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By Fritzroy Sterling

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Condemned for Being Different in Iran

By Alberto Cremonesi

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Blacks with Stereotypical Features Executed Most Often

By Fritzroy A. Sterling

NEW YORK - Juries in the U.S. tend to hand down the death penalty twice as often to black defendants with stereotypically black features like darker skin, bigger noses and fuller lips, than to those perceived to have less stereotypically black features, according to the findings of a new study.

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IPS Columnist Service

► TREND TO ABOLISH CAPITAL PUNISHMENT CONTINUES

by Elisabetta Zamparutti

The annual report on capital punishment issued on July 21 by the abolitionist organisation Hands Off Cain shows that the movement towards the abolition of the death penalty, underway for at least ten years, is continuing, writes Elisabetta Zamparutti, a lawyer and the coordinator of the annual report on the death penalty worldwide by Hands Off Cain.

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DEATH PENALTY: Increasingly, Doctors Refuse to Do Harm

by Fritzroy Sterling

NEW YORK, Jul 31 (IPS) - When Stanley "Tookie" Williams was strapped to a gurney awaiting his execution last December, things did not go as planned. California executioners had trouble finding a suitable vein in which to inject a lethal combination of drugs.

What happened next, medical professionals say, was probably a botched job that ultimately resulted in excessive and unnecessary pain for an additional 12 minutes.

Williams' probable inhumane death, which would be in violation of the U.S. constitution, was not the only one, according to doctors' groups and rights organisations that have studied executions.

Death row inmates this year have challenged the humaneness of the lethal series of drugs meant to kill them. Courts in California and Missouri have ruled that without the presence and participation of a qualified medical professional, the executions cannot proceed.

Doctors and anesthesiologists, however, increasingly are refusing to help on the grounds that they have signed an oath prohibiting them from doing harm.

"Much of medical science is guided by a principle to first do no harm," Dr. Jonathan I. Groner, a clinical associate professor of surgery at Ohio State University's College of Medicine and Public Health, told IPS. "Physicians have an obligation to heal when they can and to comfort when they cannot."

The Hippocratic Oath, signed by all medical professionals in the U.S., reads, "I will not give a drug that is deadly to anyone if asked, nor will I suggest the way to such a counsel." Without their help, however, the state must find another way to humanely kill prisoners -- or abolish capital punishment.

"Lethal injection procedures cannot survive without the intervention of medical professionals," said Dr. Groner, who has written extensively about capital punishment and medical ethics. "It requires vascular access -- someone to infuse chemicals into the veins, which is a medical procedure."

Groner said doctors dedicated to the basic tenets of the Hippocratic Oath are thrust into an ethical and moral dilemma: Can the professional sworn to protect patients now work to ensure a painless death of those same patients? Is it not in the best interest of the patient to die without severe suffering?

Medical science is ethically bound to distance itself from lethal injections and capital punishment in general, but it is the only establishment qualified to come up with a way to execute criminals that is not cruel. Under the Constitution's Eight Amendment, cruel and unusual punishment is illegal.

The Code of Ethics of the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Nursing Association (ANA), and the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) strictly forbids members from participating in executions.

In 1977, an Oklahoma medical examiner with no expertise in pharmacology or anesthesia developed the current procedure for executing prisoners in the U.S. Some 35 other states quickly adopted the method. Only Nevada, whose protocol remains secret, has not, according to an April report by Human Rights Watch.

That group found that none of the states has consulted medical experts to determine if another way could be found to reduce the pain and suffering of the condemned. The report, titled "So Long as They Die: Lethal Injections in the United States," found that the mistakes of poorly trained execution officials have caused some lethal injection procedures to exceed 30 minutes.

Logs from recent executions in California, and toxicology reports from North Carolina, suggest prisoners may have been inadequately anesthetised before being put to death, the report said. Prisoners executed by the current three-drug sequence sometimes are not knocked out with the first injection, but actually are conscious when the second medication, a paralyzing agent, is administered and slowly starts to suffocate them.

They also feel "fiery pain" as the last medicine -- potassium chloride -- courses through their veins and kills them, the report says.

One reason corrections officials have chosen not to execute prisoners with a single massive overdose of barbiturates -- even though that should provide a painless death -- was because of time. Such a method would take about 30 minutes longer for the prisoner's heart to stop beating, the report charged.

Further, it added, prison officials also have resisted eliminating the pancuronium bromide -- the paralyzing agent -- even though using it makes it harder to tell if a prisoner is sufficiently anesthetised.

"The drug is not needed to kill the prisoner, nor does it protect him from pain. It merely is intended to keep his body from twitching or convulsing while dying. It also masks any pain the prisoner might be feeling, since he cannot move, cry out, or even blink his eyes," the report said.

Medical professionals are not legally forbidden to participate in executions and some have indeed participated in executions beyond the basic requirement to determine or pronounce death. But professional associations forbid it.

"The ethical opinion explicitly prohibits selecting injection sites for executions by lethal injection, starting intravenous lines, prescribing, administering, or supervising the use of lethal drugs, monitoring vital signs, on site or remotely, and declaring death," according to a July 2006 statement by AMA president Dr. William G. Plested, III.

Still, according to the Human Rights Watch report, 28 states require a physician to determine or declare death after the lethal injection procedure. Nine other states require a physician's presence without stating the physician's exact purpose.

As more medical professionals refuse to participate in the killing, more prisoners' death sentences are being repealed. A California judge recently granted Michael Morales, a prisoner convicted of raping and killing a teenage girl in 1981, an indefinite stay of execution by default. Morales was scheduled to die in February, but prison officials postponed his execution after two anesthesiologists refused to participate.

U.S. District Judge Jeremy Fogel ruled that officials either had to find a qualified doctor who would participate in the execution, or execute Morales by administering an overdose of sedatives rather than infusing the usual series of three lethal drugs. When prison officials chose the overdose option, the judge required the injection to be administered by a qualified medical professional.

A similar ruling by U.S. District Judge Fernando Gaitan Jr. halted executions by lethal injections in Missouri this spring. Judge Gaitan's ruling requires an anesthesiologist to mix the lethal drugs, administer them or oversee their administering, and monitor the inmate's level of consciousness.

The Missouri ruling prompted the ASA to issue a statement reminding members of their ethical obligations, Dr. Orin F. Guidry, president of the ASA, told IPS.

"Once it became clear that Missouri was going to search for anesthesiologists, I wanted to make it known to all our members," he said.

His statement read, in part, "Lethal injection was not anesthesiology's idea... The legal system has painted itself into this corner and it is not our obligation to get it out. This is a complex subject and anesthesiology is being reluctantly thrust into the middle of it."

