



Speech of ICDP Commissioner Ruth Dreifuss

3rd March, 25nd Session of the Human Rights Council

Side event:

“International Actions with the view to abolishing the death penalty”

**(Representatives of civil society will focus on the support they provide to States that are contemplating abolition or moratorium)*

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Argentina for organizing this high level panel discussion on “*International Actions with the view to abolishing the death penalty*” which is being held on the occasion of the Human Rights Council. I would like also to thank the moderator his Excellency Ambassador D’Alotto for given me this opportunity to share my views on a topic that the International Commission against the Death Penalty (ICDP) and I are actively involved.

All over the world, countless activists are engaged in the campaign to abolish the death penalty. ICDP is part of this broad coalition of advocates campaigning for the right to life.

ICDP, to which I am a Member, is an independent body composed of 15 high-profile Commissioners. It was launched in October 2010 in Madrid. The Commission is composed by former presidents, prime ministers, government ministers, senior UN officials, a former judge and a leading academic. ICDP’s added value lies in the importance of its members. Their experience, knowledge and geographical representation –and their personal involvement with work to abolish the death penalty– enable them to engage effectively with senior officials and other stakeholders in different countries. These Commissioners represent all world regions demonstrating that abolition of the death penalty is a global concern and not the cause of a particular region. The work of ICDP is supported by 18 States representing all regions of the world.

ICDP opposes the death penalty in all situations and urges the immediate establishment of a universal moratorium on executions in all regions of the world with a view to total abolition. We acknowledge the need to provide punishment for an offence but we believe that justice systems can protect the public from crime without the death penalty's cruelty and constant risk of executing an innocent person. Moreover, the deterrent effect of the death penalty has not been proved and there is always a risk of killing an innocent.

I would like to explain how ICDP works in order to promote, complement and support global abolition of the death penalty.

ICDP implements its mandate in a number of ways:

- For example, we intervene with high representatives and personalities in specific countries by writing letters to promote abolition in law in countries which apply a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, to encourage countries to adopt a *de iure* moratorium on death sentences and executions with a view to total abolition and to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- ICDP undertakes visits to engage with high-ranking officials and other stakeholders. ICDP missions to the Caribbean States, California, Japan, Tunisia and Tajikistan have been organized to support efforts to abolish capital punishment. Recently, I was in Suriname in a mission with British Member of Parliament, Greg Mulholland. Suriname has not carried out executions for many years. The Surinamese State Council (Staatsraad) is currently considering the draft of the adapted Criminal Code, which excludes the death penalty.
- ICDP reacts in specific situations by issuing appeals and statements – in particular where individuals are at imminent risk of execution and where an official or *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty is to be ended or where the death penalty is to be reintroduced through legislation. ICDP issued several statements in support of foreign nationals facing capital punishment. For instance, ICDP issued statements in the cases of Humberto Leal and more recently Edgar Tamayo, both Mexican nationals who were facing the death penalty in the US state of Texas. ICDP also issued a statement on Rizana Nafeek, a Sri Lanka national who was executed in Saudi Arabia.
- Organizes public events including discussion panels, conferences, side-events at international forums on various aspects of abolition of the death penalty.

-In October 2011, ICDP co-organized the “*First International Conference on the death penalty in the Greater Caribbean*”. The main aim was to develop strategies to support abolition of the death penalty in the Caribbean;

-On October 2012, ICDP organized a roundtable in Madrid to review developments on capital punishment and identify legal and political challenges and opportunities for the coming five years;

-On 10 October 2013, ICDP and the Inter-Parliamentary Union jointly organizing a panel discussion in Geneva on "*Parliamentarians: a critical force in promoting abolition of the death penalty*". Members of Parliament from 11 countries (Algeria, Australia, Bahrain, Belarus, Chad, Japan, Jordan, Pakistan, Peru, Suriname and Zambia) attended the panel discussion;

-Since last year, ICDP has been co-organizing high level panels along with Member States on the occasion of the High level segment at the Human Rights Council in March. Last year's topic was: "*Death Penalty- Why and How to abolish*".

- ICDP participates in conferences, seminars and campaigns to mobilize public opinion for abolition of the death penalty.

-In 2013, ICDP Commissioners participated in high level meetings on issues related to the death penalty organized by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Also ICDP Commissioners participated in the 5th World Congress against the Death Penalty held in June in Madrid and met with delegates for an exchange of views to further the abolition of the death penalty.

- ICDP disseminates information by publishing reports and presenting papers at international forums. In April 2013, ICDP released its report on "*How States abolish the Death Penalty*". The publication covers the experiences of 13 countries who have taken steps towards full abolition of the death penalty. It includes a chapter on lessons learnt from the experiences of states in abolishing the death penalty.
- Moreover, ICDP has established working relations with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the UN, the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on the death penalty as well as non-governmental organizations and academics working on the abolition of the death penalty.

Today the call for repeal of capital punishment is no longer the preoccupation of a few countries. This is the result in part, to the crucial role played by the international abolitionist movement and the civil society. However, I do recognize that many challenges remain. To overcome this, we need to pull in all our efforts to achieve the

final goal of a death penalty free world. ICDP and I will continue to strengthen its work and contribution to this global abolitionist movement.

Once again, I would like to thank you for your attention.