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Botswana: the world appeals to the President to halt two imminent executions

Unless President Festus Mogae intervenes to halt their executions, two people are facing death by hanging in Botswana early tomorrow morning, Amnesty International said today.

The organization is joining Botswana human rights activists and church leaders in their opposition to the planned executions and calling on President Mogae to exercise his powers of clemency and commute the death sentences of Tlhabologang Mauwe and Gwara Brown Motswetla.

A cause of special concern is the allegation reportedly made by one of the attorneys in the case that the death sentences were passed on the sole basis of circumstantial evidence. The organization hopes President Mogae may be willing to grant a stay of execution until an urgent review is conducted to allay any doubts about the justice of their convictions.

While not seeking to belittle the seriousness of violent crime and of its consequences on the victims and their families, Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases.

"We believe that everyone -- no matter who they are or what they have done -- is entitled to basic rights, and especially to the right to life," the organization said. "No one should be submitted to this cruel, inhuman and irreversible form of punishment."

President Mogae openly supports the death penalty, which on earlier occasions he justified with its presumed deterring effect on crime. "However, there is no reliable evidence that the death penalty is a more effective deterrent against crime than any other form of punishment," Amnesty International noted.

Tlhabologang Mauwe and Gwara Brown Motswetla were sentenced to death in 1997 for the murder of a man who had caught them stealing his cattle. Both are believed to be married with children, and to be members of the minority Basarwa (San) ethnic group. The Botswana Court of Appeal later upheld their sentences. If their executions are carried out, they will bring to more than 20 the number of people put to death in Botswana since the country became independent in 1966.

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