IPS, the global news agency, brings you independent news and views on capital punishment. In this newsletter you will find in-depth reports by IPS correspondents from around the world and columns by experts, in addition to special sections for news from international NGOs and a review of the global media for a glimpse of what is happening on the ground. Join us in helping strengthen awareness about the abolition of death penalty – and encourage your friends and colleagues to subscribe to this free monthly newsletter.

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News from International NGOs:
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January Highlights

PRI calls on EC to control the trade in drugs used for execution by lethal injection

On 5 January 2011, a coalition of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), wrote to the European Commission to urge them to review and amend Council Regulation (EC) No. 1236/2005, which controls the international trade in equipment that could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, to include drugs used in the lethal injection protocol.

On 26 October 2010, Jeffery Landrigan was executed by lethal injection for the 1989 murder of Chester Dean Dyer in Phoenix, Arizona, United States. The execution took place in spite of a US-wide shortage of sodium thiopental, the anaesthetic agent in the three-drug cocktail used in lethal injections in Arizona. The Arizona Attorney General revealed that the sodium thiopental used to execute Landrigan was imported from the United Kingdom.

The export of sodium thiopental from any European country to the US for the purpose of lethal injections undermines not just the spirit and purpose of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1236/2005, but also the EU’s policy of fighting against the death penalty in countries where it still exists. Sodium thiopental is the drug preferred by US authorities that still carry out the death penalty with lethal injections.

The joint NGO submission outlined recommendations to the European Commission. Specifically, to urge the Commission, in consultation with Member States and at the earliest possible opportunity, to extend the scope of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1236/2005 to control the trade in drugs used in lethal injections by:

(a) including sodium thiopental in its Annex III, thereby subjecting this drug to the export control systems of EU Member States; and

(b) including a new ‘torture-death penalty end-use catch-all’ clause in the Regulation, which would allow EU Member States to prohibit, on a case-by-case basis, the trade of any item not listed in the Annexes of the Regulation but that clearly have no practical use other than for the purposes of capital punishment; or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that such
items would be used for the purposes of capital punishment. This catch-all clause has been advocated by the UK government, and would enable EU Member States to prevent exports of any drugs where there are reasonable grounds to believe that such items would be used for the purposes of capital punishment.

These two measures would help ensure that any future exports of any drugs from the EU (including sodium thiopental, and the other drugs currently used in the lethal injection protocol: pancuronium bromide (Pavulon), potassium chloride, and pentobarbital) would not be used for capital punishment, but only for legitimate medical purposes.

The submission was endorsed by the following NGOs:
- Amicus, UK
- Amnesty International
- Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM), France
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (FIACAT)
- International Harm Reduction Association (IHRA), UK
- Murder Victims’ Families for Human Rights (MVFHR), US
- National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL), US
- Omega Research Foundation (ORF), UK
- Penal Reform International (PRI), UK
- Reprieve, UK
- Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP), US
- World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (WCADP)

Download a copy of the full submission here: Review of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1236/2005 to include drugs used in the lethal injection protocol

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PRI’s current programme of work on the abolition of the death penalty focuses on supporting governments and other stakeholders in progressing towards the abolition of the death penalty and implementation of human rights standards in criminal justice systems, particularly concerning the treatment of death row, life and long-term prisoners.
Police officials argue death penalty doesn't make us safer

James Abbott, Antonio Cluny, Bob Denmark and Ronald Hampton write in an opinion article posted on the San Jose Mercury News on January 8, 2011: Over the past decade, executions have dropped by more than 50 percent and the number of death sentences has steadily declined, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. As police and law enforcement officers with decades of experience in fighting crime in the United States and Europe, we believe that societies are better off without the death penalty. We recently came together in Washington, D.C., for the first international dialogue among law enforcement professionals about the death penalty and found important areas of agreement.

Europe has abandoned the death penalty, but European countries have lower murder rates and higher rates of solving homicides than the United States. In the United States, states with the death penalty generally have higher murder rates than states without it. For example, southern states have the highest murder rates and account for 82 percent of all U.S. executions. The deterrence argument is weak and it goes against our experience investigating serious crimes: the majority of offenders do not think through the consequences of their actions. In fact, they do not think they will ever be caught.

The death penalty, as it is applied, is too random to effectively deter potential offenders. If you execute a contract killer, for example, it would not deter a terrorist. If you execute a terrorist, it would not deter a young man who breaks into a house, gets startled, and shoots the owner.

U.S. politicians sometimes argue that the death penalty is needed to deter the killing of police officers. But if one of us were murdered, we would not want the perpetrator to receive the death penalty. The most important thing would be taking care of our families and helping them heal. We have seen how painful it is for families to go through years of death penalty trials and appeals and that would be the last thing we would want for our own families. The idea that the death penalty provides "closure" for victims' families is a myth.

MORE >> http://www.mercurynews.com/opinion/ci_17040923?nclick_check=1
US 'execution drugs' row flares up again as trail points to London

Michael Savage reported in The Independent (UK) on 6 January 2011:

The controversy over the use of British-made drugs in executions in the United States flared up last night after court documents emerged in Arizona which suggested that the supply could be traced to an address in west London.

An invoice seen by The Independent shows the Arizona State Prison Complex invoicing a small company for a cocktail of three drugs used in the lethal injection process.

Green’s attorneys have filed a pretrial motion in Harris County District Court.

Judge Kevin Fine will hear arguments that the death penalty is unconstitutional because it creates an unacceptable risk of executing innocent people.

Green’s attorneys contend that a number of factors in Texas’s legal system increase the risk of innocent people being executed.

Sodium thiopental, potassium chloride and pancuronium bromide – worth a combined £4,253.25 – were supplied to the Arizona State prison complex in September.

American states have been forced to look abroad for the drugs because of problems they encounter sourcing them domestically. According to the invoice, the quantities sold to Arizona by the firm suggest that the state still has enough supplies to execute further prisoners using British-sourced drugs.

Vince Cable, the Business Secretary, has now tightened rules on the export of sodium thiopental to stop it being used in executions. However, similar restrictions have yet to be applied to the other two compounds. It is as yet unclear whether the firm registered at the address might have had any role in supplying the chemicals to other states.

Documents from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) have already shown that at least one British company also supplied it with all three drugs used in the execution process.

However, there is no suggestion in the document that the same company was involved. The only British manufacturer of sodium thiopental – the Berkshire-based Archimedes Pharma – has always
denied exporting the drug for use in executions.

Campaigners are now pushing for a total ban on the export of all three drugs, if they are destined to be used in the lethal injection process.


