[1] ABOLITIONIST AND NON-ABOLITIONIST COUNTRIES

More than two thirds of the world’s countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

- 97 countries have abolished the death penalty for all crimes;
- 8 countries have abolished the death penalty for all crimes except extraordinary crimes such as those committed in times of war;
- 34 countries are de facto abolitionists: the death penalty is still provided for in legislation but no executions have been carried out for at least ten years.

Therefore, 139 countries have abolished the death penalty de jure or de facto. However, 58 countries and territories still uphold the death penalty and use this punishment. That said, ‘only’ 23 countries carried out executions in 2010.

[2] PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS WORLD ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

Since 1990 more than 57 countries have abolished capital punishment for all crimes: in Africa (recent examples include Gabon, Togo and Burundi); the Americas (Mexico, Paraguay and Argentina); Asia-Pacific (the Philippines and Samoa, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan); and Europe and the South Caucasus (Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Cyprus).

In the Americas, the USA was the only nation to carry out executions in 2010 and one State, Illinois abolished the death penalty in March 2011. In sub-Saharan Africa four countries executed prisoners: Botswana Equatorial Guinea, Somalia and Sudan. In Asia, there were no executions in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Mongolia and Pakistan for the second year in a row. In Europe, only Belarus continues to use the death penalty and executed 2 prisoners in March 2010.

[3] DEATH SENTENCES AND EXECUTIONS

During 2010 at least 527 prisoners (excluding China) were executed in 18 countries and at least 2024 people were sentenced to death in 67 countries. These figures only reflect cases of which Amnesty International was aware and the actual number is certainly higher.

In 2010, the nations with the highest number of executions were China, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

[China and North Korea]

Amnesty International has not given any estimates on the number or executions in China. Official national statistics on the application of capital punishment remain a state secret. It is believed that thousands of executions have taken place in 2010. However, even under these conditions, a positive development is underway: in February 2011, the National People’s Congress of China passed a law reducing the number of offenses punishable by death from 68 to 55.

Amnesty International received reports that at least 60 people were executed in North Korea in 2010. Executions are usually carried out in secret, but an increased number of executions were held in public to serve as an example to others.
[Iran, Saudi Arabia and Yemen]

According to the information gathered by Amnesty International, Iran executed at least 252 individuals in 2010. According to Iran Human Rights’ annual report, at least 546 people were executed in 2010, 312 of which have been confirmed officially or unofficially by the Iranian authorities.

In Yemen, at least 53 people were executed in 2010. Saudi Arabia executed at least 27 individuals compared to 69 in 2009 and 102 in 2008.

[United States of America]

In the United States 12 States carried out executions in 2010, taking the lives of 46 people (compared to 52 in 2009), therefore bringing the total number of people executed since capital punishment was reinstated in 1977 to 1,234.

In March 2010, Illinois became the 16th State to abolish the death penalty, closely following New Mexico in 2009, and New Jersey in 2007.

[4] METHODS OF EXECUTION

Since 2000 the following methods have been used:
- decapitation (Saudi Arabia);
- electrocution (United States);
- hanging (Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Pakistan, Singapore, …);
- lethal injection (China, United States, Guatemala, Thailand);
- execution by firing squad (Belarus, China, Somalia, Vietnam, …);
- stoning (Afghanistan, Iran).


International human rights treaties forbid the use of capital punishment for all those under 18 at the time of the crime of which they are accused. This ban is inscribed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The countries which still uphold capital punishment for some crimes are all party to at least one of these treaties which expressly forbid the execution of juvenile offenders. However, a small number of countries continue to execute juvenile offenders.

In 2010, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen imposed death sentences on individuals that were below 18 years of age when the crimes were committed. In Nigeria, although Nigeria’s Child Rights Act prohibits the death penalty, more than 20 prisoners currently on death row were sentenced for offences committed when they were below the age of 18.

[6] INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS SUPPORTING ABOLITION

One important aspect of the progress which has been made recently is the adoption of international treaties through which States pledge not to use capital punishment:

- Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which aims to abolish the death penalty and has been ratified by 73 States. 3 other countries have signed the Protocol, thereby signalling their intention to become party to this instrument at a later date;
- Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights on the abolition of the death penalty, has been ratified by 11 States on the American continent;
- Protocol No. 6 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Human Rights Convention) on the abolition of the death penalty, which has been ratified by 46 European States and signed by one other;
- Protocol No. 13 to the European Human Rights Convention concerning the abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances, which as been ratified by 42 European States and signed by 3 others.

The object of Protocol No. 6 to the European Human Rights Convention is the abolition of the death penalty in peace time whereas Protocol No. 13 provides for the total abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances. The two other protocols provide for the total abolition of capital punishment but gives States the possibility, if they so wish, to use it exceptionally in times of war.

[Source : Amnesty international http://www.amnesty.org/fr/death-penalty]