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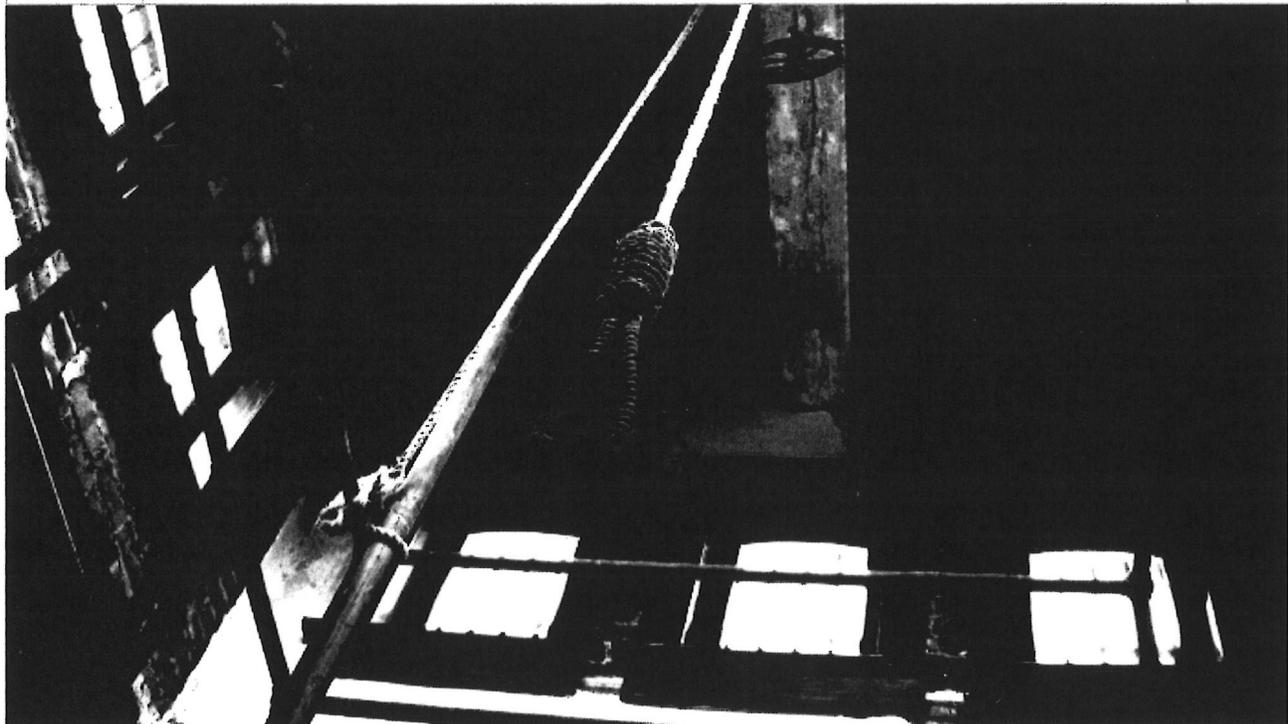
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UN Vote Against Death Penalty Highlights Global Abolitionist Trend — and Leaves the US Stranded

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By Samuel Oakford (/contributor/samuel-oakford)

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The UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to adopt a resolution urging a global moratorium on the death penalty, with an eye towards abolition, on Thursday — and left the US further marooned among noted human rights abusers in its support of capital punishment.

It was the fifth time since 2007 that the General Assembly voted on such a text, and this year's version saw record support. While 117 member states voted in favor of the resolution, the US was among 38 that opposed it, and 34 countries abstained, offering no vote at all. In 2012, a similar text received (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43568#.VJNn8AANg>) 111 "yes" votes.

Though capital punishment remains legal under international law, Thursday's resolution was the latest to call for a self-enforced moratorium on its use — and, when it is employed, only levied in highly circumscribed conditions. The non-binding text urged countries not to execute minors, pregnant women, or people with mental or intellectual handicaps.

The resolution also said states should comply with stipulations concerning foreign nationals under arrest and provide them access to their country's consular services as laid out in the 1963 Convention on Consular Relations. The US has been criticized by the UN and International Court of Justice for non-compliance in the cases of 51 Mexican citizens who were arrested and not notified of their rights.

