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Philippines: Executions put on hold

President Estrada's announcement today that no one will be executed for the rest of the year is a breakthrough for human rights in the Philippines, Amnesty International said today welcoming the moratorium.

The announcement came within hours of a joint press conference in Manila by the Coalition against the Death Penalty, attended by representatives of Amnesty International, members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), local parliamentarians and other human rights activists.

The Head of the CBCP, Bishop Teodoro Bacani, is also reported to have made a personal request to the President to suspend all executions out of respect for the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Christ.

"Today 108 countries around the world, encompassing widely different societies, cultures and religions, have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. The Philippines now has the chance to reflect on the right to life and the futility of the death penalty in fighting crime," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International expressed hope that the moratorium will lead to abolition of the death penalty, in line with the recommendation of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Background

Seven people have been executed by lethal injection since February 1999. Despite the worldwide trend towards abolition, the Philippines reimposed the death penalty in late 1993, despite having abolished it in 1986. Since 1994 the number of prisoners under sentence of death has swelled to well over 1,200, one of the highest death row populations in the world.

Research has shown that convictions in capital cases have been made on the basis of coerced confessions and many of those on death row - often the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society - have not received fair trials, heightening the risk of executing the innocent.

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