**Labour joins fight against prisoners' votes**

Andrew Grice, Political Editor of The Independent wrote on 6 January 2011:

The Coalition Government could be forced to water down controversial plans to allow prisoners to vote in elections as Conservative MPs prepare to join forces with Labour to sabotage the proposal.

The threat of a Tory rebellion grew as ministers disclosed that 28,770 prisoners would be entitled to vote under their plans — including 5,991 convicted of violence against the person, 1,753 of sexual offences, 2,486 of robbery and 4,188 of burglary.

Following a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, ministers propose to lift the ban on votes for prisoners for those serving jail sentences of up to four years. Although David Cameron stressed he was doing so reluctantly, the Liberal Democrats have long argued that prisoners should not be denied the right to vote.


**28,000 prisoners will have right to vote**

Inmates serving sentences of less than four years can take part in future elections after 140-year-old ban is lifted

The Guardian reported on 5 January 2011:

More than 28,000 prisoners are to win the right to vote, new figures showed yesterday, as David Cameron faces a growing revolt from the Tory right against the lifting of the 140-year-old ban on inmates voting in British elections.

Crispin Blunt, the justice minister, announced that 28,770 prisoners serving sentences of up to four years
will be given the right to vote. The figures include 5,991 prisoners convicted of violent offences and 1,753 inmates convicted of sexual offences.

The government revealed the change last year in response to a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg six years ago that a blanket voting ban on convicted prisoners in British jails was unlawful.

Philip Hollobone, the Eurosceptic Tory MP for Kettering, is to intensify pressure on the government to restore the ban when he holds a debate at Westminster Hall next week.

Hollobone said: "There is no reason at all for the government to change the status quo. Just because the European court has made a pronouncement doesn't mean that the British government needs to accept that. Anyway, the British parliament decided these matters in 1870 – 75 years before the European court was established.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (IPS) - Losing a family member to murder is one of the most traumatic experiences an individual can undergo. In the aftermath of their terrible tragedy, survivors must deal not only with the loss of their loved one but also with the criminal justice system - a system that does not always put victims first.

As a state lawmaker in the U.S., ensuring victims' right to be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect has always been paramount to me. I have learned, however, that when the death penalty is at issue, victims are not always treated equally.

Ten years ago I met Gus Lamm, whose wife Victoria had been murdered years before, leaving him to raise their 2-year-old daughter Audrey. The man responsible for the murder had been sentenced to death. When I met them, Gus and his now adult daughter were clear that they opposed the death penalty. "It pains me to think that in some indirect way, my mother's death

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could cause another person to lose his life," Audrey said. "Killing another person would not do any honor to her memory."

When a hearing was scheduled regarding the perpetrator's pending execution, Gus and Audrey wanted to testify. They were told they could not speak. A relative who supported the execution was permitted to testify, but Gus and Audrey were denied that opportunity.

When Gus and his daughter filed suit against the state pardon board, charging that they had been unlawfully denied the right to speak, the judge ruled that because they wanted to speak in opposition to the perpetrator's death sentence, Gus and Audrey were "not victims, as that term is commonly understood."

I knew that Gus and Audrey were victims. They were the surviving husband and daughter of a woman who had been brutally murdered, and they would feel the impact of that loss for the rest of their lives. Their opposition to the death penalty didn't make them any less victimized and did not justify this discrimination against them.

Over the years I continued to meet victims who were denied the right to speak, or to get information, or to receive assistance from court-appointed victims' advocates, because they were against the death penalty. As I documented these instances of discrimination, I realized there was a need for legislation that would ensure equal treatment of victims regardless of their position on the death penalty.

In 2009, I introduced the Crime Victims Equality Act, a piece of legislation that prohibits discrimination against victims on the basis of the views on the death penalty. That Act passed in my home state of New Hampshire, becoming the first of its kind in the United States and anywhere in the world.

Specifically, the law ensures "The right to all federal and state constitutional rights guaranteed to all victims of crime on an equal basis, and notwithstanding the provisions of any laws on capital punishment, the right not to be discriminated against or have their rights as a victim denied, diminished, expanded, or enhanced on the basis of the victim's support for, opposition to, or neutrality on the death penalty."

The goal of this law is equitable treatment for all victims. It is
unacceptable to have hierarchies of victims within the criminal justice system, with those who favor the death penalty receiving more favorable treatment than those who oppose it. The legislation is about the right of everybody to hold their own position on the death penalty and not be denied victims' rights because of it.

In New Hampshire, the Crime Victims Equality Act received support from a range of groups, including members of law enforcement and victims' advocates. It offered an opportunity for supporters and opponents of the death penalty to come together in favor of upholding victims' rights. Survivors of homicide victims, having already suffered immeasurably, should not be re-victimized by the criminal justice process. Ensuring equal treatment of all victims is a goal everyone can support.

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*Renny Cushing is executive director of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights and a former New Hampshire State Representative. His father, Robert Cushing, was murdered in 1988.

U.S.: Prisoners Coordinate Statewide Strike via Cellphones
By Matthew Cardinale

ATLANTA, Georgia, Dec 20, 2010 (IPS) - In what some are calling the largest prison strike in U.S. history, inmates in the state of Georgia coordinated a strike across multiple prison facilities using pre-paid cell phones.

After refusing to come out of their cells for as long as a week, many prisoners have now emerged. However, some are still refusing to come out, IPS has learned, and others who have come out are still refusing to report to work assignments until they are paid a living wage.

Meanwhile, activists across Georgia have organised a grassroots response, and are attempting to support the prisoners from the outside.

A team of activists and nongovernmental observers went in to Macon State Prison Monday to interview prisoners, observe conditions, and investigate prisoners' initial complaints as well as complaints of retaliation.
Demands included better medical care and nutrition, more educational opportunities, payment for the work they do in the prisons, better access to their families, reducing overcrowding in the prisons, and more opportunities for exercise.

"The team went inside the prison, Macon State was the first one, to ask questions of staff and basically verify the inmates' complaints," said Bruce Dixon of the Black Agenda Report.

"It's significant we did get in to talk to the prisoners. The Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) agreed to a process of document their demands and begin looking into what the jail conditions are, and to verify the truth of the [claims of] retaliation," Dixon said.

The GDC said that four prisons had been on lockdown, including Hays State Prison in Trion, Macon State Prison in Oglethorpe, Telfair State Prison in Helena, and Smith State Prison in Glennville.

However, the prisoners insisted in telephone conversations with journalists and activists that they were not actually on lockdown. They claimed that every morning the gates on their cells would open up, and every day they would shut them again and refuse to leave their cells.

