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Sudan: Alarming increase in executions in Darfur Region

Amnesty International today condemned the sharp increase in executions and the use of the death sentence as punishment in Darfur region, Western Sudan.

"Since the beginning of the year, at least 19 people are reported to have been executed in Darfur region. Many others are at imminent risk of losing their lives in the coming days, weeks and months if this alarming trend is not halted," the organization said today.

In May 14 men were executed by hanging in al-Fashir prison after being convicted of armed robbery in trials by "Emergency" courts. These trials fall far short of international standards for fair trial. Five other men are reported to have been executed in al-Fashir in March, after being convicted of banditry and murder by an "Emergency" court.

Amnesty International knows of 18 named men currently on death row in Northern and Southern Darfur and has received unconfirmed reports that a further 21 were sentenced to death in September 2001. The organization fears the number awaiting execution may be much higher.

"This is state sanctioned killing at its worse, with those suspected having little or no recourse to defend themselves. The judicial authorities in Sudan must ensure that all prisoners are guaranteed every opportunity to defend themselves, including the right of appeal to a higher tribunal, and to seek commutation of the sentence," the organization added.

Whilst recognizing the rights and responsibilities of all governments to bring to justice those convicted of recognizably criminal offences, Amnesty International considers the death penalty to be the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, and to have no proven deterrent effect on crime.

"In allowing death sentences to be passed, the Sudanese authorities are going against the fundamental tenet of the right to life as stated in the Bill of Rights. All pending death sentences should be commuted immediately and the trial procedures of Emergency courts should be reviewed and amended in accordance with international standards," Amnesty International stated.

Background

Sudan's penal code, which is based upon the government's interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law), includes a number of penalties, such as limb amputation, death and death followed by crucifixion, which Amnesty International regard as cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments and therefore inconsistent with international human rights law and Sudan's obligations, in particular under the

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the United Nations' *Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)*, both of which Sudan has ratified.

Emergency courts were established in Northern and Southern Darfur in May 2001 to deal with offences such as armed robbery, murder and possession and smuggling of weapons. These courts are headed by two military judges and one civil judge and do not allow legal representation for the accused until the appeal stage of proceedings.

Under international human rights standards, people charged with crimes punishable by death are entitled to the strictest observance of fair trial guarantees and to certain additional guarantees. Nevertheless, Amnesty International believes these additional safeguards are not a justification for the retention of the death penalty.

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