The recent challenges have raised the question of whether lethal injections are at all possible without the aid of medical professionals.

Still, some death penalty opponents argue that the debate about whether doctors and medical professionals have a professional obligation to make lethal injections humane should include further scrutiny of the death penalty itself.

"There is a level of ambivalence about capital punishment," Dr. Groner said. "As long as it looks clean and like a clinical, sanitary procedure, the American public is more than willing to accept it." (END/2006)

DEATH PENALTY: Japan Needs Public Debate

by **Suvendrini Kakuchi**

TOKYO, Jul 31 (IPS) - A rare essay posted on the web by a crime victim who does not call for the death penalty for the culprit has become a potent symbol for activists who face an uphill battle to abolish Japan's capital punishment laws.

Yumiko Yamaguchi who was slashed on her face by a 16-year-old boy when he went on a rampage on a public bus six years ago is now over 50 and in a contemplative mood. After reflection, Yamaguchi says she does not seek retribution, but an apology.

"While I am not yet an advocate of abolishing capital punishment, what victims of crime deeply wish for is for the criminal to repent what he has done and apologize to the people he has hurt, a process that will stop heinous crimes in the long run. This can not be achieved by sentencing him to death," she wrote on her website.

The boy, a psychiatric patient, was arrested for murdering one passenger, Yamaguchi's friend, and injuring several others. Sentenced to a medical treatment facility in 2000, he was released this March.

Most important for rights activists is Yamaguchi also writes that while she continues to grapple with her ordeal, she realizes the death penalty will neither ease the pain of crime victims nor stop further crime, opinions that represents key arguments against capital punishment.

"Attempts by victims to discuss the death penalty in public is particularly important to us today given that support for sending criminals to the gallows is growing these past few years," Kaori Sakagami, a writer and researcher on the death penalty in Japan told IPS.

According to activists like Sakagami, Yamaguchi represents one of only a handful of voices in Japan that courageously call for a public debate on the death penalty despite high approval ratings. Some 81 percent of the public support the death penalty; of that, 60.3 percent said the death penalty is necessary to deter heavy crimes.

Yamaguchi's attempts at opening a public discussion by hearing from the victims themselves are urgently needed against the growing call from sensationalist media for harsher penalties against criminals, Sakagami said. There are currently 150 prisoners on death row including those appealing their sentences, say activists. Between 1993 and 2004, 47 criminals were executed.

Still, activists like Sakagami and Amnesty International Japan point out that the call for harsher sentencing comes at a time when crime has fallen in Japan. The Justice Ministry latest report cites 22, 568 serious crimes in 2004 a decrease of 1,403 from the previous year. Violent crimes, including murder but not theft, comprise 3.5 percent of the total.

"Opinions from crime victims that illustrate the futility of the death penalty are crucial to us against growing anger over high profile murders committed these past few years. Media sensationalizing murders has contributed to hardened views against the possibility of social rehabilitation to criminals," Akiko Takada, spokesperson for Forum Against Death Penalty, a leading anti-death penalty group told IPS.

Indeed, activists took a beating in June when Japan reacted with hysteria when the court handed down life imprisonment for Jose Torres Yagi, 34, a Peruvian worker who was found guilty for sexual molestation and murder of an eight-year-old girl last November.

Devastated family members are now demanding the death penalty for Yagi. They have found support on television and in newspaper editorials. News reports focus heavily on the sexual abuse of the murdered girl that was revealed by her father after the verdict.

"The court should have given more consideration to the criteria," wrote the Asahi Newspaper, a liberal newspaper, on July 5th, commenting on the court verdict and referring to the "disturbing rash of brutal crimes against children" and "serious anxiety among parents" that have gone unnoticed in the court verdict.

Yet another high profile case that has upset activists is the media support for a 30-year-old man known only as Hiroshi who lobbies passionately for the death penalty for the defendant who received life imprisonment for raping and killing Hiroshi's wife and 11 month-old daughter.

"The death penalty alone will not alleviate my pain. I want the defendant to come to terms with the gravity of the crime he committed through the fear that he too may be killed," Hiroshi told sympathetic newscasters last month.

Hiroshi has forced the Hiroshima High Court to review its March 2002 life sentence handed down to the killer who was 18-years old at the time and a victim of severe child abuse.

The decision by the Hiroshima court to hold a hearing instead of simply reviewing the dossier as is the norm reflects the heavy lobbying by the husband and media, said Sakagami, the crime writer.

Recent mass media attention on the cruelty of the crime and the pain of the victims is a cheap tactic to gain high public ratings rather than encourage an objective debate on the death penalty, she added.

"The danger of this disturbing trend is the emotion of crime victims could influence court rulings as is the Hiroshima case," she told IPS.

Lawyer Kikuta Koichi said some victims of crime prefer the death penalty because life imprisonment in Japan permits the release of criminals.

"Life imprisonment as in the case of Yagi, provides conditions for parole after completing a decade in prison, which is why it is rejected by traumatized victims, making the death penalty their only option," he told IPS.

While the death penalty remains a high preference in Japan, lawyers on both sides of the argument acknowledge a national debate, started by victims like Yamaguchi, is important.

"Victims must be able to participate in trials and have access to the defendant. Only then can Japan be ready to debate capital punishment," he said. (END/2006)

DEATH PENALTY-IRAN: Condemned for Being Different

by **Alberto Cremonesi**

NEW YORK, Jul 28 (IPS) - Say we go back one year, to Jul. 19, 2005. Say we move from New York to Mashad, a city in northeastern Iran. There, one year ago, two teenagers named Ayaz Marhoni and Mahmoud Asgari were put to death for a crime involving homosexual intercourse, after being detained for 14 months and tortured with lashing.

The sentence, pronounced by the Iranian Supreme Court, was carried out by public hanging. Asgari, the younger of the two, was reportedly underage at the time he was jailed.

Whether the two teenagers were sentenced and executed for having engaged in sexual acts with each other or for the rape, along with several other participants, of an unidentified 13-year-old boy, activists say one certainty remains: Iran has continually violated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibit the execution of minors and to which Iran is a party.

The government of Iran insists that it does not execute minors, but according to Amnesty International, the facts tell a different story.

Since 1990, Iran has executed at least 19 people for crimes committed when they were children, despite the Convention on the Rights of Child which ask not to execute anyone for an offence committed when under the age of 18.

