Why is it important for Suriname to accede to the United Nations Protocol to abolish the death penalty?

Suriname is an abolitionist country. On 3 March, 2015, in the framework of the discussions regarding the adoption of the new Criminal Code, the Parliament decided on the abolition of the death penalty and a corresponding increase of the maximum sentence of imprisonment to 30 years. Nevertheless, the Military Penal Code still includes the death penalty.

The last execution took place on 13 March, 1982 and was carried out under a decree introduced two days earlier that empowered military courts to sentence Sergeant Major Wilfred Hawker to death on charges of “attempting to overthrow the military government”. This execution is not considered a judicial execution by present Surinamese authorities who report 1927 as the year of the last known execution.

Acceding to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is extremely important, both nationally and locally, because it is the only text with worldwide reach aiming to abolish the death penalty.

Accession to the Protocol is a very symbolic act, reflecting the universal trend towards abolition of capital punishment, considered to be cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. It is essential that the world’s abolitionist countries ratify this Protocol.

What are the international commitments already taken by Suriname to accede to the Protocol?

Suriname has demonstrated its commitment as regards abolition of the death penalty by voting in favor of the UN General Assembly resolution for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2014 and 2016. It abstained in 2012, 2010 and 2008 and voted no in 2007.
Suriname participated to the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council in 2011 and 2016 and accepted the recommendations regarding the ratification of the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR. Suriname indicated in its 2016 report that “the removal of the death penalty from the Penal Code was a first step towards arriving at the ratification of the Second Optional Protocol” and set the timeline for the removal of the death penalty from the Military Penal Code for December 2016.

During the Human Rights Committee review in October 2015, the Committee encouraged Suriname “to consider acceding to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty”.

What are the steps to be taken as regards internal law?

According to Article 7.3 of the Protocol, it “shall be open to accession by any State that has ratified the Covenant or acceded to it.” Suriname acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1973 and it is therefore competent to accede to this Protocol.

Among the obligations incumbent upon Suriname following accession to the Protocol are the prohibition of executions and withdrawal of the death penalty from internal criminal law. These two obligations have already been fulfilled by Suriname in practice. It may therefore now unreservedly accede to the Protocol.

What are the legal obstacles to accession?

There is no legal obstacle as the death penalty has been abolished in the new Criminal Code of Suriname.

We therefore strongly encourage Suriname to accede to this Protocol as soon as possible.

How can accession to the Protocol be applied?

The Protocol shall come into force three months after the instruments of accession have been deposited with the UN Secretary General (Article 8.2 of the Protocol).

According to Article 3 of the Protocol, Suriname must submit reports to the Human Rights Committee covering the measures it has adopted to give effect to the Protocol.

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty also encourages Suriname to ratify the Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights to abolish the death penalty.

For more information, contact the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty and visit its website: http://www.worldcoalition.org/protocol