

South Korean church leads campaign to abolish death penalty

SEOUL, South Korea - An organization representing the Catholic Church joined a Seoul street campaign seeking to abolish of capital punishment in South Korea.

Members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea's Subcommittee for the Abolition of Capital Punishment helped organize a Nov. 30 event with Amnesty International and other human rights groups to mark the International Day, Cities for Life/Cities against the Death Penalty.

Campaign participants joined in street performances and sent postcards to lawmakers urging them to abolish the death penalty, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News.

South Korea stopped implementing the death penalty in December 2007, but the country's capital punishment law remains on the books.

At a special Mass at Hyehwa-dong Church in a busy part of the city, Bishop Matthias Ri Jong-hoon of Suwon, president of the bishops' Committee for Justice and Peace, warned that demand for capital punishment would continue as long as the laws remained in force.

"Now and forever, executions must stop," Bishop Ri said.

"Demand for executions will continue whenever brutal crimes happen. The laws should be abolished as soon as possible," he urged.

After the Mass, more than 200 faithful, including about 20 priests, marched to join the main street campaign.

Three bills seeking the abolition of the death penalty have been introduced in the Korean National Assembly.

However, the bills have not been discussed in the legislative committees, which must consider them before a vote by the full assembly.

Lee Jeong-im, a college student who sent a postcard to lawmakers, said the assembly had a duty to act.

“It is a dereliction of duty if lawmakers fail to discuss the submitted bills,” he said.