In 2005 alone, despite being urged by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to suspend the practice immediately, at least eight child offenders were executed, including two who were still under 18 at the time of their execution. And the practice of executing people for crimes committed while juvenile remains common in Iran.

Of course Iran is not the only state that perpetrates the most inhumane form of punishment. Last year, there were 2,148 known executions worldwide, and 94 percent of them took place in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

To commemorate the date of the first anniversary of the execution of the two teenagers in Iran, several human rights organisations and gay and lesbian activists have called for protection of human rights in the country, organising vigils and forums on the topic of the death penalty as a form of discrimination against minorities and the poor.

"There is no question about abuses suffered by gay and lesbian people in Iran," Paula Ettlbrick, executive director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), said at a recent meeting in New York held at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Centre.

"The death penalty is universally recognised as a human rights violation. We must reach and ensure long-lasting human changes," she said.

In Iran, the situation of the gay and lesbian community is particularly difficult. Most of the time, the gay issue is portrayed as part of the conflict between Western secular humanism and Islamic fundamentalism. According to the Persian Gay & Lesbian Organisation (PGL) and Outrage, up to 4,000 lesbians and gay men may have been executed since the Iranian revolution in 1979.

"The way we understand being gay and lesbian in our culture does not mean that it is perceived the same in other cultures," said Hossein Alizadeh, communications coordinator of IGLHRC and a native of Iran.

One consensus that emerged from the round of talks is that local coalitions and organisations fighting the death penalty and other discrimination are more efficient than global movements. As highlighted by Hadi Ghaemi, Iran researcher for Human Right Watch (HRW), "Iran is a dynamic country. The tendency to bring about peaceful changes is coming from inside, from Iranian people. International organisations are not allowed into the country, we must rely on people from inside."

Indeed, external help is often seen as something dangerous.

"Manifestations from outside raise hysterics in Iran. The U.S. in particular is seen as evil, it is not trusted nor liked. This is the kind of ignorance that hurts other people," said Kourouss Esmaeli at the meeting, an Iranian-American filmmaker and activist.

In this complicated situation it is difficult to figure out which could be the next step towards a more comprehensive human rights protection. "There is an effort now to reform some of the forms of punishment in Iran, including the death penalty. However, this legal crisis makes the situation very difficult for democracy in Iran," Scott Long, Director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Program of Human Rights Watch, told IPS.

According to Amnesty International, Iran is one of the most frequent executioners. Only last year the Islamic country is known to have executed at least 94 people. The Islamic law, called Shariah, allows for execution as punishment for sexual crimes like rape and human rights groups have documented numerous cases in which Iran has executed its citizens on charge of sodomy and adultery. According to the Persian Gay and Lesbian Organisation, it is obvious that the Iranian government does not recognise gay rights.

At the time of the execution of the two adolescents, Human Rights Watch expressed concern that interest in the case from gay organisations and some media was only a way to make use of the episode for other ideological purposes. However, whether the death penalty was used as a form of discrimination of homosexual rights or not, Iran violated specific human rights obligations, contravening articles contained in the two treaties of which the country is signatory.

"My hope is that the struggle of the gay and lesbian community will become part of the democratic struggle in Iran, I think this is the crucial part of the debate. Defending the right to privacy for everyone, defending the right not to be tortured, eliminating the death penalty... this is part of the issues that affect Iran," Long told IPS.

This month, rallies and vigils took place worldwide, from San Francisco to Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Toronto, Moscow, Brussels, Vienna, Dublin, London, Berlin and many other cities to commemorate the anniversary of the death of the two young Iranian men and to call attention on human rights violations that take place globally every day. (END/2006)

DEATH PENALTY: No Outrage for Nigerians in Singapore

By Sam Olukoya

LAGOS, Jul 27 (IPS) - When Uzonna Tochi picked up the phone last week he heard the most chilling words of his life. "Please do something fast to save my life; they might execute me anytime now,"

Uzonna's older brother, Iwuchukwu Amara Tochi, pleaded from Singapore.

Iwuchukwu Amara Tochi, 19, is sitting on death row in Singapore with Okele Nelson Malachy, 31, condemned in March after being found guilty of transporting 727.03 grams of heroin into Singapore.

Singapore's Misuse of Drugs Act carries a mandatory death sentence for anyone found guilty of trafficking more than 15 grams of heroin. The two men will be executed this year if they are not granted clemency from Singapore's president.

Uzonna and human rights organisations from around the world have not given up hope. Still, they say it is hard to garner international outrage to save the life of a poor Nigerian.

M. Ravi, a human rights lawyer and a member of the opposition party, Singapore Democratic Party, wrote in an online appeal that Iwuchukwu and Malachy, as Africans, stand in danger of being executed if nothing urgent is done to save their lives.

Unlike Iwuchukwu, Malachy is classified as stateless and no country has the direct responsibility of pleading for him. He carried a South African passport, but officials believe he is Nigerian.

"There has been a spate of executions of African nationals across Asia, which had gone unnoticed. The Australian and Western counterparts get different treatment in the media," Ravi wrote on the web site.

For instance, German national Julia Bohl, who was convicted for drug trafficking in 2002, escaped the gallows in Singapore when she was released from prison and exiled in 2005.

This year Ravi has embarked on a tour of European countries, holding press conferences and meeting parliamentarians in an effort to seek support for Iwuchukwu and Malachy.

Groups like the Amnesty International also have launched campaigns to save the lives of the condemned men. In Lagos, the country's largest human rights group, the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) has started a drive to force the Nigerian government to intervene on behalf of the condemned men.

"Since he lost the appeal, I always fear that the next moment might be his last," a ruffled Uzonna told IPS..

He has every reason to be concerned about his brother, who he described as the bread winner of the family. Once a football player, Iwuchukwu first took to trading before leaving Nigeria for Pakistan four years ago.

He was on a trip from Pakistan to Singapore when he was arrested at the Changi Airport 27 November 2004 on allegations of transporting heroin into Singapore. His lawyer told the court Iwuchukwu did not know the pills he was shipping contained heroin. He thought he was bringing in medicines.

The arrest and conviction of his brother is kept secret from his parents, Uzonna said. "My poor parents will die if they hear that a child who has worked so hard to sustain them is facing a death sentence," he said.

Uzonna has visited Nigeria's Ministry of External Affairs twice and that officials promised they would write letters in support of his brother's life. He added he was unsure if the promise was kept.

Officials of the Ministry of External Affairs could not give a definite answer when IPS enquired as to whether they are doing anything to save Iwuchukwu's life.

"The Nigerian government has not done anything public to show it is interested in saving Iwuchukwu's life," says Princewill Akpakpan, head of the penal reform project at CLO.

