

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Liberia: Amnesty International calls for repeal of death penalty law signed by Liberian President

Amnesty International condemned the signing by Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of a law calling for the death penalty for anyone convicted of armed robbery, terrorism or hijacking offences if these crimes result in death.

The organization called on President Johnson-Sirleaf to repeal the law.

Amnesty International said that the law directly violates Liberia's obligations under the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Liberia acceded to on 16 September 2005 and which abolishes the death penalty.

Liberian law already included the possibility of the death penalty, but in 2005, the country should have incorporated into law the Second Optional Protocol, thereby abolishing the death penalty for all crimes.

Under customary international law, as reflected in Article 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which Liberia ratified on 29 August 1985, a state "may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as a justification for its failure to perform a treaty".

The continent of Africa is largely free of executions, with only seven of the region's 53 countries known to have carried out executions in 2007. According to Amnesty International's information, 14 countries in Africa are abolitionist in law and a further 21 in practice.

While states have the duty to protect the right to life and security of individuals from violent crimes, there is no valid scientific evidence to support that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments.

All too often, politicians have found the death penalty a useful tool in appearing to address crime and make the public feel safe. In reality, the death penalty has no such effect and simply distracts from the need to address the causes of crime and providing effective remedies – which is what the Liberian government should be doing.

Background information

The Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, aimed at the abolition of the death penalty worldwide, was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. It provides for the total abolition of the death penalty but allows states parties to retain the death penalty in time of war if they make a reservation to that effect at the time of ratifying or acceding to the Protocol.

Any state that is a party to the ICCPR can become a party to the Protocol.

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