Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on executions in Nigeria

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission issued the following statement today:

"I deeply regret the execution of four prisoners yesterday in Edo State, Nigeria. This represents a break of a 7-year moratorium on the death penalty and is a most regrettable setback to Nigeria's human rights record. It goes against the commitment repeatedly made by the Nigerian authorities, most recently at the EU-Nigeria human rights dialogue held in Abuja in March and at the annual Ministerial meeting in Brussels in May 2013, to maintain the de facto moratorium on executions.

I recognise the serious nature of the crimes involved and express my sympathy to the families and friends of the victims. However, executions can never be justified. I reiterate the longstanding opposition of the European Union to the use of the death penalty and recall the importance of UN Resolutions calling for the establishment of a moratorium as a first step towards abolishing the death penalty.

I urge the Nigerian authorities to refrain from further executions and urge State Governors not to sign execution warrants. I call on Nigeria to join the strong abolitionist trend which prevails on the African continent. As a first step towards abolition, I strongly encourage Nigeria to amend its legislation in order to end the use of the death penalty as sole sentence for a number of crimes."

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