"The government is hardly bothered about Iwuchukwu because Nigeria, just like Singapore, has the death penalty," Akpakpan told IPS.

If the two had been convicted for the same offence in Nigeria, they would have earned a lighter sentence of between three years and life imprisonment, Jonah Achema, Assistant Director Public Affairs of the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency, told IPS.

"It would depend on the discretion of the judge and other factors like whether he is a first offender or not," Achema said.

A Nigerian law scrapped the death penalty for drug offenders in 1986. "This is an indication of the evolving nature of our laws," Achema told IPS.

Figures of those executed for drug-related offences around the world are not readily available. But Ryan Schlieff, who works on the Singapore desk at Amnesty International in London, told IPS that Asian and Middle Eastern countries that retain the death penalty are doing so to crack down on drugs.

Singapore, in particular, has come under special criticism for its harsh death penalty laws. More than 420 persons have been executed there since 1991, the majority for drug trafficking. Singapore is believed to have the highest per capita execution rate in the world.

Critics question the justification for executing drug offenders. Instead, they say, the best way to deter crime is to increase the certainty of detection, arrest and conviction.

"Drug offenders should in effect not be made to pay with their lives," Akpakpan said.

Moreover, no study has proven that the death penalty reduces crime. In Iran, nearly 2,000 people were reportedly executed for drug offences between 1988 and 1999; a report by the country's official news agency IRNA observes that in spite of the executions, the problem of drug trafficking had not been resolved.

In 1995, 26 governments adopted laws making drug-related offences punishable by death. The countries see the death penalty as an effective and cheap way of removing criminally minded individuals from the society.

Growing pressure from civil society groups for a total abolition of the death penalty forced the Nigerian government to initiate a national debate on whether or not to retain the death sentence.

Singapore has no room for such debates, human rights workers said.

"There is usually little public debate in Singapore about the death

penalty, partly as a result of tight government controls on the press and civil society organisations," Amnesty International said in a report.

Amnesty International was a victim of this government control in April 2005, when Singapore denied an AI member permission to speak at a conference on the death penalty organised by political opposition leaders and human rights activists.

Moreover, the Singaporean government rarely grants clemency for drug traffickers, Ravi and Amnesty said, making more urgent the need to keep up international pressure to save the lives of Malachy and Iwuchukwu Tochi. (END/2006)

DEATH PENALTY: Europe Squeezes Russia

by Kester Kenn Klomegah

MOSCOW, Jul 21 (IPS) - Though Russia first declared its willingness to abolish the death penalty more than a decade ago, that determination has foundered because many legislators believe it is a necessary tool to fight terrorism.

"It's been obvious Russia has not adopted the protocol abolishing death penalty, despite increasing calls to do so, and it's likely it would not do away with it most especially this time when Russia has stepped up its fight against terrorism," Chairman of the State Duma's Legislative Committee Pavel Krasheninnikov told IPS.

The issue has come to a head now because Russia took over the rotating chairmanship of the Council of Europe, the continent's leading human rights body, in May. The 46-member council is reticent to have the former Soviet Union as its head if it has not complied completely with Council of Europe ideals, Secretary General Terry Davis said at a parliamentary session in June.

The problem, parliamentarians in Russia say, is that the legislature is reluctant to abolish the death penalty at a time when terrorism appears to be on the rise. Removing capital punishment from the law books would make them appear soft on terrorism, they believe.

However, the Head of the Centre for Development of Democracy and Human Rights based in Moscow, Yury Dzhibladze, told IPS he did not believe that was a cogent reason to keep the death penalty on the books.

"This is a very worrying status quo," Dzhibladze said. "Russia cannot be considered a full-fledged and true democratic European nation until the moment it abolishes this obsolete and barbarian method of governing people."

The public attitude can change if politicians and leaders engage actively in public awareness campaign about abolition of capital punishment and democratic values in modern society, he says, adding that there is nothing unusual about that. Governments often go against the will of the majority in such serious matters.

"These kinds of issues are not decided by a referendum, at least not in this country. Often a leader, as poet Alexander Pushkin once said, is more progressive than the majority of a backward and conservative public," Dzhibladze said.

In late June, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly issued a fresh statement urging Russia to ratify the protocol on death penalty.

"The death penalty has been abolished in all the member states, with just one exception," the document said. "More than ten years after accession, the Russian Federation still retains the death penalty in its legislation, although it does respect the moratorium on the executions it decided in 1996."

The Council of Europe will continue to insist that Russia ratify the European Convention on Human Rights' protocol on the abolition of the death penalty, Davis said at the last parliamentary session.

The Soviet Union executed an average of 730 people per year from the 1960s until its dissolution in 1991. In 1996, Russia imposed a moratorium on capital punishment, and three years later, the Constitutional Court formally barred death sentences. Still, some lower courts continue to sentence defendants to death.

President Vladimir Putin has suggested he might take steps towards abolishing the death penalty in Russia. He did not elaborate what steps he would take in light of public opposition.

Many politicians in Russia argue they need to impose capital punishment for terrorists. Russian legislators also point to a massacre at the Dubrovka theatre in October 2002, in which 130 people were killed and more than 700 wounded. More recently, 331 people died in the Beslan school hostage crisis, the worst case of terrorism in the nation's post-Soviet history.

Those responsible for those crimes, most Russians believe, should be executed, according to polls conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation in August last year.

Kostantin Kosachyov, head of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, said there was no majority in parliament in favour of ratification of the protocol against the death penalty.

"There has not been any serious and controversial matter that came up before us and has taken such a long time to find a collective solution as the death penalty," Kosachyov told IPS. "We certainly have no right to debate ratification while there is a risk that it will be rejected. If this happens, the issue will inevitably be delayed."

Surprisingly, Sergey Mironov, speaker of the Federation Council (Russia's Upper Chamber), in June rejected all talks concerning Russia's unchangeable attitude towards abolition of capital punishment.

Several legislators this year have talked about maintaining the moratorium and privately advocated for its extension after it expires early next year. Krasheninnikov called death sentences ordered by lower courts "a serious legal mistake and judicial decisions not in conformity with the times."

The pressure that international organisations are putting on Russia regarding this issue is not a factor here, Krasheninnikov said.

"Public opinion influences the matter a great deal. From the political viewpoint, nobody ventures to raise issues related to the abolition of the death penalty while terrorist attacks still happen," Krasheninnikov said. (END/2006)

DEATH PENALTY-CHINA: Rapid Death by Roaming Vans

by Antoaneta Bezlova

BEIJING, Jul 19 (IPS) - Responding to criticism that it cruelly and arbitrarily executes a large number of its citizens each year, Chinese officials now are gradually moving toward what they say is a more discreet way of killing its prisoners: Mobile vans..

