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Ghana: Time to abolish the death penalty

The recent handing down of yet another death sentence in Ghana highlights the urgent need for concrete measures to be taken towards the complete abolition of the death penalty in Ghana, Amnesty International said today.

Edward Anim Densu, a former District Chief Executive for East Akyem in the Eastern Region of Ghana, was sentenced to death by hanging on 12 February 2002 by a Koforidua High Court.

"Judges are still handing down death sentences because capital punishment is still in the statute books of Ghana," the organization said.

Although no executions are known to have been carried out in Ghana since 1993 by firing squad, and since 1968 when the last hanging took place, the death penalty has continued to be handed down in cases of murder and for treason convictions for alleged coup-plotting.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, on grounds that it is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and it violates the right to life. Although Ghana is not a party to the second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) abolishing the death penalty, International human rights standards and bodies encourage the abolition of the death penalty. The Human Rights Committee has stated that the ICCPR refers generally to abolition. Ghana is a party to the ICCPR.

The death penalty also has never proven an effective deterrent against violent crimes. A survey on the relation between the death penalty and homicide rates in the world, conducted for the United Nations in 1988 and updated in 1996, concluded: "Research has failed to provide scientific proof that executions have a greater deterrent effect than life imprisonment and such proof is unlikely to be forthcoming".

"It is high time to remove the death penalty from the statutory books of Ghana. In doing so, Ghana will reaffirm its commitment towards human rights and will defuse the temptation of using the capital punishment as a repressive weapon in the future. Ghana has the means and structures to join the growing group of African nations that have already officially abolished the death penalty", Amnesty International said. In this context, Amnesty International urges Ghana to ratify without further delay the second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR.

The Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, has reportedly indicated that it is time to decide whether to keep capital punishment in the statute books or not. "This clearly indicates that even within the Government, there are serious doubts about the effectiveness of such a cruel punishment," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International has published two reports analysing the situation of the death penalty in Ghana and making recommendation to the Government on the steps to be taken for its complete abolition.

See Amnesty International reports on Ghana:

AFR 28/003/1991, "Political imprisonment and the death penalty", 18 December 1991

[AFR 28/001/2000, "Briefing on the death penalty", July 2000](#)

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