Prisoners coordinated the strike across as many as 11 Georgia prisons. Other facilities mentioned in various reports include Augusta State Medical Prison in Grovetown, Baldwin State Prison in Hardwick, Calhoun State Prison in Morgan, Hancock State Prison in Sparta, Rogers State Prison in Reidsville, Valdosta State Prison in Valdosta, and Ware State Prison in Waycross.

The strike began on Dec. 9 and had largely ended on Dec. 16. "It was definitely an organic thing that grew inside the prison... The coalition was sort of formed in response to it," Dixon said.

Elaine Brown, a former leader of the Black Panther Party, has a friend whom she calls her son, who is locked up in the Georgia prison system. Brown told IPS that the prisoners in several facilities set the date of the protest themselves, and relied upon her to communicate about the strike to the general public.

She believes the strike was a major success.
"I put the word out there on the 9th of December. Now everybody is involved in it, we have now been a coalition around it. The strike wasn't the issue, the demands were the issue, they're still on the table," Brown said.

"It was probably greater than anything that has happened in this country in the rising up of oppressed groups in a unified and a strategically savvy way," she said.

Brown joined with Dixon and others in forming an ad hoc coalition called the Concerned Coalition to Protect Prisoners' Rights.

The Coalition includes groups like Black Agenda Report, the Green Party of Georgia, the Nation of Islam, and the state and national chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Since the beginning of the strike, the coalition has been holding conference calls to organise ways to support the prisoners from the outside.

The delegation includes a representative of the Southern Center for Human Rights and one from the Georgia chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The prisoners appear to have obtained the prepaid cell phones from individual guards and were able to hide them in their cells.

While prison strikes are somewhat common, the strike in Georgia has been quite significant in its scope.

"It's unusual [to occur] across institutions, and for more than a few hours," Dixon said, adding that prisoners worked together across racial, ethnic, religious, and even "gang" lines.

"There were multiple Black factions, the Muslims, the Rastafarians, the gangsters from different gangs, the Mexican factions, even the Aryan brotherhood," Dixon said.

"The question is, are they gonna get paid fairly?" Brown asked.

Georgia's prison system holds some 53,000 inmates. Nearly all of the work they do is unpaid. Prison wages vary from state to state, but are all a fraction of the federal minimum wage of 7.25 dollars per hour.
Death Penalty Alive and Well in the Gambia
By Saikou Jammeh

BANJUL, Dec 15, 2010 (IPS) - The appeal by the Gambia's former Chief of Defence against his death sentence for treason is being heard during December. An amendment to the country's drugs and human trafficking laws could mean many more capital cases come before the courts.

Besides Lang Tombong Tamba and his seven co-accused, the country's death row holds, among others, Sulayman Bah, convicted of killing his housemate in a dispute over money, and Tabara Samba, a woman who convicted of killing her husband by pouring boiling oil over her.

Yet when it abolished the death penalty in 1981, the West African country was among the first African governments to do so. President Jammeh reinstated the death penalty in 1995 as punishment for murder and treason.

Two dozen people have been sentenced to death in Gambia since then. None have been executed in that time, but neither has anyone been pardoned or had their sentences reduced.

Since Gambian independence in 1965, a death sentence has been carried out only once, when Mustapha Danso was executed for killing the commander of the country's army, Ekou Mahoney, during a failed coup in 1981.

Baboucarr Ceesay, editor of The Daily News newspaper, says the death penalty has not contributed to reducing the murder rate.

"In fact before 1995, we rarely heard of someone being murdered," he says, "but it has hit the headlines frequently over the past few years."

Regarding treason, Ceesay cannot recall a coup attempt during the period when capital punishment was abolished. Since 1995, however, the Gambia has experienced at least four coup attempts since its re-institution.

In October, capital punishment was extended further to punish drug trafficking offences.

Musa Touray, a retired civil servant, says applying the death penalty to drug offences will do little to reduce the spiraling rate of drug trafficking.

"The death penalty is not necessary," he
says, "It is too heavy a penalty. What the government should do is to strengthen its surveillance mechanisms."

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has noted that West Africa has increasingly become a transit point for drugs, with traffickers taking advantage of poverty and poor surveillance to move drugs from South America to Europe.

In June, a record two-tonne stash of cocaine was found in the Gambia, with an estimated street value in Europe of just under a $1 billion according to newspaper reports.

The Gambia's amended act states that anyone caught with over 250 grammes of cocaine faces the death penalty if convicted. Those convicted of human trafficking will also face a death sentence.

"The menace of drug trafficking and the activities of major drug lords have started to rear their ugly heads in this jurisdiction in recent times," Attorney General and Justice Minister Edward Anthony Gomez told lawmakers.

"Therefore this bill seeks to nip the negative developments in the bud by providing sentences which will serve as deterrent to anyone wishing to use this country either as a transit or destination point for hard drugs."

The bill also covers human trafficking, said Gomez. "Both the strategic location of The Gambia as a gateway to the Western world as well as our liberal immigration policy have attracted the attention of unscrupulous persons in using the country as a transit route for trafficking in persons."

The move immediately drew criticism. Lawyer Assan Martins said legislators had exceeded their powers, as the Gambia's constitution rules out a death sentence for offences that have not resulted in the death of another person.

"The fundamental rights and freedom of everybody must be respected as enshrined in the constitution, which is the supreme law of the land," he said.

Opposition parliamentarian, Babanding Daffeh of the United Democratic Party challenged media reports that the National Assembly had unanimously passed the bill.

"The ruling party forms the majority in the House, so even when we say no our
vote did not count," he said, "but I was against the death penalty. In my opinion, in as much as we want to curb the drug trade and human trafficking, we should not impose death penalty, but rather emphasise preventing it and re-integrating criminals into the society."

Gambian president Jammeh has issued several stern warnings of his intent to fight drug trafficking. As he marked the 16th anniversary of his presidency - Jammeh first came to power in a coup in 1994 - he vowed to clamp down on drug smugglers.

"I would rather die than allow some misguided elements to use The Gambia as a drug zone," Jammeh told the press. He has backed his words with additional funding and equipment for the country's National Drug Enforcement Agency.

The immense amounts of money involved make stopping trafficking a complicated affair. Among those facing drugs charges are a former chief of the anti-drug agency and four of his staff. A former chief of police and two top military officers are also up on drugs charges; they are additionally accused of attempting to implicate the president himself, saying he gave them the drugs to sell.

The experience of countries such as Thailand do not support the argument that the death penalty serves as a deterrent to drugs traffickers. Thailand continues to record significant trafficking in drugs; the Asian country is now considering dropping the death penalty in line with its human rights obligations.

Martins and Badinding share a concern that innocent people could be executed for crimes they have not committed. "We need to rehabilitate our criminals," Daffeh says, "If someone has been convicted, but later found innocent after a death penalty has been carried out, that will be a big blow."

