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Taiwan carries out first executions in five years

Amnesty International has condemned the execution of four prisoners by the Taiwanese authorities, the first since December 2005.

Chang Chun-hung, Hung Chen-yao, Ko Shih-ming and Chang Wen-wei were executed in prisons in Taipei, Tainan and Taichun on the evening of 30 April.

The executions come just two weeks after new Minister of Justice Tseng Yung-fu was reported as saying that his ultimate goal is the abolition of the death penalty.

“These executions cast a dark shadow on the country’s human rights record, and blatantly contradict the Justice Minister’s previously declared intention to abolish the death penalty,” said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Deputy Director.

The resignation of Wang Ching-feng as Minister of Justice last March sparked international attention over the issue of the death penalty in Taiwan. Wang Ching-feng had refused to sign execution orders because of her opposition to the death penalty.

“The world was looking to the Taiwanese authorities to choose human rights, and to show leadership on the path towards abolishing the death penalty in the Asia-Pacific. Today’s executions extinguished that hope,” said Catherine Baber.

The Taiwanese Alliance to End the Death Penalty has raised concerns over the legality of the executions.

The Taiwanese authorities stated today that they are still considering alternatives to the death penalty, but such commitments are of little value while executions continue.

139 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Amnesty International calls upon the Taiwanese authorities to immediately establish a moratorium on executions and take all the necessary steps to abolish the death penalty in the country.

Background

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, as a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Amnesty International believes that the death penalty legitimizes an irreversible act of violence by the state. Research demonstrates that the death penalty is often applied in a discriminatory manner, being used

disproportionately against the poor, minorities and members of racial, ethnic and religious communities. The death penalty is often imposed after a grossly unfair trial.

But even when trials respect international standards of fairness, the risk of executing the innocent can never be fully eliminated – the death penalty will inevitably claim innocent victims, as has been persistently demonstrated. Scientific studies have consistently failed to find convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments.

Two resolutions, calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty, were adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in December 2007 and 2008 by an overwhelming majority of states.