

Vietnam considers reduction in scope of death penalty

Category : Asia - Pacific

Published by [Aur lie Pla ais](#) on 2009/2/9

Vietnamese Justice Minister Ha Hung Cuong (photo) has introduced a Criminal Code revision bill providing for a reduction in the number of capital offences. This was one of the World Coalition's demands on World Day Against the Death Penalty, which focused on Asia on October 10, 2008.

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In Vietnam, 29 offences are punishable by death, including non-violent crimes such as drug trafficking or embezzlement. The proposed revision of the Criminal code would lower this number to 12, changing the status of offences such as corruption, fraud, hijacking, rape, drug manufacturing and trafficking, and food and medicines counterfeiting.

The bill was introduced in November 2008 and the National Assembly Standing Committee started examining it at the end of December. It has yet to make a decision and the issue has sparked a debate.

National Assembly Vice-Chairman Huynh Ngoc Son said that although the number of offences that carry the death penalty should be reduced, the move needs to be carefully considered and serious crimes against national security should remain punishable by death.

Le Thi Thu Ba, who heads the National Assembly's Justice Committee, expressed reservations about the plan and insisted that corruption and drug trafficking must remain capital offences.

Long-term trend

The proposed legislation follows a long-term trend as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam reduced the number of crimes punishable by death from 44 to 29 in an earlier revision of the Criminal code in July 1999.

In February 2006, the ministry of public security also offered to reduce the number of capital offences “in keeping with a general, global trend”.

In December 2007 and 2008, Vietnam abstained from the vote on the [United Nations General Assembly's resolution calling for a moratorium on the death penalty](#). It did not sign the dissociation letter put forward by Singapore.

As early as 1982, Vietnam ratified the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), which states: “In countries which have not abolished the death penalty, sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes”. However, Vietnam has not ratified the [Second Optional Protocol aiming at the abolition of the death penalty](#).