

SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS ON STATES TO ABOLISH DEATH PENALTY

New York, Jul 3 2012 11:05AM

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on Member States which use the death penalty to abolish this practice, stressing that the right to life lies at the heart of international human rights law.

"The taking of life is too absolute, too irreversible, for one human being to inflict on another, even when backed by legal process," Mr. Ban told a panel organized by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on 'Moving away from the death penalty - Lessons from national experiences' at UN Headquarters in New York.

"Where the death penalty persists, conditions for those awaiting execution are often horrifying, leading to aggravated suffering," he added.

In 2007, the General Assembly endorsed a call for a worldwide moratorium of the death penalty. Since then, the practice has been abolished by countries like Argentina, Burundi, Gabon, Latvia, Togo and Uzbekistan. More than 150 States have either abolished the death penalty or do not practice it.

However, Mr. Ban noted, the death penalty is still used for a wide range of crimes in various countries. In particular, he expressed concern that 32 States retain the death penalty for drug-related offences, and its use on juvenile offenders.

"I am also very concerned that some countries still allow juvenile offenders under the age of 18 at the time of the alleged offence to be sentenced to death and executed," Mr. Ban said. "The call by the General Assembly for a global moratorium is a crucial stepping stone in the natural progression towards a full worldwide abolition of the death penalty."

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, has also repeatedly called for the universal abolition of the death penalty, citing a host of reasons ranging from the fundamental right to life to the possibility of judicial errors.

In addition, Mr. Ban's *Guidance Note of 2008 on the UN Approach to Rule of Law Assistance* stated that the UN will not establish or directly participate in any tribunal that allows for capital punishment.

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