



International Commission  
against the Death Penalty

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**Statement by the International Commission against the Death Penalty:  
ICDP events on the occasion of the staging of the opera “Dead Man  
Walking”: A round table, a speech by Sister Helen Prejean at ICDP  
Support Group meeting and a meeting with Spain`s Foreign Minister  
Dastis**

On 25 January 2017, the International Commission against the Death Penalty (ICDP or Commission) co-organized a round table panel discussion titled “Dead Man Walking: culture of violence, death penalty and redemption,” with the collaboration of the Teatro Real and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain and sponsored by the Embassies of Switzerland, Belgium and Portugal and supported by Amnesty International Spain. The panel featured the participation of Sister Helen Prejean (the renowned death penalty abolition activist), Mr Joaquín José Martínez (the first Spanish national to be released after being under sentence of death in the USA), Mr Juan Ignacio Morro (the Director General of Human Rights and United Nations at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Ms Asunta Vivó (ICDP Executive Director). The discussion was introduced by Ms Laura Furonés Frago (Director of Cultural Activities of Teatro Real) and moderated by Mr Esteban Beltrán (Director of Amnesty International Spain). The event was organized at the Teatro Real on the eve of the premiere staging of the opera version of the book “Dead Man Walking” by Sister Helen Prejean.

Executive Director Asunta Vivó introduced ICDP, its activities on furthering the abolition of the death penalty worldwide. She also explained how organizing this round table linking art and the death penalty was part of ICDP’s mandate and was an important medium and platform to spread the message of abolition of capital punishment.

Director General Juan Ignacio Morro presented the role of the Spanish government and the international community in the abolition of the death penalty. He highlighted that the issue of abolition of capital punishment was one of the key priorities for Spain, which had joined the UN Human Rights Council in early January 2017. He also pointed out that Spain’s commitment to the abolitionist cause was evidenced by its significant contribution and support to the ICDP, whose Secretariat was based in Madrid.

Mr. Joaquín José Martínez gave a very moving testimony of his experiences while facing the death penalty. As the first Spanish national to be released after being under sentence of death for several years in the United States of America, his emotional speech was a reminder of the human cost of capital punishment, of the ever-present risk of the innocent being executed, and how the international community contributed to save



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his life. As Mr. José Martínez pointed out, “It was a never ending experience. Now I look back and I remember the struggle of my parents, the organizations, the government...”.

The final speaker, Sister Helen Prejean, spoke eloquently about how she became an activist for death penalty abolition and explained the context that led her to write the book *Dead Man Walking*. She mentioned her role as counsellor of persons under sentence of death, her experiences as she witnessed six executions of those persons she had counseled and the importance of recognizing the pain and suffering and perspectives of families of the victims. She concluded by stating that “We all have the duty of changing the world and end with this suffering. So it is time to roll up our sleeves and begin the task”.

The event was ably moderated by Mr. Esteban Beltrán (Director of Amnesty International Spain), who initiated the discussion by introducing the current state of play in the situation of death penalty worldwide.

On 26 January, Sister Helen Prejean gave an inspiring talk at ICDP’s Support Group meeting of Member-States . She thanked ICDP for its work and for its key role in organizing the round-table discussion the day before. She also exhorted the efforts of all those present for their important work and encouraged their countries to continue their valuable efforts towards achieving a world free of the death penalty.

Following the meeting, the ICDP Secretariat staff met with Sister Helen Prejean to discuss issues related to the abolition of capital punishment.

Later, Executive Director Asunta Vivó joined Sister Prejean, Director General Ignacio Morro and Ambassador Pablo Ruiz-Jarabo in a meeting with the Spanish Foreign Minister H.E. Alfonso Dastis. The Minister praised the work of activists like Sister Prejean and reaffirmed Spain’s continued support on the global abolition of the death penalty.

Judge Navi Pillay  
President

International Commission  
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## Background

Composed of 21 Commissioners, who are persons of high international standing from all regions of the world, ICDP acts with total independence and neutrality and works under its President Judge Navi Pillay.

ICDP opposes the death penalty under any circumstances believing that it violates the right to life enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Commission 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.

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 ICDP is supported by a diverse group of 19 States from all regions of the world that are committed to the abolition of the death penalty. Its secretariat is based in Madrid.