

Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
President of the  
Council of Ministers of the European Union

22 May 2007  
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Dear Dr Steinmeier,

**Subject : ASEM meeting 28-29 May 2007**

ASEM has become a useful framework for Asian and European countries to discuss a range of issues, including human rights. In view of your co-chairmanship of the forthcoming ASEM Foreign Ministers meeting in Hamburg, Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to one particular priority for you to discuss with your counterparts: the death penalty in Asia.

As you are aware, Amnesty International actively promotes the abolition of the death penalty worldwide and welcomes the EU's determination to increase the number of abolitionist countries. To move towards a world where human rights are protected and respected, those countries that still execute must abolish the death penalty. On 27 April 2007, Amnesty International published its latest global death penalty statistics. In 2006, an estimated 1,591 people were executed throughout the world and 3,861 people were sentenced to death. Despite these statistics, the trend towards abolition is clear: the number of countries carrying out executions halved in the last 20 years and has dropped for the fourth consecutive year.

Regrettably Asia is bucking this worldwide trend with an alarming number of known executions. Secrecy regarding government practices means that the actual number of executions may be much higher. In 2006, 16 countries in the Asia Pacific region still retain the death penalty and 25 countries have now abolished the death penalty either in law or in practice. Asia remains the continent with the highest number of executions. The number of capital crimes in certain countries is high and issues such as the "war on terror" and drugs tend to perpetuate the use of the death penalty regionally. Additional concerns include unfair trials, forced confessions, mandatory use of the death penalty, executions of juveniles, elderly or mentally ill persons, organ transplants from executed criminals, its use against those convicted of non-violent crimes such as economic crimes, and its discriminatory use against disadvantaged groups including ethnic minorities and the poor.

Amnesty International recorded the fact that several Asian countries, including many of those within ASEM, passed death sentences and carried out executions in 2006 despite appeals for clemency from all around the world. After fifteen months Indonesia resumed executions and executed three people in September 2006, and executions also took place in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Bangladesh, China, North Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia and Pakistan. Singapore has one of the highest rates of execution per capita of any country in the world. Amnesty International estimates that at least 1,010 people were executed in China in 2006, although some credible sources suggest the annual figure to be far higher at around 8,000 executions. In recommencing executions in December 2006, Japan ended a 15 month unofficial moratorium, which is a very concerning development. Latest figures are confirming these worrying trends across Asia: Indonesia had an execution on 28 April 2007 and there are 90 persons on death row; Singapore two on 26 January 2007; and Japan carried out four executions on 25 December 2006 and three on 27 April 2007, and at least hundred persons are currently on death row, which may constitute a possible reason for more executions.

On the positive side, on 10 October 2006, on the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> World Day against the Death Penalty, a growing and dynamic network was launched to campaign for abolition within the Asia Pacific region. The Anti Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) has 33 members made up of lawyers, parliamentarians, abolitionists and organisations mainly from the Asia-Pacific Region. Progress was also seen last year when South Korea considered a parliamentary bill to abolish the death penalty. On 1 January 2007, China's Supreme People's Court formally resumed its role of approving all death sentences passed in China and it will hopefully result in a significant reduction in the number of death sentences being passed. The Philippines abolished the death penalty for all crimes in June 2006 and following the technical assistance provided by the EU to the government of the Philippines in its campaign to achieve this result, Amnesty International calls on the EU representatives at the ASEM meeting to use this form of assistance again to build on this leadership in Asia.

Amnesty International would strongly encourage you to use the opportunity of the forthcoming ASEM meeting to raise these concerns with your Asian counterparts and to bring about some practical steps to encourage the abolition of the death penalty in the Asia Pacific. In previous letters on a death penalty moratorium in the United Nations, Amnesty International outlined a constructive and effective strategy for introducing a resolution on this issue. The struggle against the death penalty must be a global effort and not perceived as a 'western' or European issue only. Amnesty International believes that ASEM, as a regional forum, represents an opportunity to move forward toward building a coalition of key champion states in every region of the world, to make abolition more acceptable to those countries which may be less attracted to an initiative championed only by one regional organisation.

We would welcome any feedback on these measures and discussions, and are happy to provide any further information if necessary.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Dick Oosting  
Director  
Amnesty International EU Office



Barbara Lochbihler  
Secretary General  
Amnesty International Germany

Cc:  
Javier Solana, High Representative for CFSP  
Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner

Annex :Annual Report on Death Penalty Statistics in 2006, Amnesty International Report, 27 April 2007.