Martins agreed: "The fear is that an innocent person may also suffer or may end up being a victim. We don't support anything of collective punishment of both the innocent and the guilty."

(END)

U.S.: And Justice for Few
Blasphemy Laws
By William Fisher

NEW YORK, Dec 14, 2010 (IPS) - Poor defendants on death row, immigrants in unfair deportation proceedings, torture victims, domestic violence survivors and victims of racial discrimination - all these groups are consistently being denied access to justice while those responsible for the abuses are protected, according to a new report by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Jamil Dakwar, director of the ACLU Human Rights Programme, told IPS, "Access to justice is a fundamental human right and bedrock tenet of American democratic system - it was even codified by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the U.S. championed 62 years ago."

"Unfortunately, access to the courts and effective remedy have been severely curtailed over the last decade, especially for those who need it most," he said. "It is time for our government and judiciary to recommit to respecting and promoting this essential right."

According to the report, "Slamming the Courthouse Doors", the "actions of the executive, federal legislative, and judicial branches of the United States government have seriously restricted access to justice for victims of civil liberties and human rights violations, and have limited the availability of effective (or, in some cases, any) remedies for these violations."

For example, the report details how individuals convicted of capital crimes who seek to present newly found evidence of their innocence or claims of serious constitutional violations are being denied recourse in the courts.

Federal legislation, most prominently the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA), and Supreme Court decisions, has greatly limited access to federal review of state court death penalty convictions, the report says. It also charges that victims of rape, assault, religious rights violations and other serious abuses in prison are having their claims thrown out of court because of a restrictive federal law.

Immigrants who may have legitimate claims to remain in the U.S. are unknowingly waiving their opportunity to pursue these claims and are being swiftly deported because of unfair procedures, the report charges.

It also notes that victims of domestic
violence are being denied the opportunity to seek civil remedy under the Violence Against Women Act because of recent court decisions.

Similarly, victims of torture and "extraordinary rendition" have been denied their day in court.

The administration of President Barack Obama has sought to extinguish lawsuits brought by torture survivors through use of "judicially-created doctrines such as the so-called 'state secrets' privilege and qualified immunity to dismiss civil suits alleging torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, forced disappearance, and arbitrary detention, without consideration on the merits," the report says.

It charges that by invoking the "state secrets" privilege, the Obama administration can not only restrict discovery but can quash an entire lawsuit - without demonstrating the validity of their claim to a judge.

Immigrants also are systematically denied access to justice, as they face monumental obstacles to obtaining review of removal orders.

The U.S. government has claimed that there is no right to judicial review of diplomatic assurances when it has sought to transfer individuals to countries known to employ torture.

Federal immigration officials also have used a procedure known as stipulated removal to deport non-U.S. citizens without a hearing before an immigration judge. "There is a lack of meaningful safeguards to ensure people with mental disabilities facing possible deportation from the United States are afforded fair hearings. As a result, legal permanent residents and asylum seekers with a lawful basis for remaining in the United States may have been unfairly deported from the country because their mental disabilities made it impossible for them to effectively present their claims in court," the report says. The ACLU's recommends that Congress amend the habeas-related provisions of AEDPA so that federal courts are more accessible to prisoners asserting claims of constitutional violations. It also urges the creation of and adequate funding for state defender organisations that are independent of the judiciary and that have sufficient resources to provide quality representation to indigent capital defendants.

Congress should pass legislation that creates procedures to prevent the abuse of the state secrets privilege, and
the Obama administration should prohibit the reliance on "diplomatic assurances" to deport or otherwise transfer persons from the United States.

The ACLU also urged Congress to enact the End Racial Profiling Act, which would ban racial profiling and provide for government monitoring and documentation of racial profiling.

Frances Boyle, a legal expert familiar with the report, told IPS, "Because of the deliberate U.S. federal court-packing scheme undertaken by the [Ronald] Reagan, [George] Bush Sr. and [George] Bush Jr. administrations, today about 60 percent of U.S. federal judges at all levels - up to and including the U.S. Supreme Court - have been members of the Federalist Society, and/or were vetted by the Federalist Society."

Boyle, a law professor at the University of Illinois, described this organisation as "right wing, racist, bigoted, reactionary, elitist, sexist, warmongering and totalitarian".

For example, he said, almost all of the lawyers involved in the Bush Jr. administration's torture scandal were and still are members of the Federalist Society.

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**Cuba Commutes Sentences; Only One Person Still on Death Row**

**By Patricia Grogg**

HAVANA, Dec 7, 2010 (IPS) - Human rights activists are pleased with the decision by Cuba’s Supreme Court to commute to 30 years in prison the death sentences of two Salvadoran men convicted of terrorism. But dissidents continue to call for complete abolition of the death penalty.

"This is good news that we've been waiting for since 2008," Elizardo Sánchez with the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, a dissident group that puts out regular reports on the human rights situation here, told IPS.

Sánchez was referring to an April 2008 announcement by President Raúl Castro that nearly all death sentences had been commuted to life imprisonment or 30 years in jail.

The cases of the two Salvadoran convicts, René Cruz León and Otto René Rodríguez Llerena, were still pending decisions by the Supreme Court, which
were finally handed down last Friday and this Monday, respectively.

The last person on death row in Cuba is Cuban-American Humberto Eladio Real Suárez, who was arrested in October 1994 after disembarking in Cuba by boat, armed with assault rifles, stealing a car and killing the driver.

In 1999, Cruz León and Rodríguez Llerena were found guilty after they confessed to planting bombs in several hotels and a restaurant in Cuba in 1997, as part of a plan to scare off tourists, one of the country’s main sources of foreign exchange. A 32-year-old Italian tourist, Fabio di Celmo, was killed in one of the explosions, and 11 people were wounded.

During the trial, Cruz León testified that a fellow Salvadoran, Francisco Chávez Abarca, recruited him when he was working at the "Geo Rent a Car" agency in El Salvador. In July Venezuela extradited Chávez Abarca to Cuba, where he is in prison and under investigation.

Sánchez said he hoped the Supreme Court, which is considering an appeal in the case of Real Suárez, will also commute his sentence, thus further reinforcing the government’s de facto moratorium on capital punishment in place since 2000. The moratorium was only interrupted in 2003 by the execution of three of 11 armed individuals who hijacked a ferry with dozens of passengers on board, with the aim of defecting to the United States.

The executions triggered an international outcry and drew criticism at home.

Sánchez said that since 2003, at least "half a dozen" prisoners facing a possible death sentence for serious common crimes were handed life sentences instead. The authorities "are apparently avoiding convictions involving capital punishment," the activist said.