Human rights critics say they may look more like officially sanctioned roaming death squads, which simply allow China to execute its prisoners more quickly, easily and out of the public eye. Chinese legal officials counter that its fleet of mobile execution vehicles are a "more humane" form of carrying out death sentences.

Both sides agree they are a departure from publicly held execution rallies organised in the past.

"I think it is definitely a progress for China and it shows more consideration both for the people sentenced to death and for others (their relatives and the public)," Li Guifang, vice-chairman of the Criminal Affairs Committee of the All-China Lawyers Association, told IPS. "There is less pain and quicker death for the convicted."

Rights activists point out that the evidence from the U.S. shows that lethal injection, too, inflicts pain.

The middle kingdom has developed a fleet of mobile execution vehicles slowly, starting recently after cautiously experimenting with lethal injections for the first time in selected provinces since 1997. It is now adopting them on a larger scale in more localities.

As opposed to the shootings which took place in public, inmates are now executed in purpose-built vans in an almost clinical environment. Prisoners are confined to a bed, similar to an ambulance stretcher, and put to death with lethal injections. The contents of the drug cocktails used for the lethal injections are mixed in Beijing and delivered to local intermediate courts where the trials take place.

The exact number of vans being used is a state secret. What is known, however, is that Yunnan province alone has 18 mobile units in use.

Beijing officials plan to assign a mobile execution to designated provinces, but would not tell IPS which ones. IPS spoke with several Chinese officials involved with the programme on condition they would not be quoted.

The move from firing squad to lethal injection "demonstrates tremendous progress in China's criminal judgement proceedings," Yin Yong, director of Zhejiang province Supreme Court, told the state media in June.

First tried out in 1997 in Yunnan province -- a backward southwestern region bordering the Golden Triangle and notorious for its drug trafficking -- mobile death vans are now readied for use also in booming industrialised places where crime rates have soared, such as the eastern coastal province of Zhejiang and others. Zhejiang plans to start using them from Sep. 1.

Human rights groups claim China executes more criminals every year than the rest of the world combined. The exact number remains a highly confidential state secret. Amnesty International recorded at least 1,770 death sentences carried out in China in 2005 but it says the real number could be as high as 8,000.

The mobile death fleet is being touted by Chinese legal officials as the latest advance in China's judicial system as Beijing tries to revamp its international image ahead of playing host to the 2008 Olympic Games. According to Chinese press reports, each mobile execution van is priced at about 500,000 yuan (60,000 U.S. dollars) each.

They are now in vogue because they allow for death sentences to be carried out without the usual trip to the execution ground and they are cheaper. Lethal injections only require four people to assist in the execution while the usual practice of death by a firing squad needs many guards at the execution site and along the road to the site.

The vans also prove that China has abandoned a long-standing practice of public executions. After China signed the U.N. Convention against Torture in 1984, it issued new regulations banning execution rallies. Rights activists claim, however, the rallies have continued during the "Strike Hard" anticrime crackdowns first initiated by the government in 1983 and revived in 1996. These rallies no longer happen in large cities where foreigners live.

Yet as mobile executions chambers begin to silently roll into more and more towns, making capital punishment easier and faster to deliver, fears have risen amongst human rights activists and death penalty opponents that China is relying more on lethal injection because it is harvesting organs of executed prisoners in an effort to supply the country's growing market for organ transplants.

Chinese hospitals started organ transplants in the 1960s and now perform between 10,000 and 20,000 transplants annually, according to official figures. A kidney transplant in China costs about 7,200 dollars but this official price could swell to 20,000 or even 50,000 dollars if the patient is willing to pay more to obtain an organ sooner. Even those prices though amount only to a fraction of the price for an organ transplant in developed countries.

As patients from Malaysia, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore flock to China for transplants, the business is bringing in thousands of dollars to the country's under-funded health system. Suspicions are growing abroad that the use of newly developed mobile executions vans may be linked to this boom. The British Transplantation Society and Amnesty International in May strongly condemned China for harvesting prisoners' organs.

China carried out 8,000 kidney transplants last year but only 270, or less than 4 percent of the organs, came from voluntary donations.

"The use of mobile execution chambers exacerbates existing problems with prison-related issues in China," Sharon Hom, executive director of Human Rights in China, wrote in an e-mail interview with IPS.

"It facilitates the black market trade in organ sales particularly because there is no access for independent monitors, such as the Red Cross, to prisons, detention centres, and labour camps."

In China, it is illegal to remove organs without the permission of the person in question or his family members, but critics say that these

obligations are commonly violated not the least because of the secrecy surrounding such operations. Regulations issued in 1984 stipulate that the removal of organs from executed prisoners should be "kept strictly secret, and attention must be paid to avoiding negative repercussions."

Authorities routinely refuse to give relatives access to bodies of executed prisoners, cremating them hastily after the executions, says Robin Munro, a British expert on China's criminal justice system.

"Once the body is cremated, it is impossible to determine whether any organs have been removed," he told IPS. (END/2006)

DEATH PENALTY: Blacks with Stereotypical Features Executed Most Often

by **Fritzroy A. Sterling**

NEW YORK, Jul 19 (IPS) - Juries in the U.S. tend to hand down the death penalty twice as often to black defendants with stereotypically black features like darker skin, bigger noses and fuller lips, than to those perceived to have less stereotypically black features, according to the findings of a new study.

The study, published in the May 2006 issue of *Psychological Science*, the journal of the Association for Psychological Science, noted that previous research already has proven that black defendants in capital cases receive the death sentence more frequently than white defendants. The death penalty is, statistically speaking, unlikely when both the defendant and victim are black.

When the victim is white, however, the matter of race as an influential factor in "death-eligible cases" is emphatically evident, according to the study. A team of educators headed by Stanford University Psychologist Jennifer L. Eberhardt conducted the study, titled "Looking Death worthy."

"Race and the death penalty is a complicated topic," communications director of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (NCADP), David Elliot, told IPS. "In Maryland alone, 60 percent of all homicide victims are black, yet there is only one person currently on death row for the killing of a black person."

The victims of the five defendants executed in that state between 1976, the year the death penalty was reinstated, and April 2006, were all white.

Eberhardt and her team conducted the study by presenting black and white head shots, in slide show format, of black capital defendants in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania between 1979 and 1999. "Naive" participants judged how stereotypical each of the defendants looked in the pictures by noting facial features such as lips, nose and skin tones. Each feature was rated on a scale of one (not at all stereotypical) to 11 (extremely stereotypical).

