



Geneva, 7 March 2014

## **Statement by the International Commission against the Death Penalty: Events on abolition of the death penalty at the 25<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva**

**International Commission  
against the Death Penalty**

**President**

Federico Mayor

**Members**

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On 3 March 2014, the Permanent Missions of Argentina, Norway, Mexico, Switzerland, Algeria, Italy and France and the International Commission Against the Death Penalty (ICDP) organized a high-level event at the sidelines of the High-Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva to discuss “International Actions with the view to abolishing the death penalty”. The discussion panel included the President of the Swiss Confederation and Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs Mr. Didier Burkhalter, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Argentina Mr. Héctor Timerman, the Secretary of State of Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy Mr. Benedetto Della Vedova, the Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN in Geneva Ambassador Steffen Kongstad, the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN in Geneva Ambassador Jorge Lomónaco Tonda, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights of the UN Mr. Ivan Šimonović, ICDP Commissioner Ms. Ruth Dreifuss and the Executive Director of Penal Reform International (PRI) Ms. Alison Hannah. The Permanent Representative of Argentina to the UN in Geneva Ambassador Alberto Pedro D’Alotto moderated the panel.

The panelists discussed how the process of abolition developed in their respective countries and how the governments of Argentina and Mexico have assisted their nationals who have been sentenced to death abroad. Minister Timerman spoke about the case of Victor Saldaño, the only Argentinean national sentenced to death abroad. Ambassador Lomónaco Tonda explained the situation of Mexican nationals on death row and gave examples of actions taken by his government to ensure that the rights of Mexican nationals detained abroad were respected in particular their right to receive prompt consular assistance. In this regard, he highlighted the 2004 Avena judgement by the International Court of Justice which ruled that the USA had violated its commitments under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. President Burkhalter and Secretary of State Della Vedova welcomed the global trend toward the abolition of the death penalty. Ambassador Kongstad narrated the Norwegian experience of abolishing the death penalty and explained actions taken by his government to strengthen their work on abolition of capital punishment. Assistant Secretary-General Šimonović and President Burkhalter raised the point that special attention must be given to vulnerable or marginal groups who are often subject of discrimination during the judicial process. Commissioner Dreifuss introduced ICDP and its actions to advance the cause of abolition of capital punishment as part of the international abolitionist movement. Executive Director Hannah described the activities of PRI. Mr. Šimonović provided a general overview and emphasized the need of moral and political leadership to achieve the abolition of capital punishment. As a concluding remark on the international efforts, he welcomed the establishment of the ICDP and added that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was working closely with ICDP. The event attracted a very large and appreciative audience.



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On 5 March 2014, ICDP Commissioner Ms. Asma Jahangir, participated in the high level panel discussion organized by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the "Question of the Death Penalty." Her speech covered advances and challenges relating to the abolition of the death penalty in Asia. While noting that the majority of executions were carried out in this region and thousands were under sentenced of death, she mentioned that there were glimmers of hope and cited Asian countries that had abolished the death penalty or did not execute. She called on States in the Asia region that retain the death penalty to introduce a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing capital punishment and alongside it to strengthen their criminal legal system. Other participants in the panel included the Minister of Justice and Human Rights of the Republic of Benin Mr. Valentin Djenontin-Agossou, the Vice-President of the National Parliament of Morocco Ms. Khadija Rouissi, and a former death row inmate in the US and currently Director of Advocacy at the organisation Witness to Innocence, Mr. Kirk Bloodsworth. The panel was moderated by the Permanent Representative of France to the UN in Geneva Ambassador Nicolas Niemtchinow. The President of the United Nations Human Rights Council Mr. Baudelaire Ndong Ella chaired the panel. A video message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr. Ban Ki-Moon was screened. In his message, he noted that since the General Assembly's landmark call for a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty in 2007, the trend against capital punishment had become stronger in all regions and across all legal systems and traditions. He also called on States that had not yet done so to ratify the Second Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. In her opening remarks, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Navi Pillay stated that she had put a focus on the abolition of the death penalty in her agenda. She added that she would continue to support international initiatives such as the ICDP. The High Commissioner urged all states that still retain the death penalty, as a first stage, to introduce a moratorium and to aim for a suspension of capital punishment on grounds that death penalty is incompatible with human rights.

ICDP thanks all the organizers and the distinguished participants for the success of these timely events and for their important contributions in discussions in order to advance the cause of abolition of the death penalty.

Federico Mayor  
President of the International Commission  
Against the Death Penalty



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## Background

ICDP was founded in Madrid in October 2010. ICDP is composed of 15 personalities of high international standing from all regions of the world who act with total independence and neutrality and work under its President Mr Federico Mayor.

ICDP opposes the death penalty under any circumstances believing that it violates the right to life enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ICDP promotes the abolition of capital punishment in law in those states that observe a de facto moratorium on the use of the death penalty and promotes moratoriums on executions in states that rarely use the death penalty. In states that continue to carry out executions ICDP urges strict adherence to international standards.

ICDP works with the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, governments and nongovernmental organizations to further the abolition of capital punishment worldwide.

The work of the ICDP is supported by a diverse group of 18 states from all regions of the world that are committed to abolition of the death penalty. Its secretariat is based in Geneva.