Life sentences were introduced in a 1999 penal reform.

"The bad news now is that we don’t see any signals that the government is considering abolition of the death penalty, which still figures in several articles of the penal code," the dissident lamented.
"No hostile incident has been reported in 11 years, that would justify keeping capital punishment on the books as a kind of Sword of Damocles," he maintained.

The Cuban government has stated that it will not abolish the death penalty, under the argument that it has a deterrent effect for "mercenary terrorists at the service of the empire (the United States)," and that eliminating it would "endanger the life and security" of Cubans.

But it has also clarified that, although the death penalty still forms part of this country's legislation, "Cuba comprehends and respects the arguments by the international movement calling for abolition or a moratorium," which is why Cuba has not voted against these initiatives in the United Nations.

According to the government, "in all these years, there have been 713 acts of terrorism against Cuba, 56 of which have occurred since 1990, organised and financed from U.S. territory, leaving a total of 3,478 people dead and 2,099 injured and disabled."

The list includes the October 1976 bombing of a Cuban Airline passenger plane shortly after it took off from Barbados. All 73 people on board were killed.

Cuban exile and naturalised Venezuelan citizen Luis Posada Carriles, who was convicted and jailed in Venezuela for masterminding the bombing of the plane -- but escaped from prison in 1985 -- is also wanted in connection with the 1997 hotel bombings carried out by Cruz León and Rodríguez Llerena.

Posada Carriles, a former U.S. Central Intelligence Agency operative, is now living in the United States, where he was arrested in 2005 on immigration charges but is out on bail and awaiting trial, set for Jan. 10 in El Paso, Texas.

He is charged with lying about how he entered the United States and for his involvement in the Havana hotel bombings. U.S. media reports say the trial will be the first time evidence collected by authorities in Cuba and by the FBI will be presented in a U.S. court to prove his role in the hotel bombings.

Posada Carriles has been living in Miami, Florida for nearly six years. For years both Cuba and Venezuela have unsuccessfully demanded his extradition from the United States. (END)
WORLD PRESS REVIEW
December 2010

This review provides a glimpse of developments related to death penalty as reported by media around the world, in a chronological order from the end of December to the beginning of the month.

'TORTURE DEATHS' IN UZBEKISTAN
Ukrainian Press Association reported on Dec 30, 2010: At least 39 people have died of torture in Uzbekistan jails this year amid a growing crackdown on religious groups and government critics, a respected rights group has said.

The Independent Human Rights Defenders Group said the figure is based on information from the victims' families and former inmates. It added that the actual number of such deaths could be higher, but many are not reported because the families fear official reprisals. In 2009, the group registered 20 prison deaths by torture.

Prison authorities often return bodies to relatives in sealed coffins to conceal torture, the report said. Police officers force the families to ignore Muslim burial rites and bury the unopened coffins, it said.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/ukpress/article/ALeqM5jVcpPoTYvk9yWjunHNTWLsLsk8A?docId=N0393451293731642387A

CHINA: UYGHUR STUDENT SENTENCED TO DEATH
Radio Free Asia reported on December 30, 2010: A 19-year-old Uyghur becomes the second woman sentenced to die following ethnic violence last year. A female Uyghur student in northwestern China was sentenced to death with a two-year suspension following a trial last April on charges of participating in ethnic riots that left hundreds dead, according to a classmate.

Pezilet Ekber became the second Uyghur woman to receive the death penalty in connection to the unrest. Another woman was executed by Chinese authorities earlier this year.

"Nobody knows what exactly led to Pezilet Ekber receiving such a heavy punishment, other than her 'involvement in violence,' because the trial was secret and her parents were only just informed of the decision," her classmate, who asked to remain
anonymous, wrote in a letter. After the trial, her parents were just given the judgment, and were warned to keep silent and to refrain from telling the content of judgment to anyone,” the letter said.


CUBA COMMUTES LONE REMAINING DEATH SENTENCE

AFP reported on December 28, 2010: Cuba's Supreme Tribunal commuted the death sentence of an anti-Castro activist who was the last death row inmate on the island, a rights group said. The tribunal was ruling on the appeal of Humberto Eladio Real, who had been convicted in the 1990s on murder and "acts against state security." "The trial ended at 2:30 pm (1930 GMT) and the sentence was commuted to 30 years in prison," Elizardo Sanchez, spokesman for the opposition Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), told AFP.

Real, 40, was part of a team of seven fighters belonging to the Florida-based National Unity Democratic Party (PUND) who infiltrated Cuba in 1994 to set up a guerrilla base in the Escambray mountains, according to the government-run Cubadebate website. All seven were quickly captured including Real, who was arrested on October 15, 1994 "after assassinating Arcelio Rodriguez Garcia and stealing his car," Cubadebate said. Two years later, he was sentenced to death for "acts against state security, assassination, and shooting a firearm against a determined person," the website said.

JAPAN: NUMBER OF DEATH-ROW INMATES HITS RECORD HIGH OF 111

Mainichi reported on December 27, 2010: There will be 111 death-row inmates in the nation as of the end of the year, a record high since the end of World War II, according to the Japanese Justice Ministry. The figure includes nine inmates whose death sentences were confirmed this year, while the number of those who were executed in 2010 stood at two. It is the first time that the number of death-row inmates at the end of the year will top 110, while the previous high was 107 at the end of 2007.

IRAN PASSES DEATH SENTENCE ON 'ISRAELI SPY'

Washington Post reported on December 26, 2010: Iran sentenced an unidentified man to death for spying for Israel, the semiofficial Mehr news agency quoted Abbas Jafari Dowlatabadi, Tehran’s chief prosecutor, as saying. “His identity will be announced after approval of the verdict by Iran’s Supreme Court.”

**EGYPT: MILITANT’S DEATH SENTENCE COMMUTED TO JAIL TERM**

Reuters reported on December 23, 2010: Judge Abdullah Abu Hashem of the Egyptian state security court commuted the death sentence of Abdel Hamid Musa Abu Aqrab to life imprisonment. Abu Aqrab, headed of Al-Gama’a Al-Islamiya military, was convicted in June for murdering two generals and two policemen in 1992 and 1993.

**CHINA: CRIMINAL LAW DRAFT AMENDMENT UNCHANGED IN REDUCING NUMBER OF CRIMES SUBJECT TO DEATH PENALTY**

Xinhuanet reported on December 20, 2010: A draft amendment to China’s Criminal Law remained unchanged in reducing the number of crimes subject to the death penalty. The draft amendment was submitted today to the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC), China’s top legislature, for its second reading. In August this year, the NPC Standing Committee discussed the draft amendment during its first reading. The draft amendment will make 13 crimes exempt from capital punishment, if it becomes law. The current law allows the death penalty for 68 crimes. The draft amendment, if passed, will reduce that number to 55.

