



International Commission
Against the Death Penalty

Madrid, 15 October 2021
ICDP 09/2021

Statement by the International Commission against the Death Penalty: Sierra Leone abolishes death penalty

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Navanethem (Navi) Pillay

Vice-Presidents

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Federico Mayor Zaragoza

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Rodolfo Mattarollo,
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The International Commission against the Death Penalty (ICDP or Commission) warmly welcomes the signature by Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio, on 8 October 2021, which confirmed as law the abolition bill which its Parliament voted for on 23 July 2021. By doing so, President Bio's historic action, which came just before the 19th World Day against Death Penalty, made Sierra Leone the 23rd country in Africa and 109th country in the world to abolish the death penalty.

"I join ICDP Commissioners in congratulating President Bio, the Sierra Leone parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers for providing important political leadership in moving the country to abolish capital punishment. We agree with President Bio's description of the death penalty as an 'inhumane practice' and that by affirming the belief in the sanctity of life by abolishing the death penalty, Sierra Leone, as a nation, has exorcised horrors of a cruel past," said ICDP President Judge Navi Pillay.

ICDP notes that this signature by President Bio is the culmination of a series of important steps that were taken including the 23 July vote by the Parliament and earlier commitments made by Government authorities, which highlighted the political leadership that created a strong momentum away from the moratorium that has been in place since the last executions – of 24 soldiers on charges of treason – were carried out in October 1998. Reports reaching the Commission suggest that in February 2021, President Julius Maada Bio officially gave the directives for the death penalty to be abolished from Sierra Leone's laws. On 12 May 2021, during Sierra Leone's United Nations' Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Deputy Justice Minister Umaru Napoleon Koroma confirmed President Bio's cabinet's commitment to fully abolish the death penalty in the country. As of December 2020, 94 people were reportedly under sentence of death.

In its earlier statement on 29 July 2021, while welcoming the historic vote by Sierra Leone Parliament on the bill abolishing the death penalty, ICDP had recognized that it was "an inspirational step recognizing the respect and protection of the fundamental right to life and, thereby, human dignity," and that it signaled "a move recognizing the death penalty's cruelty and in removing the constant risk of executing an innocent person." Noting this, the Commission welcomes President Bio's important statement that "the death penalty is incompatible with the right to life, constitutes inhuman and degrading treatment and has no proven deterrent effect."

As a follow-up, "I believe that this important domestic move towards abolition could be consolidated by an international commitment which could be achieved by Sierra Leone becoming a State Party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," added ICDP President Judge Navi Pillay.



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Background

Composed of 24 Commissioners, who are persons of high international standing and who represent all regions of the world, ICDP acts with total independence and neutrality and works under its President Judge Navi Pillay.

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 punishments worldwide. The work of ICDP is supported by a diverse group of 23 Member-States from all parts of the world who are committed to the abolition of the death penalty. Its Secretariat is based in Madrid.