Fifty-seven percent of the defendants considered by the participants as having extremely stereotypical had already received a death sentence by juries. Only 24.4 percent of defendants considered not at all stereotypical had received the death sentence.

The fact that the issue of race continues to be of great significance in

the outcomes of capital and other criminal cases does not come as a surprise, according to death penalty opponents.

"Sadly, this is not a new finding," Christina Swarns, director of the NAACP Legal Defence and Education Fund Criminal Justice Project, told IPS.

The findings will do little to assuage the concerns of death row inmates who believe they have been sentenced unfairly because of a key precedent set in the 1987 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *McCleskey v. Kemp*.

In that case, the high court rejected the arguments of Warren McCleskey, a black man convicted of killing a white Georgia police officer, even though his defence presented statistical data which proved that blacks convicted of killing whites in the state of Georgia were four times more likely to be sentenced to death than those who were convicted of killing non-whites.

"*McCleskey v. Kemp* was one of the most rigorous examinations of the effects of race on capital sentencing, and the defence's arguments were similar to findings in this study," Swarns added.

In fact, the majority opinion in *McCleskey* stated that "apparent disparities in sentencing are an inevitable part of our criminal justice system." Moreover, the Court also argued that rather than relying on broad statistical data to illustrate patterns of discrimination in the criminal justice system, black capital defendants must provide "exceptionally clear proof" that the people involved in their specific cases had discriminated against them in seeking the death penalty.

The decision delivered a debilitating blow to death row inmates seeking to overturn their fatal sentences on the grounds that the sentences were racially motivated.

McCleskey v. Kemp has since been used as the precedent to overturn appeals from death row inmates in state Supreme Courts and Courts of Criminal Appeals in Illinois, Oklahoma, Missouri and South Carolina, according to a 2003 Amnesty International report on the continued significance of race in capital cases.

The findings of Eberhardt's research underscore how deeply rooted the negative perceptions of stereotypes and black physical traits are in the psyche of many jurors. Further, they illustrate how those perceptions affect the outcomes of capital cases.

According to the study, "in actual sentencing decisions, jurors may treat these traits as powerful clues to death worthiness."

Defendants with stereotypically black features receive harsher sentences in other criminal cases, too. The study found that blacks with stereotypical features spend up to eight months longer in prison for felonies.

"In modern history, the state of Texas," according to NCADP's Elliot, "has only executed one or two white defendants for the killing of a black person."

Between 1976 and April 2006, the state of Texas executed 78 black defendants for the killing of a white victim, according to the spring 2006 quarterly report by the NAACP Legal and Educational Defence Fund.

Texas has executed only two white defendants for the killing of victims of mixed race between 1976 and 2006, according to that same report. Those statistics expose blatant flaws in the criminal justice system, according to some critics.

"It sends a powerful message in the criminal justice system that the lives of whites are more valuable than those of blacks," Elliot said.

Eberhardt's report also notes that people, not just whites alone, "associate black physical traits with criminality."

Still, many death penalty opponents are optimistic that through continued advocacy, policy change and legislative reform, the "apparent disparities" that the US Supreme Court acknowledged in 1987 as an "inevitable part" of the criminal justice system can be eliminated.

"There's always hope," said Swarns. "The NAACP Legal Defence Fund is always looking at ways to successfully attack and remedy those disparities."

She points to Kentucky's Racial Justice Act as a model that should be considered by federal and state legislatures.

That act allows capital defendants to use statistical data as evidence to prove that racial discrimination influenced the outcomes of their individual capital sentences. It was signed into law in Kentucky in 1998, 11 years after the *McCleskey* decision.

Supporters of a nation-wide Racial Justice Act argue that some current death row inmates who believe their death sentence were racially motivated will be able to cite, for example, the statistical findings of Eberhardt study to prove that capital defendants with more stereotypically black features receive the death penalty more frequently than other capital defendants.

"We need a national racial justice act," said Elliot. "The act will make it easier to tie individual cases into the broader context of racial discrimination." (END/2006)

News from International NGOs

IRAQ: 'HANGING WILL BE SADDAM'S DEATH PENALTY IF CONVICTED'

If the death penalty against Hussein was executed, it would be hanging until death and not by a shooting squad, said Jaafar Al-Mosawi, chief prosecutor of the trial of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. "It is a civil court not a military one," said Al-Mousawi, eliminating any legal exceptions due to the issue of age. He added that in case a final verdict, the execution can be activated within 30 days. Al-Mousawi said the next court session will be in mid-October to review the case's documents. He predicted that the last court session would be on October 26th, 2006. Saddam Hussein had asked the court judge in the previous hearing for an execution by a fire squad and not by hanging, based on claims that he was a "military man" and should die in a military way.

CHINA: BANKER SENTENCED TO DEATH

Wen Mengjie, an official from the Agricultural Bank of China, was sentenced to death for corruption involving 15 million yuan (\$1.87-million). Wen, former head of technology at the bank's Beijing branch, was sentenced to death earlier in the month, Xinhua news agency reported without specifying the date. Wen was convicted of taking 10.7 million yuan in kickbacks from equipment and software providers and 4.3 million yuan in public funds, the report said.

THAILAND: MAN SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR MURDER OF 4

July 29, 2006: Anuchai Noithai, a man convicted of shooting four people dead, wounding three others and damaging seven vehicles after an argument with his ex-wife in 2005, was sentenced to death by the Saraburi Court, Thailand. The court found Anuchai, 41, guilty as charged, after witness testimony and evidence showed he had prepared a shotgun, gasoline and a letter for his parents in case he died. Although Anuchai pleaded guilty to 15 counts of crimes including illegal possession of a firearm, destruction of property, and premeditated and attempted murder, the court saw his confession as resulting from his failure to rebuff evidence and declined to reduce his punishment.

MOLDOVA RATIFIES CONVENTIONS OUTLAWING DEATH PENALTY

Moldova assumed an international obligation not to apply the death penalty. The Moldovan parliament ratified the following international documents to this effect: the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on abolishing the death penalty and Protocol No 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights on abolishing the death penalty under any circumstances. A report drafted by the parliamentary commission for foreign policy and European integration said that the documents were ratified based on the Moldova-EC action plan.