**JAPAN: 1,800 RALLY IN TOKYO AGAINST DEATH PENALTY**

Kyodo News reported on December 19, 2010: More than 1,800 people called for the abolition of the death penalty at a rally in Tokyo. In the keynote speech, Yo Hemmi, an award-winning writer, said, “Are we able to tolerate binding the neck of a person with rope and hanging him or her? Are we able to pass on such a scene to our children?”

“I’m going to continue seeking its abolition as I cannot tolerate it and it makes our hearts destructive,” said Hemmi, a former Kyodo News reporter. “I hope Dec 19, 2010, will become the starting point for the suspension of
executions forever. I don’t want to see them anymore.’’

The rally marked the 20th anniversary of the foundation of Forum 90, Japan’s major anti-death penalty group. Osamu Kobayashi, a lawyer who heads a Japan Federation of Bar Associations panel working for the suspension of executions, told the rally, “Ordinary people have to face up to the death penalty now whether they like it or not, but the details of punishments, including capital punishment, have not been fully disclosed.”

USA: OKLAHOMA USES ANIMAL EUTHANASIA DRUG IN EXECUTION

AFP reported on December 16, 2010: A US state executed a convicted murderer with an animal drug for the first time because of an anesthetic shortage. Oklahoma executed John Duty, 58 -- who in 2001 strangled his 22-year-old cellmate, Curtis Wise, while serving three life sentences -- with pentobarbital, normally used by veterinarians to put animals to sleep. "The procedure started at 6:12 pm our time (0012 GMT). John Duty was pronounced dead at 6:18pm," Jerry Massie, a spokesman for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, told AFP.

The Death Penalty Information Center, a Washington-based group that monitors capital punishment, confirmed that Duty was the first death row inmate to be executed using the drug. For months now, several US states have struggled to find supplies of sodium thiopental -- the first and most crucial of three drugs used in lethal injections -- after its sole US manufacturer Hospira ran out of stock.

The company will resume production of the drug early next year, forcing some states to suspend executions and others to import the drug from other states or from overseas with government approval. Oklahoma's decision to use the animal drug was approved by a US court last month in a ruling that may lead other states to adopt the procedure.

The appeals court found that the amount of pentobarbital to be used was "sufficient to induce unconsciousness in an inmate and indeed would likely be lethal in most, if not all, instances." Capital punishment specialists meanwhile warned that the drug had not been properly vetted and might not keep inmates unconscious during the
more painful subsequent injections that kill them.

IRAQ HAS EXECUTED 257 SINCE 2005: MINISTER

Iraq has executed 257 people, including six women, since 2005, deputy justice minister Busho Ibrahim told AFP on December 16, 2010, amid calls from the United Nations for Iraq to abolish capital punishment. Ibrahim also said the country was embarking on a major prison rebuilding and renovation programme that would see all of its 33 jails upgraded to what he said would be international standards by 2015.

"Executions began in August 2005, and 37 people are presently ready to be executed, following approval from the presidency council," Ibrahim said.

He said 251 men and six women had been executed since Iraq lifted the moratorium on the death penalty it adopted after the 2003 US-led invasion that overthrew Saddam Hussein. This year, Iraq has executed just 17 people, sharply down on 2009 when it put 124 people to death, four of them women.

Ibrahim gave no explanation for the fall but Iraq has been without a government for much of this year and under the constitution all executions have to approved by a member of the three-man presidency. Ibrahim also said that Iraq was embarking on a massive prison revamping programme, due to be completed in 2015.

"There are some plans to build new prisons because most of our current prisons are very old," he said. "Only the prisons that were built by the Americans are of good quality. All of the Saddam-era prisons, except for Badoush in Mosul (northern Iraq), need to be rebuilt, renovated or modernised.

"By 2014 or 2015, all prisons in Iraq should be fully updated or rebuilt," Ibrahim said, putting the current capacity of the 33 prisons operated by the justice ministry, two of which are not being used, at 28,530.

Iraq’s fractured penal system means that while all convicted prisoners are sent to justice ministry jails, the ministries of interior and defence operate their own pre-trial detention facilities.

Ibrahim said that as of December 9, a total of 24,783 people were being held in justice ministry prisons, including both convicts and remand prisoners. Among them are 130 minors convicted of offences and 45 awaiting trial. A total
of 341 adult women are serving sentences, while 241 are on remand. Overall, he put prison operating costs at between 180 and 190 dollars per prisoner per month -- 150 dollars a month for food, with the remainder being spent on clothing, healthcare and other basic services.

SOUTH KOREA: APPEALS COURT OVERTURNS DEATH SENTENCE

AFP reported on December 15, 2010: A South Korean appeals court overturned a death sentence passed on a 33-year-old man who raped and murdered a teenage girl, sentencing him instead to life imprisonment. Kim Kil-Tae, a repeat sex offender, had been sentenced to hang by a district court in June for the offence against the 13-year-old girl in the southern city of Busan in February. He appealed, claiming he had no memory of the crime which shocked the country.

A court spokesman told AFP that tests on Kim had shown no mental disorder, but judges were unsure whether he was in a normal state of mind at the time of the crime. "Thus, his punishment has been decreased to a life sentence." The appeals court upheld an earlier ruling ordering Kim, if he is eventually released, to wear an electronic tracking device for 20 years. Kim had served a total of 11 years behind bars for two previous rapes before he was arrested in March for the latest crime. He had been released in June 2009 but was not ordered to wear the tracking device because his offences occurred before a new law came into force.

UAE: DEATH ROW CONVICTS IN DUBAI LOSE SECOND PLEA

Gulf News reported on December 12, 2010: Presiding Judge Eisa Al Sharif of the Dubai Appeal Court rejected the appeal of Russian, S.A., 31, and Ukrainian, S.N., 35, against their death sentences in the United Arab Emirates. They were found guilty of murdering and robbing Indian salesman A.B. in 2001 by the Dubai Court of First Instance.

In October, the Court of First Instance rejected the prisoners' special plea to reduce their death sentences after they submitted a written waiver they obtained from the blood parents of the victim. Their lawyer Abdul Rahman Al Mutawaa handed the court a written plea to reduce his clients' death sentence to one year, after the salesman's blood parents dropped their
complaint against S.A. and S.N. Al Mutawaa mentioned in the plea that the salesman’s family collected the blood money and dropped their charges against the killers. "We pardon S.A. and S.N. and we hold no grudge against them. We pardon them for ever. This is to certify that we only collected the blood money amount and nothing else," said the written waiver.

