

Pakistan: Two executions for non-terrorism offences a ‘disturbing and dangerous’ escalation

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The execution of two men convicted of non-terrorism-related offences marks a disturbing and dangerous escalation in Pakistan’s use of the death penalty since a moratorium was lifted in December last year, Amnesty International said.

Muhammad Riaz and Muhammad Fiaz were hanged this morning in Mirpur Central Prison in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir region. The two men were convicted of murdering the son of the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association in 2004 and given death sentences in 2005.

Pakistan lifted a moratorium on executions on 17 December 2014 – in the wake of the Peshawar school massacre – on prisoners convicted of “terrorism” offences in Anti-Terror Courts. However, today’s hangings mark the first executions of prisoners convicted by ordinary courts.

Today’s executions mark a disturbing and dangerous escalation of Pakistan’s use of the death penalty since a moratorium was lifted. The government has apparently gone against its own stated policy of only executing those convicted on terrorism charges.

“Twenty-four people have now been put to death by the government since December last year. This spate of killings must end immediately – the government should re-impose a moratorium on the death penalty with a view to its eventual abolition. Pakistan has one of the world’s largest death row populations, and more than 8,000 people’s lives are at risk.”

Muhammad Riaz and Muhammad Fiaz received an unfair trial. Their appeal before the Supreme Court in was dismissed in 2006 on a technical ground as no lawyer was willing to represent or appear on behalf of the two men, for fear of being disbarred or a backlash from the Supreme Court Bar Association.

“Pakistan’s judicial system is seriously flawed. Frequent use of torture to extract ‘confessions’, a lack of access to legal counsel, and long periods of detention without charge are just some of our concerns. The death penalty is always a human rights violation, but the serious fair trial concerns in Pakistan makes its use even more troubling,” said David Griffiths.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and under any circumstances, regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to carry out the execution. The organization considers the death penalty a violation of the right to life as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.