



International Commission
against the Death Penalty

President

Navanethem (Navi) Pillay

Vice Presidents

Ruth Dreifuss

Ibrahim Najjar

Members

Michelle Bachelet

Marc Bossuyt

Helen Clark

Marzuki Darusman

Michèle Duvivier Pierre-Louis

Tsakhia Elbegdorj

Hanne Sophie Greve

Sylvie Kayitesi

Enda Kenny

Ioanna Kuçuradi

Barbara Lochbihler

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

Dannel Malloy

Marta Santos Pais

Ivan Simonovic

Horacio Verbitsky

Honorary Members

Giuliano Amato

Louise Arbour

Mohammed Bedjaoui

Federico Mayor Zaragoza

Martin Joseph O'Malley

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

Marta Vilardell

Founding Members

Rodolfo Mattarollo

(1939-2014)

Asma Jilani Jahangir

(1952-2018)

Bill Richardson

(1947-2023)

Robert Badinter

(1928-2024)

Secretariat

Pl. Marqués de Salamanca 8

28006 Madrid, Spain

+00 34 91 3799458

info@icomdp.org



North-South Prize
of the Council of Europe



René Cassin

Madrid, 23 December 2024

ICDP 19/2024

Statement by the International Commission against the Death Penalty: ICDP commends President Biden's historic commutation of 37 federal death sentences

The International Commission against the Death Penalty (ICDP or Commission) warmly commends President Joseph (Joe) R Biden, Jr. for his historic decision to commute the sentences of 37 of the 40 people facing the death penalty at the federal level. ICDP believes that this important decision, which was announced on 23 December 2024, represents one of the most significant moves against capital punishment by a sitting US president in recent history. Reports reaching ICDP suggest that all the people who have been commuted from the sentence of death by this measure by President Biden will serve life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

"I would like to join my fellow ICDP Commissioners in congratulating President Biden for his commutations of 37 federal death sentences which nearly empties the federal death row," said ICDP President Judge Navi Pillay. "We note with appreciation President Biden's statement that he is more convinced than ever to stop the use of the death penalty. His historic, principled and courageous decision marks his legacy as a President who was profoundly committed to justice, human dignity, his spiritual beliefs and the fundamental right to life."

President Biden's measure for commutations appears to have been a response to calls from civil society organizations, including death penalty abolitionist organizations, religious leaders, legislators at the federal and state level, lawyers, human rights organizations worldwide, including ICDP. Earlier in December, ICDP wrote to President Biden, calling on him to commute the sentences of people under sentence of death at the federal death row. This appeal echoed the message of His Holiness Pope Francis, who called for the commutation of death sentences in the United States on 8 December and reportedly discussed the issue with President Biden on 20 December, advocating for mercy, compassion, and the protection of human rights.

President Biden's administration was reportedly the first to adopt abolition of the death penalty, partially in reaction to preceding Trump administration, which restarted federal executions after an undeclared moratorium for nearly two decades by carrying out 13 executions, all of which were carried out in the final six months of his administration. Although proposed legislation to that effect failed to advance in Congress during his administration, President Biden directed the Justice Department to issue a moratorium on federal executions in 2021.

While President Biden's decision for commutations sets an important precedent for the United States, ICDP also recognizes that the President's powers of clemency are limited to those who committed federal crimes, which constitute a small number of the people sentenced to death in the United States. Most people facing the death penalty in the USA are sentenced and imprisoned by the US states, who also carry out most of the executions. Moreover, incoming President Donald Trump supports the death penalty, and during his 2024 presidential campaign, he had reportedly called for an expansion of the death penalty to include drug dealers, human traffickers and child sex abusers. His approach could inspire some states to consider expanding the scope of the death penalty. In this context, it must be noted that since 1973, at least 200 people in the United States who were convicted and sentenced to death have been exonerated.

Background



**International Commission
against the Death Penalty**

President

Navanethem (Navi) Pillay

Vice Presidents

Ruth Dreifuss

Ibrahim Najjar

Members

Michelle Bachelet

Marc Bossuyt

Helen Clark

Marzuki Darusman

Michèle Duvivier Pierre-Louis

Tsakhia Elbegdorj

Hanne Sophie Greve

Sylvie Kayitesi

Enda Kenny

Ioanna Kuçuradi

Barbara Lochbihler

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

Dannel Malloy

Marta Santos Pais

Ivan Simonovic

Horacio Verbitsky

Honorary Members

Giuliano Amato

Louise Arbour

Mohammed Bedjaoui

Federico Mayor Zaragoza

Martin Joseph O'Malley

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

Marta Vilardell

Founding Members

Rodolfo Mattarollo

(1939-2014)

Asma Jilani Jahangir

(1952-2018)

Bill Richardson

(1947-2023)

Robert Badinter

(1928-2024)

Secretariat

Pl. Marqués de Salamanca 8

28006 Madrid, Spain

+00 34 91 3799458

info@icomdp.org

The International Commission against the Death Penalty is currently composed of 26 Commissioners of high international standing following highly respected careers in public service. The Commission acts with total independence under the leadership of President Judge Navi Pillay. The work of ICDP is supported by its Support Group of 24 Member States who are committed to the abolition of the death penalty. Both ICDP's Commissioners and Member States of its Support Group come from all regions of the world. ICDP's Secretariat is based in Madrid and is responsible for the day-to-day work of the Commission.

The Commission promotes the abolition of capital punishment in law in States that observe a *de facto* moratorium on the use of the death penalty and promotes moratoriums on executions in States that retain capital punishment. ICDP works with the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, governments and nongovernmental organizations to advocate for worldwide abolition of the death penalty.



North-South Prize
of the Council of Europe

SARIA PREMIO

René Cassin