YEMEN: MASTERMIND IN ADEN BLAST GIVEN DEATH SENTENCE
Arab News reported on December 11, 2010: The Aden Specialized Criminal Court in Yemen sentenced Faris Abdullah Saleh to death for masterminding the bombing of the city’s Al-Wahda Stadium in October, according to a statement on the Yemeni Defense Ministry website. The sentencing sparked protests in the southern town of Dalea, where hundreds took to the streets and blocked traffic. The attack was blamed on the Southern Movement, which is fighting for independence and increased autonomy for the south.

MALAYSIA: DEATH SENTENCE TO INDIAN FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING
Daily The Pak Banker reported on December 9, 2010: A Malaysian court sentenced a 41-year-old Indian national to death for drug trafficking. Bahurudeen Mohammad Yusuof Ghaney was sent to the gallows for trafficking in 10 kgs of ketamine at the Penang International Airport January last year. Ghaney sobbed in the dock when the decision was read out by High Court judicial commissioner Mohd Amin Firdaus Abdullah.

Mohd Amin Firdaus, in his decision, said the defence had failed to raise reasonable doubt on the prosecution’s case. However, Ghaney, in his defence, had said that the bag containing the drugs was given to him by a man named Farouk, who is his neighbour, and told the former to bring the bag to Malaysia. The accused had also said that he did not know the contents of the bag and that he only found out the contents at the airport here.

GAZA: HAMAS COURT ORDERS EXECUTION OF 'COLLABORATOR'
The Permanent Military Court in Gaza sentenced Mamdouh Mohammed 'Eid al-'Attar, residing inside the Green Line, to death by hanging, AFP said on December 6, 2010. He was convicted of collaboration with hostile parties (Israel). The sentence was issued in absentia. "The military court handed
down a death sentence against one collaborator with the occupation, and prison terms of seven years and three years for two other collaborators," the ministry said in a statement.

CUBA: SUPREME COURT COMMUTES BOMBER'S DEATH SENTENCE TO 30 YEARS

Reuters reported on December 4, 2010: Cuba has commuted the death sentence of a Salvadoran man convicted of killing an Italian tourist during a 1997-1998 hotel bombing spree to 30 years in prison, a state-run Internet site said. The Supreme Court began hearing Raul Ernesto Cruz Leon's appeal of the capital sentence for "terrorism of a continuous character" on December 2. The court announced its decision to substitute the original sentence for one of 30 years, the maximum that could be imposed," the Cubadebate website reported. Cruz Leon, 39, confessed to bombing six hotels and tourism-related establishments in 1997 and 1998, killing the Italian tourist and wounding a number of other people. Cuba charged that the Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation, an exile organization that opposes the Castro government, was behind a total of 15 bombings over 18 months. The group has denied the bombings.

IRAQ PARADES 39 AL-QAEDA MEMBERS AMID EXECUTION CALLS

The UK Telegraph reported on December 2, 2010: Iraqi security forces have paraded 39 suspected al-Qaeda members accused of running terrorist operations as the country's interior minister called for them to be executed. Jawad al-Bolani said that he was confident the men would be found guilty, citing their alleged confessions, documents and video found at their homes that he said showed their earlier attacks and plans to carry out new ones. He did not say when the men were arrested, but described them as operatives of the Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaeda wing based in Iraq's Sunni-dominated western Anbar province. "Today, we will send those criminals and the investigation results to the courts that will sentence them to death," Mr al-Bolani, a Shiite Muslim, said. "Our demand is not to delay the carrying out of the executions against these criminals so that to deter terrorist and criminal elements." He hailed the arrests as a "major achievement", http://ipsnews.net/new_focus/deathpenalty/ http://www.ipsnews.net/deathpenaltyabolition/
indicating Iraq's security forces are improving, adding that the rate of attacks in Iraq had declined tenfold in the past two months. Among those arrested were Hazim al-Azzawi, a "minister" in the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Ahmed Hussein Ali, ISI's "Mufti of Anbar", and Abdul Razzaq, the organisation's media chief.

News from International NGOs - December 2010

New UN Guidelines Recognise the Specific Needs of Women in the Criminal Justice System

On 21 December the United Nations General Assembly adopted 52 resolutions and six decisions recommended by its Third Committee.

Penal Reform International (PRI) welcomed in particular the adoption of a resolution setting out specific standards for the treatment of women accused of crimes or serving custodial and community based sentences.

The guidelines will be known as the Bangkok Rules, in recognition of the role that the Government of Thailand and the Thai Royal Family have played in supporting their adoption.

PRI, with its twenty year history of working with women and children in prisons around the world, played its part also in the development of these important guidelines. PRI Representatives from the UK and Middle East/North Africa were among groups of experts who in February and November 2009 travelled to Bangkok to draft and then to refine them. PRI translated and disseminated the Rules in their draft form in Chinese, Russian and Arabic, helping to ensure that the broadest possible range of States had the opportunity to consider them well in advance of this week’s vote. This has contributed to the fact that the Rules have been welcomed by States.

The 70 Rules cover such issues as the economic inequality that deprives many women of access to justice, the heightened discrimination and stigmatization they may suffer, the need for gender-sensitive methods of classifying the risks and meeting the needs of women detainees, the need also for gender-specific health and hygiene services, the implications for dependant children both in and outside a prison setting, particular safety and personal security concerns associated
with women prisoners, the need to develop coordinated pre-release, post-release and community based programmes that take into account the reality of women’s lives. These are all issues that were recognised as having failed to receive sufficient attention in 1955 when the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners were developed. These omissions have, in part, also contributed to the rise in numbers of women being imprisoned, and to the resulting international concern that was behind the Bangkok Rules initiative.

With adoption of the Rules now comes the need for States to examine their criminal justice and social welfare policies, legislation and practices so as to identify gaps and plan for the Bangkok Rules’ implementation. PRI and other partners, including the Quaker UN Office, are working together to offer guidance materials to States and other interested bodies. Needs assessment missions will take place in five Middle East/North African countries in 2011, with the support of the Swedish agency for development SIDA, while the Open Society Initiative will support PRI in organising a regional meeting for activists in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.


For further information, contact Mary Murphy, Policy Director of PRI, mmurphy@penalreform.org

Majority of countries world-wide unite for universal moratorium on the death penalty

On 21 December 2010, a third landmark resolution calling for a universal moratorium on the use of the death penalty has received unprecedented votes at the United Nations General Assembly (UN GA).

