

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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St Kitts and Nevis: Execution is a shameless act

Amnesty International considers the execution of Charles Elroy Laplace carried out in St. Kitts and Nevis on Friday 19th December as a shameless human rights development for the country after 10 years of moratorium.

Amnesty International understands concerns about the upsurge of crime and murders in the country. However, the organization strongly believes that the use of the death penalty, as well as constituting cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, is not an effective method for preventing crime.

Given the unlikelihood of ever being brought before the courts, it is quite implausible that before committing a crime a criminal would consider the risk of being hung and would refrain from wrongdoing. The death penalty also runs the risk of irrevocable error.

Protection of citizens does not come from executing criminals but from preventing them committing crimes. Amnesty International therefore believes that the true solution to the deteriorating crime situation lies with the strengthening of police capacities. The proper functioning of the justice system is also crucial to ensure compensation to victims but such compensation cannot come from claiming the life of the wrong-doer.

The world is turning away from the use of death penalty. Before last Friday's execution, since 2003, the United States has been the only country in the Americas to carry out executions, even in the USA there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of executions in recent years. One hundred and thirty seven countries have now abolished the death penalty in law or practice and only 24 nations carried out executions in 2007. Huge swathes of the world are now free from executions.

Amnesty International appeals to the St Kitts and Nevis authorities to send a strong message to the world and to the other Caribbean countries by stopping the executions and commuting the sentences of all other prisoners waiting on death row.

Background

Charles Elroy Laplace was executed last Friday 19 December 2009 at 8.00 a.m. at Her Majesty's Prison in Basseterre, St Kitts. He was tried at the High Court (Criminal Assizes) for the killing of his wife committed in 2004. He was convicted on 28th February 2006 and sentenced to death on 30th March 2006.

According to press reports, St. Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister and Minister of National Security disclosed that a Notice of Appeal was later filed with the Court of Appeal but was dismissed on the 29th October 2008 for being filed out of time. He added that there was no further Application or Appeal in this matter and therefore in accordance with the Constitution of the Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis the meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Prerogative of Mercy was convened and advised the carrying out of the sentence of the aforementioned Court made on the 30th March 2006.

Friday's hanging was the first in 10 years. In 1998, David Wilson, aged 28, was hanged for killing a security guard at a hotel four years earlier. One man was hanged in 1985. The last execution in other English-speaking Caribbean countries was carried out in the Bahamas in 2000.

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