

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Philippines: Abolition of the death penalty

Amnesty International welcomes today's passage of legislation abolishing the death penalty by the Philippine Congress. The Philippines is the 25th country in the Asia-Pacific region to end capital punishment in law or practice. Amnesty International now appeals to President Arroyo to sign the approved legislation into law.

On 6 June, both the Philippine Senate and the House of Representatives voted to repeal Republic Act 7659, just days before adjournment at the end of this week.

The Philippine Congress rightly took the opportunity to end the death penalty and has shown through its leadership its commitment to respect the fundamental right to life. Now Amnesty International is calling on President Arroyo to follow suit and enact the legislation into law.

On 15 April President Arroyo commuted all death sentences to life imprisonment in what is believed to be the largest ever commutation of death sentences in modern times. Four days later, President Arroyo marked as urgent legislation to repeal the death penalty.

By abolishing the death penalty, Philippines now joins the worldwide trend toward abolition of the death penalty and will become the 125th nation to become abolitionist in law or practice. Amnesty International hopes that the Philippines will motivate others in the region that have not yet abolished the death penalty to follow suit.

As an organization concerned with the victims of human rights abuses, Amnesty International also recognizes the suffering of families of crime victims. However, studies have shown that the death penalty is disproportionately imposed on the poorest, least educated and most vulnerable members of society. It takes the lives of offenders who might otherwise have been rehabilitated. Amnesty International welcomes all steps by governments to end use of the death penalty -- the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Amnesty International stresses that any punishments that replace the death penalty should not themselves constitute torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments.

Background

In 1987 the Philippines set an historic precedent by becoming the first Asian country in modern times to abolish the death penalty for all crimes. However, the death penalty was reintroduced in the Philippines in late 1993 for 46 different offences. Executions resumed in 1999 until former President Estrada in 2000 announced a moratorium on executions, which President Arroyo has continued, in practice, throughout her presidency.