109 countries voted in favour of the resolution, 41 voted against, 35 abstained, and 7 were absent. This is a significant vote in that it reaffirms the continuing trend towards international abolition. An additional 3 states voted in favour of the 2010 resolution, and 5 fewer states voting against it, compared to that in 2008.

“These figures are indicative that those states who still practise capital punishment do so in isolation of the rest of the world,” said Jacqueline Macalesher, Penal Reform
International’s Death Penalty Abolition project coordinator.

“While it is encouraging to see an increasing number of states supporting a moratorium on the death penalty, it is paramount that those states who have voted in favour of the resolution put this political rhetoric into action and ratify at the earliest opportunity the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in order to abolish the death penalty in law”, continued Macalesher.

Kyrgyzstan is the most recent state to have ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, having acceded to the Protocol on 6 December 2010 without any reservations.

PRI’s current programme of work on the abolition of the death penalty focuses on supporting governments and other stakeholders in progressing towards abolition and implementation of human rights standards in criminal justice systems, particularly concerning the treatment of death row, life and long-term prisoners. The programme of work is being carried out in five regions: the Middle East and North Africa, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, Central Asia and the Great Lakes region of East Africa.

The programme is supported by the European Union’s Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

FIDH alarmed at dramatic wave of executions and death sentences in Iran

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Iranian League for Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI) said on 6 January 2011 that they were alarmed by the wave of executions of and death sentences on tens of people following blatantly unfair trials and for apparent grounds of repression of their free expression, political or ethnic affiliation.

On 5th January, the executions toll reached almost 70 in the span of one month alone. According to various official and semi-official sources, these included a public hanging at the centre of capital Tehran on 5th January 2011, 8 hangings on 3rd January and 16 ‘in the course of the preceding days in Ahvaz.’ Most of those executed were charged with drug trafficking, but at least 18 reportedly faced the death penalty for political reasons facing the vague
charges of moharebeh [fighting God] and ‘corruption on earth.’

Vice-president of FIDH and president of the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights, Karim Lahidji condemned: “the dramatic toll embodying the increased repression” and repeated a “call to the international community to echo its condemnation outlined in the UN General Assembly Resolution of 21st December 2010 by adopting individual targeted sanctions against human rights offenders responsible for the massive level of human rights violations”. MORE >> http://www.fidh.org/IRAN-Dramatic-wave-of-executions-and-death

Amnesty's Clemency call for Kurdish law student facing execution in Iran

On 24 December 2010 Amnesty International called on the Iranian authorities to halt the imminent execution of a Kurdish law student, scheduled for 26 December, and to commute his death sentence. The lawyer of Habibollah Latifi, a law student at Azad University in the south western province of Ilam, has been informed by the Iranian authorities that Habibollah Latifi’s execution will take place on 26 December at Sanandaj Prison, Kordestan, in western Iran.

“We are urgently appealing to the Iranian authorities to show clemency, halt the imminent execution of Habibollah Latifi, and commute his death sentence,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“We while we recognise that governments have a responsibility to bring to justice those who commit crimes, this must be done according to international standards for fair trial. Amnesty International is unconditionally opposed to the death penalty - the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment - in all cases.”

Habibollah Latifi was arrested on 23 October 2007 in Sanandaj, the Kordestan provincial capital, north-western Iran. His trial was held behind closed doors and his lawyer was not allowed to be present to defend him. Nor was his family allowed to attend the trial.

He was convicted of moharebeh (enmity against God), by the Sanandaj Revolutionary Court, in connection with his alleged membership of and activities on behalf of the Kurdish Independent
Amnesty condemns execution of 11 in Iran following suicide bomb attack
Amnesty International condemned the execution of 11 men on 20 December 2010 morning in Iran accused of links to the bomb attack in Chabahar that killed more than 39 people last week, many of them worshippers at a mosque.

According to Iran's Fars News Agency, the 11 men hanged at Zahedan Prison were connected with the People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI), or Jondallah, which claimed responsibility for the 15 December attack in Chabahar in the Baluchi minority area of south-east Iran.

"Last week's bombing was an atrocious act and we strongly condemn it, but so too do we condemn these executions, which have the hallmark of an act of retaliation, not justice," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa. No details of the charges, if any, have been released by the authorities for six of the convicted men or any details of the 11 men's trials - trials which are likely to have been conducted before Revolutionary Courts, which are notoriously unfair.

Yemeni authorities called upon to commute juvenile offender’s death sentence
On 21 December 2010 Amnesty International today called upon the Yemeni authorities to halt the imminent execution of a young man for a crime he is alleged to have committed at the age of 15.

“We are urgently appealing to President Ali Abdullah Saleh to show clemency in the case of alleged juvenile offender Muhammed Taher Thabet Samoum,” said Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“We call for him to be saved from execution – the ultimate cruel, inhuman
World Coalition Against the Death Penalty welcomes UN

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty welcomed on December 2, 2010 the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of a third resolution calling for a universal moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Supported by an increasing number of co-sponsor countries, it reaffirms resolutions 62/149 and 63/168 of 18 December 2007 and 2008, “Moratorium on the use of the death penalty”, and recognizes the global trend towards the abolition of the death penalty.

In Asia, the largest retentionist area in the world, a breakthrough occurred. Mongolia and Thailand had previously voted against the resolution and signed a statement of dissociation but respectively voted in favour and abstained for the first time this year.

Bhutan and Maldives, which had abstained before, voted in favour of this third resolution. In the Arab countries, the positive trend that started in 2008 continued: Algeria officially co-sponsored the resolution and seven other Arab countries abstained for the second time.


Kyrgyzstan becomes 73rd country to pass irreversible abolition

Published by Emile Carreau on 2010/12/17 (373 reads)

Following one year of lobbying led by the World Coalition, the central Asian country has become a party to the UN protocol on the abolition of the death penalty.

On December 6 Kyrgyzstan acceded to UN protocol on the abolition of the death penalty, becoming the 73rd state party to this treaty since its adoption in 1989.

Up until its accession, Kyrgyzstan was one of several World Coalition target countries in its campaign for the ratification of the text, officially known as the Second Optional Protocol to the

or degrading punishment – and for his death sentence to be commuted.”

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Advocacy work started in October 2009 with the official launch of the campaign. Since then the World Coalition and its partners, the countries ‘friends of the Protocol’, convened meetings with the authorities, sent reports to the UN and official letters to the President and Parliament. That was the case in November 2009, when the Parliament rejected the bill for the ratification of the Protocol. The bill was reintroduced and subsequently adopted in February 2010.

MORE >> http://www.worldcoalition.org/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=467
Read the latest information about worldwide efforts to abolish the death penalty!

http://www.ipsnews.net/deathpenaltyabolition