countries have abolished the death penalty for all crimes since 1990, bringing the total to 84 in 2004. Bhutan, Greece, Samoa, Senegal and Turkey are among the most recent to do so. Others, such as Kyrgyzstan and South Korea, have placed a moratorium on executions. And in 2004, scores of death row inmates in Malawi and Zambia had their death sentences replaced with prison terms.

[Page 5 outer]

Iran hangs girl for 'acts incompatible with chastity'

Atefeh Rajabi, a 16-year-old girl, was executed in northern Iran in August 2004 for "acts incompatible with chastity". Reportedly, she was hanged on a street in the city centre of Neka. She was said to have been mentally ill both at the time of her "crime" and during her trial proceedings.

Executing child offenders - people under 18 at the time of the crime - is forbidden under international law. Since 1990, Iran has executed 11 child offenders.

[Quote]

In 2004, 159 executions were carried out in Iran. The true figure is believed to be significantly higher.

[end Quote]

[Photo caption]

An unidentified youth cries as people watch the public hanging of five men in Tehran, Iran, in September 2002.

[End caption]

Man executed for embezzling funds in China

Xie Kaichong, 46, was one of six people sentenced to death by Haikou Intermediate People's Court in Hainan Province on the morning of 25 January 2005. Xie Kaichong was convicted of embezzling 5 million RMB (US\$600,000) while working at a bank in Haikou. After the sentences were announced at a public rally, Xie Kaichong was reportedly allowed a final visit with friends and family over a telephone link either side of a thick glass window. He and the other five condemned prisoners were then taken to an

execution ground and shot.

[Quote]

China accounts for the vast majority of the world's reported judicial executions. A senior Chinese official has stated that China executes "nearly 10,000" people per year.

[End Quote]

[Page 6 outer]

What is Amnesty International doing to abolish the death penalty?

Amnesty International appeals to all governments to stop executions, abolish the death penalty in law and ratify international treaties that provide for abolition. Amnesty International works for the abolition of the death penalty by:

- ◆ monitoring developments worldwide
- ◆ collecting and disseminating information
- ◆ mobilizing with other human rights organizations to take concerted action against the death penalty.

Amnesty International maintains worldwide statistics and publishes in-depth reports on the death penalty, available at www.amnesty.org/deathpenalty. It is a member of the World Coalition against the Death Penalty (www.worldcoalition.org), a movement made up of national and international human rights organizations, bar associations, trade unions and local authorities.

[Box]

A campaigning success

Amnesty International, in collaboration with other organizations, launched a worldwide campaign against child executions in January 2004, thus intensifying its efforts in this area. Thousands of appeals were sent to authorities in the USA and other countries. In March 2005 the US Supreme Court ruled that the use of the death penalty against child offenders contravenes the US Constitution. The ruling meant that the lives of more than 70 people on US death rows for crimes committed when they were 16 or 17 years old would be spared.

[end box]

[Box]

What can you do?

Every letter you write in support of abolition helps build pressure - it can bring about change while instilling hope. Act now!

- Join Amnesty International and become part of a worldwide movement campaigning for an end to human rights violations.
- Visit www.amnesty.org/deathpenalty and take action.
- Join Amnesty International's Urgent Action network.

- Participate in the World Day against the Death Penalty every 10 October.

For more information, write to the address in the box above, if there is one.
Or contact: Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House, 1
Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

AI Index: ACT 50/008/2005. © Amnesty International
[End box]