



International Commission
against the Death Penalty

President

Federico Mayor

Members

Giuliano Amato

Louise Arbour

Robert Badinter

Mohammed Bedjaoui

Ruth Dreifuss

Michèle Duvivier
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Hanne Sophie Greve

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Ioanna Kuçuradi

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Navanethem (Navi) Pillay

Ibrahim Najjar

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Statement by the International Commission against the Death Penalty on the occasion of the World Day against the Death Penalty

On the occasion of the 13th World Day against the Death Penalty, we at the International Commission against the Death Penalty (ICDP) renew our commitment to fight for a world free of capital punishment and call for its abolition because it is an affront to the very fundamental and crucial value of human dignity.

According to ICDP President Federico Mayor, "The death penalty is incompatible with human rights and human dignity as it violates the right to life which happens to be the most basic of all human rights. It also violates the right not to be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. Furthermore, the death penalty undermines human dignity which is inherent to every human being."

Our view was echoed by Pope Francis in his letter that he presented to President Mayor when they met in Rome on 20 March 2015, where it states that "Today capital punishment is unacceptable, however serious the condemned's crime may have been. It is an offence to the inviolability of life and to the dignity of the human person...It does not render justice to the victims, but rather foments revenge."

A tragic example of the death penalty and its assault on human dignity is the case in Pakistan of 43 year old Abdul Basit, a death-row prisoner, whose legs have been paralyzed after he contracted tuberculosis meningitis in prison in 2010. On 22 September 2015, a magistrate stopped the early morning execution of Mr. Basit, who was convicted for murder in 2009, in Faisalabad central jail stating, "We have thoroughly observed this case and reached a conclusion that there are no rules available to guide us on execution of a paraplegic person." Mr. Basit still faces the death penalty as the authorities are considering seeking opinion of provincial officials on how to carry out his execution. Pakistan has carried out over 240 executions since resuming the death penalty after a horrific attack on an army-run school in Peshawar in December 2014.

In Japan as well, the system of death penalty has paid little regard to human dignity. On 4 October 2015, 89 year old Okunishi Masaru, who had been sentenced to death in 1969, passed away at Hachioji Medical



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Prison. He had been convicted of the murders of five women after “confessing” to the crime following his interrogation by police for many hours over five days and with no lawyer present. For over four decades, Okunishi Masaru lived in constant fear that each day could be his last as those facing the death penalty in Japan are only informed hours before their execution, which takes place in secret. He also spent, like most prisoner in death row, nearly all his time in solitary confinement. Moreover, Okunishi Masaru had maintained his innocence; eight of his requests for a retrial were rejected. He was moved to the medical prison from Nagoya Detention Centre in 2012 after his health deteriorated.

In the United States, we also hear of cases where human dignity has been devastatingly diminished by the death penalty. On 18 March 2015, authorities in the US state of Missouri carried out the execution of 73 year old Cecil Clayton. Mr Clayton had been sentenced to death for the murder of a police officer in 1996. He had been mentally impaired from a work accident in 1972 that resulted in the removal of a large portion of his brain and which had a long-term impact on his behaviour. Medical experts who examined 74-year-old Mr. Clayton concluded that he was intellectually disabled with an IQ of 71. He suffered from severe mental illness and dementia related to his age and multiple brain injuries.

In Saudi Arabia, in Iran, in Pakistan, we hear of those who have been convicted of crimes they committed as juveniles being sentenced to death and even being executed. In Saudi Arabia, Ali Mohammed Baqir al-Nimr was 17 years old when he was arrested for taking part in anti-government protests in 2011. He was reportedly found guilty of sedition, breaking allegiance to the king, rioting, using petrol bombs against security patrols, robbing a pharmacy, among other charges and sentenced to death in September 2015. He now faces execution by beheading once the King approves his sentence.

ICDP believes that human dignity is at risk as long as the deadly system of death penalty is in existence. We note, however, that the international trend is moving towards abolition of capital punishment. According to the United Nations, some 160 countries have abolished the death penalty or do not execute. These States have turned away from capital punishment because it violates the right to life and human dignity. It is cruel and inherently flawed as a tool of criminal justice. And, importantly, it fails to deter crime more effectively than other punishments.



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We, at the International Commission against the Death Penalty, an independent body led by commissioners from all world regions, are urging the States that continue to carry out capital punishment to respect and protect human dignity and to turn away from this cruel and irreversible punishment which has no place in today's world.

Federico Mayor
President of the International Commission
against the Death Penalty

Background

Composed of 17 persons 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. 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. In states that continue to carry out executions, ICDP urges strict adherence to international standards. The Commission 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 Madrid.