

## Death penalty on the decline

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Momentum is growing for an end to capital punishment after Amnesty International's (AI) latest analysis revealed a big drop in executions.

The Annual Death Penalty Statistics – launched in Rome on Friday – show a worldwide trend towards abolition with an encouraging 25 per cent decrease in executions and death sentences in 2006.

Last year, the Philippines became the 99<sup>th</sup> country to abolish the death penalty for ordinary crimes, while Georgia and Moldova removed provisions for the death penalty from their constitutions. Many more, including South Korea, stand on the brink of abolition. Only 16 countries were abolitionist in 1977.

“AI is calling for a universal moratorium on execution,” said Secretary General Irene Khan. “A death penalty free world is possible if key governments are willing to show political leadership.”

Despite the encouraging signs, statistics reveal that many states continue to kill their citizens with a total disregard for basic human rights.

At least **1,591** prisoners were executed by their own governments in **25** countries last year, while **3,861** new death sentences were issued (in **55** countries). Over **20,000** prisoners currently languish on death row across the globe.

**91 per cent** of all known executions in 2006 took place in **six** countries: China, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Pakistan and the USA.

“These hard core executioners are isolated and out of tune with global trends,” said Ms Khan. “The figures are inexcusable, but even officials in Iraq and China have spoken of their desire to see an end to the use of the death penalty.”

Based on public reports available, AI estimated that at least **1,010** people were executed by the Chinese government last year. These figures are only the tip of the iceberg, with credible sources suggesting the real total is closer to **8,000**.

Iran's execution rate nearly doubled compared to 2005, with at least 177 people killed. It also executed the highest number of child offenders (**four**), while Pakistan killed **one**. Iraq was a new entry on the list of top executioners after a dramatic escalation in deaths, with at least 65 hangings.

"The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment," said Ms Khan. "It must be abolished and a universal moratorium will be an important step forward."

**More info on the Annual Death Penalty Statistics:**

Facts and figures

Sentences and executions

List of abolitionist and retentionist countries

Ratifications

Executions fall as pressure grows for universal moratorium (press release)

Stop the state killing (essay, PDF)

Caption: Third World Congress against the Death Penalty march, Paris