The Daily Telegraph

A record 110 countries on Monday backed a resolution voted every two years at a UN General Assembly committee calling for the abolition of the death penalty.

The vote tears apart traditional alliances at the United Nations. The United States, Japan, China, Iran, India, North Korea, Syria and Zimbabwe were among 39 countries to oppose the non-binding resolution in the assembly's rights committee. Thirty-six countries abstained.

Israel voted against its strong US-ally to join European Union nations, Australia, Brazil and South Africa among major countries backing the motion.

Norway, which played a leading role campaigning for the resolution, said on its Twitter account that the increased support was a "great result".

At the last vote in 2010, 107 countries backed the resolution.

France's new Socialist government has launched a campaign with other abolitionist states to get the full General Assembly to pass a resolution in December calling for a death penalty moratorium. Though such a resolution would be non-binding, diplomats say it would increase moral pressure.
Related Articles

A world congress against the death penalty is to be held in Madrid in June.

According to the United Nations, about 150 countries have either abolished capital punishment or have instituted a moratorium.

Amnesty International says that China executed "thousands" of prisoners in 2011 though exact figures are hard to determine. It says that other countries put to death at least 680 people with Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia major users of capital punishment.

Amnesty says that progress is slowly being made however. Even in the United States, Illinois last year became the 16th US state to abolish the death penalty.