RUSSIA: SIX POINTS FOR THE G7

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), which represents 46 national Helsinki committees and Cooperating Organizations throughout Europe, Central Asia and North America, and the Moscow Helsinki Group are appealing to members of the G-7 to press the Russian Federation to address serious violations of international human rights standards that deprive inhabitants of Russia of human rights and freedoms enjoyed by members of other states taking part in the St. Petersburg G-8 meeting.

3 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS RELEASED, MANY OTHERS STILL DETAINED

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, welcomes the decision to release Mr. Nidal Derwiche, member of the Committees for the Defence of Human Rights and Democratic Freedoms in Syria (CDF), Mr. Safouan Tayfour, human rights defender, and Mr. Ghaleb Amer, board member of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights. According to the information received, Mr. Nidal Derwiche, Mr. Safouan Tayfour and Mr. Ghaleb Amer were released on bail July 17, 2006, reportedly after withdrawing their signatures from a petition, initiated by Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals and human rights defenders, calling for the normalisation of relations between Lebanon and Syria.

TREND TO ABOLISH CAPITAL PUNISHMENT CONTINUES

By Elisabetta Zamparutti

IPS COLUMNIST SERVICE, JULY 2006

ROME, Jul (IPS) - The annual report on capital punishment issued on July 21 by the abolitionist organisation Hands Off Cain shows that the movement towards the abolition of the death penalty, underway for at least ten years, is continuing.

According to the report, the number of countries or territories that have decided to abolish the death penalty, whether in practice or through legislation, is now 142. Of these, 89 have abolished the sanction entirely; 10 have barred the death penalty for ordinary crimes; Russia is required to eliminate the death penalty as a condition of its membership in the Council of Europe and at present has imposed a moratorium on executions; five other countries have imposed moratoria; and 37 have not imposed the sentence in the past ten years and can be considered de facto abolitionist.

And one other country will be added to the number of complete abolitionists: Montenegro, which opted to sever its federation with Serbia through an independence referendum held on May 21, 2006, which won 55 percent approval.

The number of countries with active death penalties has dropped to 54 from 60 in 2004, 61 in 2003, and 64 in 2002. This gradual abandonment of capital punishment is shown not only in the decrease in the number of countries that keep the penalty on the books but also those who have carried out executions.

As a consequence, the number of executions worldwide has also fallen, to 5494 in 2005 from 5530 in 2004. Once again, Asia was the continent responsible for the vast majority of the executions worldwide. The total for China alone was at least 5413, down from 5450 in 2004.

In the Americas only the United States carried out any executions in 2005: 60, slightly up from 59 in 2004. There were 65 in 2003.

In Africa the death penalty has fallen into disuse. In 2005 it was carried out only in four countries: Uganda (8), Libya (6), Sudan (4), and Somalia (1). The total number of executions for the continent was 19 in 2004, 60 in 2003, and 63 in 2002.

Europe would be completely free of the stain of the death penalty but for Belarus, which carried out two executions in 2005.

Since the beginning of 2005, six countries have dropped from the roster of death penalty states: Tajikistan, Liberia, and the Philippines abolished the sanction. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Santa Lucia, and Lesotho have not imposed the death penalty in 10 years and can thus be considered de facto abolitionists.

On the other hand, from the beginning of 2005 to 13 June 2006, five countries have reinstated the death penalty after years of suspension: the Palestinian Authority, Libya, Iraq, Equatorial Guinea, and Botswana. And in contrast to the general tendency in the United States, the state of Connecticut carried out its first execution in 45 years, ending an extended de facto moratorium.

Of the 54 death penalty states, 42 are dictatorships or authoritarian regimes. In 2005 they were responsible for 98.7 percent of all executions carried out worldwide. Many of these countries do not provide statistics on their implementation of capital punishment, which means the actual number of executions could be far higher.

Of the 11 countries with the death penalty that could be called liberal democracies with regard not only to their political system but also their human rights record, respect for civil and political rights, economic freedoms, and adherence to the rule of law, only five imposed the death penalty in 2005, carrying out a total of 74 executions, or 1.3 percent of the global total: the US (60), Mongolia (at least 8), Taiwan (3), Indonesia (2), and Japan (1).

On May 23, 2006, the Italian prime minister Romano Prodi stated: "I think it is opportune to resume the Italian initiative to end the death penalty, which is a fixed point of our culture and our civilisation."

It is essential that we act immediately to make sure that a moratorium on the death penalty is presented and approved by the UN General Assembly in September. In this way we can fulfil the initiative begun 13 years ago by Hands Off Cain and by the Transnational Radical Party, which enjoys the support of an extraordinary convergence of the majority and the opposition in the Italian Parliament.

With the help of the UN moratorium -- and in anticipation of a complete worldwide abolition -- the thousands of those condemned to death could be saved: not only those already known to all, in American prisons, but also the unnamed and the forgotten who await their sentences in the prisons of China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Cuba, and all other authoritarian regimes who go to their deaths in silence with total indifference on the part of the world. (END/COPYRIGHT IPS)

(* Elisabetta Zamparutti, a lawyer, is the coordinator of the annual report on the death penalty worldwide by Hands Off Cain.)

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WORLD PRESS REVIEW - July 2006

NO ONE SHOULD BE PUT TO DEATH, NOT EVEN SADDAM - VATICAN

No one should be put to death, not even former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, said Cardinal Paul Poupard, president of the pontifical councils for Interreligious Dialogue and for Culture. "The Catechism of the Catholic Church, the church itself and the pope reaffirm that every person is a creature of God and that no one but the creator can claim to be the lord of the life and death of another," the cardinal said in an interview with the Italian news agency ANSA.

"Every creature, even the most wretched, was created in the image and likeness of God," the French cardinal said. "God is the master of life and death." The cardinal made his comments after *Avvenire*, the Italian bishops' daily newspaper, published an editorial June 20 calling for the life imprisonment and not the execution of Saddam and his co-defendants, who are on trial in Iraq.

"Even in the daily slaughterhouse of Iraq a human life – any human life – always is sacred," the newspaper said. Revenge, even resulting from a fair trial, "will not heal wounds, but rather risks exacerbating them further," *Avvenire* said. "Nothing gives legitimacy to a killing unless it is motivated by a compelling need for legitimate defense."

INDONESIA REFUSES EU REQUEST ON CANCELLATION OF DEATH PENALTY

Indonesia has refused the demand of the ambassadors of the European Union (EU) countries to revoke the country's death penalty, *People's Daily* online said in a Xinhua report July 4. Minister of Justice and Human Rights Hamid Awaluddin made the statement after meeting with the Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla, a counselor delegation of the European Union and the ambassadors of Finland and Germany at the vice presidential office.

