

# UN vote shows growing support of death penalty ban

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UNITED NATIONS -- The U.N. General Assembly's human rights committee voted Thursday for the second year in a row to urge a global moratorium on the death penalty.

The United States sided with countries such as Iran, China and Syria in opposing the resolution.

The 105-48 vote marked a slight change from the 104-54 vote in the full General Assembly last December. About 30 nations abstained.

Supporters of the ban argue there's no conclusive evidence that the death penalty serves as a meaningful deterrent to crime and the risk of injustice is too high. Nations opposing the ban say the death penalty is effective in discouraging most serious crimes and remains legal under international law.

The vote in the human rights committee, though it includes all U.N. members, is not the final vote. Next month, the General Assembly will hold a final vote on the measure and the committee's vote is almost certain to be closely replicated there.

Though not legally binding, the voting does carry moral weight coming from the 192-nation world body that serves as a unique forum for debate and barometer of international opinion.

Amnesty International, which has been campaigning for the resolution, noted rising acceptance of a moratorium. In the 1990s, it was voted on twice in the General Assembly and failed.

On Thursday, the committee vote picked up one more nation than last year and six fewer opponents.

As of November, some 137 nations had abolished the death penalty in law or practice, compared with about 80 in 1988, according to Amnesty International figures.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has been encouraged by the trend in many areas of the world toward ultimately abolishing the death penalty, U.N. spokeswoman Michele Montas said.

Last year there were at least 1,252 people put to death by 24 nations and 3,347 others sentenced to death in 51 countries, according to Amnesty International.

Terlingen urged nations such as Japan that increased the rate of executions in the past year to "take immediate steps to implement the resolution."

The resolution has been spearheaded by Italy and supported by the Vatican, a leading opponent of capital punishment. Also leading the campaign has been the European Union, which requires its 27 members to outlaw capital punishment.