Souleymane Sow was among those inspired to continue campaigning after visiting Amnesty International's office in Dakar. He now trains lawyers and advocates to work on human rights with the help of Amnesty's experts.

"I visited the office in Dakar. I could see that change is possible. Most of all, it inspired us to continue campaigning."

Amnesty monitors its use by all states to expose and hold to account governments that continue to use the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

For 40 years, Amnesty has been campaigning to abolish the death penalty around the world.

Reasons to abolish the death penalty

• It is irreversible and mistakes happen.
• It is discriminatory.
• It does not deter crime.
• It is ineffective in reducing crime.
• It is Inadequate in some situations.

International standards on the death penalty

Amnesty holds that the death penalty breaches human rights, in particular the right to life and the right to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Both rights are protected at the international level by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The use of the death penalty for crimes committed by people younger than 18 is prohibited under international law. The right to life is Absolute. The only circumstances in which the death penalty may be considered are those provided for in Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The second Optional Protocol to this covenant sets out a moratorium on the death penalty.

Executions per year

In 2019, Amnesty International recorded at least 2,307 death sentences in 56 countries, a slight decrease from 2018 (at least 2,530). This represents the lowest number of death sentences recorded in a decade.

Amnesty International recorded at least 657 executions in 20 countries in 2018, down by 5% from 2017 (at least 700). This figure represents the lowest number of executions that Amnesty International has recorded in a year.

Executions per year

In 2019, China accounted for 75% of executions, followed by Pakistan with 10%, Iran with 6% and Saudi Arabia with 5%.

Juvenile Executions

Since 1990 Amnesty International has documented at least 149 executions of child offenders in 10 countries: China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Sudan, the USA and Yemen.

Overview

Although international law says that the use of the death penalty must be restricted to the most serious crimes, there are still too many countries using it, especially in the Middle East and North Africa.

The death penalty is a violation of a fundamental human right. It is a violation of the right to life and the right to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Both rights are protected at the international level by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Inadequate legal representation. In some countries death sentences are imposed as the mandatory punishment for drug-related offences.

Many death sentences are imposed as the mandatory punishment for drug-related offences. In many cases recorded by Amnesty International, people were transferred to criminal courts to achieve these death sentences.

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