

Ref: ASA 25/002/2009 (Public)  
TG ASA 25/2009.003

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President  
Office of the President  
Cheong Wa Dae  
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13 February 2009

Dear President

### **OPEN LETTER: POSSIBLE RESUMPTION OF EXECUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

I understand that the Government of the Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea) may be taking steps towards the resumption of executions. I urge you not to reverse South Korea's recent practice by carrying out the death penalty. Doing so would ignore the global trend towards abolition of the death penalty.

We are aware that a joint consultative meeting took place on 12 February involving the ruling Grand National Party, Korean National Police, and Ministries of Justice and Public Administration and Security to discuss whether to execute the 58 inmates currently on death row and to introduce life imprisonment without the possibility of commutation.

Amnesty International has repeatedly welcomed the fact that no executions have been carried out in South Korea since December 1997 and considers the country to be abolitionist in practice.

We acknowledge the public concern and recent anger at the alleged murder of seven women by Kang Ho-soon. I would like to stress that our opposition to the death penalty does not in any way seek to distract from the sympathy for the victims of violent crime and their loved ones. However, Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and considers it a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

We believe the death penalty serves no useful purpose for those societies that utilise it. It has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments and brutalises those involved in the process of executions as well as wider society. Executions create another set of victims of violence through the suffering inflicted upon the relatives and loved ones of the individual killed at the hands of the state.

Resumption of executions runs counter to the universal protection of human rights and comes at a time when there is a clear international trend away from the use of the death penalty. This trend was clearly illustrated on 18 December 2007 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for a moratorium on executions as a first step towards total abolition of the death penalty. The resolution was adopted by 104 votes in favour, 54 against and 29 abstentions. The UN Secretary-General (and South Korean national), Ban Ki-moon, stated that "Today's vote represents a bold step by the international community. I am particularly encouraged by the support expressed for this initiative from many diverse regions of the world. This is further evidence of a trend towards ultimately abolishing the death penalty". A second resolution on the moratorium was adopted a year later with an even greater margin of support.

In the past five years, the governments of Uzbekistan, Rwanda, the Philippines, Greece, Albania, Mexico, Turkey, Bhutan and others have removed capital punishment from their laws. One hundred and thirty eight countries have now abolished the death penalty in law or in practice. Executions have become increasingly rare. In 2007, only 24 countries carried out executions. The figure for 2008 will be very similar.

I urge the Government of South Korea to signal its embrace of the international trend to move away from using the death penalty and to refrain from reintroducing executions.

I thank you for your time and look forward to hearing from you on this vital human rights issue.

Yours sincerely

Irene Khan  
Secretary General