

# Amnesty report: Executions worldwide at highest level in 25 years

By Thomas Gaist  
7 April 2016

Governments worldwide executed at least 1,634 prisoners in 2015, an increase of more than 50 percent above official figures for 2014, Amnesty International reported Wednesday.

After bottoming out during the 1990s and early 2000s, the number of executions registered by Amnesty has steadily risen since the mid-2000s.

In a trend described as “profoundly disturbing” by Amnesty secretary general Salil Shetty, the number of executions has spiked in the past few years, including a sharp increase in 2015.

“Not for the last 25 years have so many people been put to death by states around the world,” Shetty said. “In 2015 governments continued relentlessly to deprive people of their lives on the false premise that the death penalty would make us safer.”

China executed the highest number, killing more than 1,000 prisoners, followed by Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

The United States ranked fifth worldwide, with 28 executions in 2015. American prisons “continued to use the death penalty in ways that contravene international law and standards, including on people with mental and intellectual disabilities,” Amnesty found.

Egypt’s US-backed military dictatorship also sharply increased its execution rate, joining Iraq, Somalia, Indonesia, and Chad to round out the top 10 executioner states.

The most common methods of execution were hanging, lethal injection, shooting and beheading.

In the United States, all of the death sentences were by lethal injection, a method whose reputation as being more humane has been increasingly discredited amidst a growing number of high-profile botched executions resulting in extreme suffering, easily comparable to

medieval forms of torture.

Many US states are considering revival of the firing squad (Oklahoma and Mississippi), electric chair (Virginia) and gas chamber (Wyoming) in response to costs and other difficulties associated with obtaining the “cocktail” of deadly chemicals used for the procedure.

At least nine of the victims documented by Amnesty worldwide were under the age of 18 at the time of their execution.

Leading US client states, including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Bahrain and Iraq, continue to execute prisoners for a range of non-capital offenses and pre-modern “crimes,” including drug offenses, adultery, petty crimes, and religious blasphemy, and frequently carry out executions based on “confessions” given under torture and after unfair trials.

More than 20,000 prisoners are currently awaiting execution globally. The Pakistani state, whose military and intelligence services have maintained close ties to Washington for decades, is currently engaged in a “state-sanctioned killing spree,” Amnesty finds.

Despite the rising number of executions, the report noted a countervailing trend of governments abandoning the barbaric practice. The report noted that a growing list of countries have abolished the death penalty including Congo-Brazzaville, Fiji, Madagascar, and Suriname. Altogether more than 100 states have formally abolished capital punishment.

Another subset of states maintain death penalty laws but have not carried out any killings within 10 years, termed by Amnesty “abolitionist in practice,” including Russia, Mongolia, Algeria, Myanmar, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Kenya, and Tanzania.

The Amnesty data makes clear that the escalated pace of official state killings has been spearheaded by US

imperialism, its ultra-reactionary regional allies in Riyadh and Islamabad, and the Stalinist ruling elite in Beijing.

Taken as a whole, the growth of state killing is ultimately an expression of the immense social antagonisms building up within world society. All major governments are implementing increasingly violent domestic and foreign policies in response to the crisis and breakdown of world capitalism and the reemergence of mass struggles in the international working class.

The widespread application of the death penalty by the Chinese government, typically presented in pro-imperialist propaganda as evidence of Beijing's exceptional status as a "human rights abuser," is, in reality, a product of capitalist social relations in China. It is an outgrowth of the determination of the billionaire capitalists running the Chinese "Communist" Party to maintain their grip over an increasingly restive labor force of hundreds of millions of Chinese workers.

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