Dear Minister

Executions by lethal injection in Vietnam

The British Medical Association (BMA), Danish Medical Association (DMA) and German Medical Association (BÄK) are writing to express grave concern at reports that executions by lethal injection were due to recommence in Vietnam from 27 June, using unspecified drugs sourced by the Ministry of Health. We are particularly concerned that executions may involve medical personnel, whose participation would be contrary to internationally-accepted ethical principles, as articulated by the World Medical Association (WMA) Resolution on Physician Involvement in Capital Punishment. This states that it is unethical for doctors to participate in capital punishment in any way, or during any step of the execution process. In October 2012, the WMA reaffirmed this position and resolved that physicians will not facilitate the importation or prescription of drugs for execution. The Ministry of Health’s reported role in researching and sourcing lethal drugs seems to indicate that doctors have had at least some involvement in facilitating the recommencement of executions in Vietnam.

The BMA, DMA and BÄK are also concerned about the use of a three-drug protocol, where the particular drugs to be used are not set down in Vietnam law. As you may be aware, the use of three drugs is controversial because of the potential for executions resulting in excruciating pain for the prisoner if insufficient anaesthetic is administered. In the United States of America, where the three-drug protocol was originally pioneered, the Supreme Court has declared that the punishment would amount to medical torture if the first drug did not fully anaesthetise the prisoner.

We are sure that, as a medical doctor, you would not wish to see medicines or medical personnel used in executions. The BMA, DMA and BÄK urge you to voice concerns about the three-drug protocol with your government colleagues and to ensure that the Ministry of Health ceases its involvement, as well as the involvement of all medical personnel, in executions.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely

Prof Vivienne Nathanson
Director of Professional Activities
BMA

Mads Koch Hansen
President
DMA

Prof Dr Frank Ulrich Montgomery
President
BÄK