

Zimbabwe: Historic moment as President signs into law a bill to abolish death penalty for ordinary circumstances

Reacting to news that Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa has signed the Death Penalty Abolition Bill into law today, Amnesty International Zimbabwe's Executive Director, Lucia Masuka, said:

“Amnesty International applauds Zimbabwe's decision to abolish the death penalty for all crimes, but regrets the possibility of its reinstatement during state of emergency under the Defence Act.

“This is not just great progress for Zimbabwe, it is also a beacon of hope for the abolitionist movement in the region, and a major milestone in the global collective pursuit for an end to this ultimate cruel, inhuman, and degrading punishment.

“By enacting the Death Penalty Abolition Bill, Zimbabwe has taken a major step towards aligning its laws with international human rights standards. Its actions also send a clear message about the fundamental importance of protecting the right to life and human dignity.

“We urge the authorities to now swiftly move to a full abolition of the death penalty by removing the clause included in the amendments to the Bill allowing for the use of the death penalty for the duration of any state of public emergency.”

Background

Before today's signing of the Bill, Zimbabwe's Criminal Law Code, Criminal Procedure Law and the Defence Act allowed the death penalty in cases of murder committed under aggravating circumstances. A new provision in the Defence Act introduced by the Death Penalty Abolition Act, 2024 allows for the reinstatement of the death penalty when any state of public emergency is declared in terms of section 113 of the Constitution.

At least 59 people were known to be under sentence of death in Zimbabwe as of the end of 2023.

As of today, 24 African countries have fully abolished the death penalty, including four – Chad, Central African Republic, Sierra Leone and Zambia – which did so since 2020. Globally, 113 countries are fully abolitionist.