As "they asked us to delete the death penalty, Indonesia still had the law, which was inherited from the Dutch colonial rule and event in the country's view of criminal law, death penalty should still exist," the minister said, adding "the vice president and I explained our position... and Indonesia's criminal law still has a cause of it (death penalty)." Awaluddin said that in the new draft, "the death penalty is still stipulated, which sparks pro and contra."

Indonesia has executed 71 people up to now and prepares to conduct the death penalty on tens of others, including three bombers whom played leading roles in the Bali bombings in 2002, which killed 202 people. Indonesian has been imposing death penalty on the cases of terrorism, drug trafficking and planned assassination.

DEATH PENALTY WORLDWIDE DIMINISHES, REPORT SAYS

Less countries worldwide are issuing life sentences, according to the Italian rights group *Nessuno Tocchi Caino* (Noone touch Cain) which released its annual report on the death penalty, AKI reported on July 21.

Today 90 countries have abolished capital punishment altogether, while no executions have taken place in another 52 states in the past few years. However, there are still 52 countries worldwide where capital punishment is legal. Overall, 5,494 executions were carried out in 2005, compared to 5,530 a year before. Asia is the continent where the highest number of executions were registered in 2005, 98.7 percent of life sentences worldwide. Among Asian countries, China ranks first with as many as 5,000 executions last year, followed by Iran with 113.

DEATH PENALTY NEEDS FIXING, SAY CRITICS

The death penalty should be changed or abolished because it is corrupting the U.S. system of justice at all levels, critics allege. "It corrupts all of us. It is corrupting our courts, it's corrupting prosecutors, it's corrupting defense attorneys, it's corrupting juries, it's corrupting our society," said Bryan Stevenson, a defense attorney and professor of clinical law at New York University's School of Law. He was among those participating in a National Press Club discussion on the future of the death penalty, *Cyber Cast New* (CSN.COM) reported July 24.

Stevenson said the system is so corrupt in Alabama that 80 percent of death row inmates face execution for committing crimes against white people, while 65 percent of all murder victims are black. "The people on death row are not terrorists. They are not Timothy McVeigh. The majority of them are poor, the mentally ill, the wronged," Stevenson said.

Sam Millsap, former district attorney for Bexar County, Texas, said too many innocent people face the death penalty. "It's better that a hundred guilty men go free, than one innocent man gets sentenced to death. It's important that we remember that." Kenneth Starr, a former U.S. solicitor general and independent counsel who investigated the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky scandal, said that while he favors the death penalty, it needs to be fixed. "I am not an abolitionist and never have been," he said. Starr said the president and governors have the power to grant pardons and clemency and should do so more frequently. It is a power that Starr said has not been used in California since Ronald Reagan was governor.

POLISH LEADER WANTS EU TO RETURN TO DEATH PENALTY

Poland's conservative President Lech Kaczynski vowed on Friday to campaign for a return of the death penalty in the European Union, Washington Post said in a Reuters report July 28. He said the EU, which has effectively banned capital punishment, would to come to see it was justified for murder.

"Countries who give up this penalty award an unimaginable advantage to the criminal over his victim, the advantage of life over death," Kaczynski told public radio. Kaczynski and his twin brother Jaroslaw, Poland's prime minister, won power last year promising a tough stance against corruption and crime in the biggest ex-communist EU member. Their traditionalist and nationalist rhetoric has alarmed Warsaw's EU partners, raising concerns they will drive Poland away from the European mainstream.

The Kaczynskis dismiss the criticism as unfair and argue their views on the death penalty should be debated. "We need to discuss this in Europe. I think that with time Europe will change its view in this regard," Kaczynski said. All 15 of the EU's older member states abandoned capital punishment in the late 1960s. The new members who joined in 2004 have had to abandon it as a condition of membership.

UGANDA GOVT NOT READY TO ABOLISH DEATH PENALTY

Uganda is not ready to abolish the death penalty the Speaker of Parliament, Edward Kiwanuka Ssekandi, has said. Ssekandi, on Wednesday, July 26, told officials from the African Commission on Human and People's Rights that abolishing the death penalty "could cause anarchy" in society, The New Times (Kigali) said in a report from Kampala.

He said "in our society it requires patience and sensitization" to contain crime but not abolishing the death penalty. "I personally would not say we abolish the death penalty. We should leave it intact after all, it is rarely carried out. Once we abolish the death penalty, it could cause anarchy in our society," Ssekandi told Mumba Malila and Reine Alapini-Gansou, both commissioners at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The two officials, during a courtesy call, had asked the Speaker to explain why Uganda was reluctant to abolish the death penalty, "a human rights abuse that is hindering development in Africa". "From what you have said, it is true Uganda will do better. As parliament, you should explain why you have not abolished the death penalty. Nobody should take the life of another. That is how Africa will develop," Alapini-Gansou, the Commissioner of the Defense of the defenders of human rights, said.

But Ssekandi insisted: "Maybe some years to come. We still need to sensitise. The death penalty in Uganda is for capital offences, which are very few. Even in America, there are capital offences. And there is no evidence that many people have suffered because of the death penalty." The Speaker had earlier said that the abolition of the death penalty was first debated upon during the Constituent Assembly and majority of the members maintained that it stays.

FORMER CHINESE POLICEMAN LIFTS LID ON ORGAN HARVESTING

Chinese body parts are in hot demand, with Western patients sick of long waiting queues and in need of a transplant. Customers, including dozens of Australians, are prepared to pay up to \$US170,000 (\$255,700) for a major organ such as a lung or heart, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported July 25.

The report quoted former Beijing policeman Sun Liyong saying he knows the methods used by Chinese authorities to harvest body parts from prisoners. Mr Sun now lives in Australia, but during the 1980s he says he was well aware of what was happening to executed prisoners. "Before the prisoners were executed the Public Security Bureau would go to the detention centre and test their blood," he said. "As far as I know during the period I was a policeman all the organs were harvested by the Friendship Hospital in Beijing."

Records show the Friendship Hospital boasts of an excellent reputation in transplant operations. "The Beijing Public Security Bureau would notify the Friendship Hospital before they carried out the execution of prisoners," Mr Sun said. "The Friendship Hospital would then send an ambulance, and as soon as the prisoners were executed, the police on the spot would put them in a plastic bag and throw them into the van."

Mr Sun says the date and time of the executions were determined by patient demand. He says once prison authorities had carried out the execution, hospital staff were ready to act. "And the staff from the hospital would already have everything prepared for the organ harvesting," he said. Mr Sun left the police force in 1987, but afterwards he became involved in China's democracy movement.

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