Pakistan lifting the death penalty moratorium for 'terrorists' might backfire. Read more here. (<https://news.vice.com/article/pakistan-lifting-the-death-penalty-moratorium-for-terrorists-might-backfire>)

Two men who were eventually put to death this year — Edgar Tamayo and Ramiro Hernandez Llanas — were among those not informed they could access consular services. In April, the UN's human rights division accused the US of violating international law by putting Hernandez Llanas to death.

Despite falling to four-decade lows, the use of the death penalty in the US has come under increased scrutiny this year after a series of botched executions and exonerations of death row inmates. In a dark twist, the US vote was not registered correctly on Thursday afternoon and had to be re-imputed as no.

Several countries — including Niger and Suriname — that had abstained in the past switched to a "yes" vote. Bahrain, Myanmar, Tonga, and Uganda abstained rather than voting "no," as they had in the past.

'We cannot deny that, despite some recent setbacks, the trend towards universal abolition is irreversible.'

"These resolutions are not binding but it does show the overall readiness of the General Assembly," Chiara Sangiorgio, death penalty expert at Amnesty International told VICE News. "The US and the other no votes are even more isolated."

While still in the UN's human rights focused third committee, the US had supported a Saudi Arabian amendment to the resolution that called for recognition of "the sovereign right" of countries to determine "legal penalties" — effectively undermining the spirit of the resolution. That amendment, however, was voted down.

China also was opposed to the resolution, in line with its stances in the past. Untold thousands are estimated to be executed in the country every year, though officials have shown a recent willingness to seek other punishments for offenders.

The vote came a week after human rights groups petitioned the UN to cease its funding of anti-narcotic efforts in Iran, where drug offenders make up the bulk of those sentenced to death. The UN estimates as many as 625 people have been killed in Iran this year. Iran opposed the resolution.

Maybe it's time to stop letting states experiment with secret death drugs. Read more here. (<https://news.vice.com/article/maybe-its-time-to-stop-letting-states-experiment-with-secret-death-drugs>)

The vote came nearly 25 years to the day after the General Assembly adopted a protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that laid out steps to abolish the death penalty.

"If we think that when this protocol was adopted in 1989, only half of the countries that today voted in favor of the resolution were abolitionist, we cannot deny that, despite some recent setbacks, the trend towards universal abolition is irreversible," Maria Donatelli, executive director of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, told VICE News.

In 1945, the year the UN was founded, eight of its then 51 member states had officially abolished the death penalty. Today about half - 95 of 193 countries - have completely abolished it, while 137 have done so in "law or practice."

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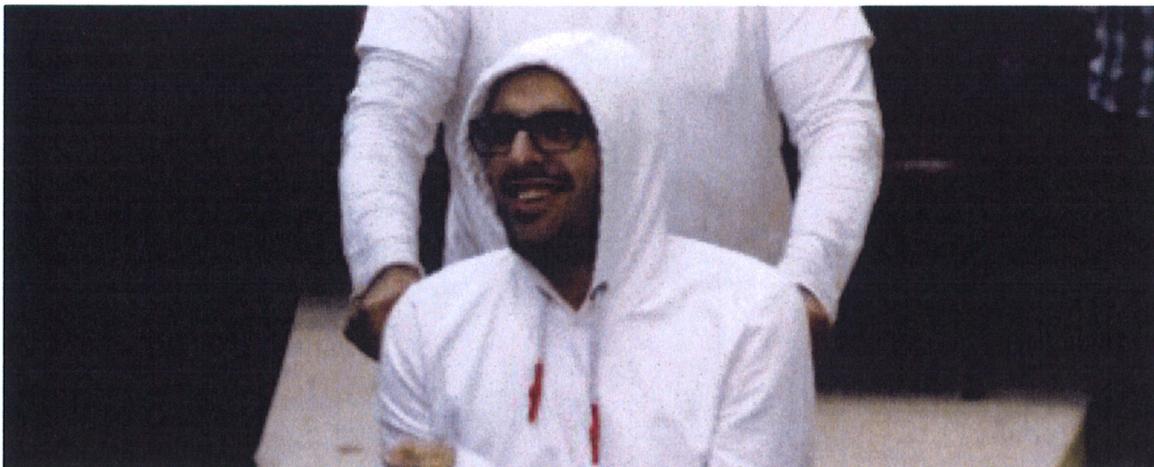
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