



CARIBBEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

**Arthur Chung Conference Centre, Georgetown, Guyana
23/24 November 2015**

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Union organized a Caribbean Regional Conference on the Abolition of the Death Penalty in partnership with the International Commission against the Death Penalty. The conference was funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the British High Commission in Guyana. Twenty-five participants came from Europe and the Caribbean region, as well as numerous participants from Guyana. The following organizations were also represented: the European External Action Service; the International Commission against the Death Penalty; the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Abolition of the Death Penalty, the World Coalition against the Death Penalty; Greater Caribbean for Life; Parliamentarians for Global Action; Guyana Human Rights Association; Justice Institute Guyana; Human Rights Commission Belize; National Human Rights Defence Network Haiti; and the Ministry of Legal Affairs of Guyana.

Conclusions of the conference:

The risk of executing innocent people exists in any justice system:

There have been and always will be cases of executions of innocent people. No matter how developed a justice system is, it will always remain susceptible to human failure. Unlike prison sentences, the death penalty is irreversible and irreparable.

The arbitrary application of the death penalty can never be ruled out:

The death penalty is often used in a disproportional manner against the poor, minorities and members of racial, ethnic, political and religious groups.

The death penalty is incompatible with human rights and human dignity:

The death penalty 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.

The death penalty does not deter crime effectively:

The death penalty lacks the deterrent effect, which is commonly referred to by its advocates. As recently stated by the General Assembly of the United Nations, “there is no conclusive evidence of the deterrent value of the death penalty” (UNGA Resolution 65/206). It is noteworthy that in many retentionist states, the effectiveness of the death penalty in order to prevent crime is being seriously questioned by a continuously increasing number of law enforcement professionals.

Public opinion is not a major stumbling block for abolition:

Public support for the death penalty does not necessarily mean that taking away the life of a human being by the state is right. There are undisputed historical precedents where gross human rights violations had had the support of a majority of the people, but which were condemned vigorously later on. It is the job of leading figures and politicians to underline the incompatibility of capital punishment with human rights and human dignity. It needs to be pointed out that public support for the death penalty is inextricably linked to the desire of the people to be free from crime. However, there exist more effective ways to prevent crime.

Recommendations

- ❖ Formalize the unofficial moratorium of the death penalty in countries in the Caribbean region that retain capital punishment;
- ❖ Respect international and regional human rights law and standards relating to the death penalty;
- ❖ Engagement and constructive dialogue with governments in the Caribbean region as they take steps towards eventual abolition of the death penalty;
- ❖ Strengthening justice system structures, including ensuring that it is sufficiently resources, that it has the capacity of effectively investigating crimes, ensuring that victims are supported, ensuring adequate legal assistance to vulnerable sections of society;
- ❖ Advancing human rights education as part of the curriculum for citizenship studies.

ENDS