

Beat: Politics

Pakistan's new gov;t ends moratorium on executions

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USPA News - Pakistan's five-year-old moratorium on executions expired last week and the country's new government has no plans to renew it, meaning more than 8,000 prisoners on death row could now be facing imminent execution, officials said on Friday. A presidential order was issued in 2008 and imposed a moratorium on the implementation of capital punishment, which is carried out by hanging in Pakistan.

It is believed the new government, led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, is planning to move rapidly to resume executions to crack down on violence. Pakistan has more than 8,000 prisoners on death row, most of whom have exhausted the appeals process, and could now be facing execution. "The sheer number of people at risk makes the new government policy of turning back to the death penalty even more horrendous," said Polly Truscott of Amnesty International. Truscott described the decision not to renew the moratorium, which expired on Sunday, as a "shocking and retrograde" step that puts thousands of people's lives at risk. Media reports have indicated that Pakistan's new government intends to implement a new policy to execute all death row prisoners, except those whose mercy petitions have reasons to be considered. "As long as the death penalty is in place, the risk of executing innocent people can never be eliminated. The systemic fair trials violations in Pakistan not only exacerbate this risk, but also puts Pakistan in breach of its international obligations," Truscott said, urging Pakistan to immediately extend the moratorium order. The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) on Friday also called on the Pakistani government to renew the moratorium, saying the resumption of executions would be a "major step backwards" for the country's human rights situation. "The prospect of lifting the moratorium is all the more alarming given the extraordinarily high number of people on death row," said ICJ Legal Advisor Sheila Varadan. Despite the moratorium on executions, Pakistani soldier Mohammad Hussain was executed in November 2012 after he had been sentenced to death by a military court in 2008 for killing a superior over a personal dispute. It was the country's first execution since November 2008, and officials said last year the moratorium did not prevent executions ordered by military courts. More than 150 of the 192 United Nations members States have either abolished the death penalty or imposed a moratorium on its practice.

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