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North-South Prize of the Council of Europe

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Statement by the International Commission against the Death Penalty: ICDP condemns botched execution of Christa Pike and calls on Tennessee to halt all executions

The International Commission against the Death Penalty expresses its disbelief over the deplorable circumstances surrounding Christa Pike's botched execution on 30 September. Ms. Pike was administered the lethal injection twice, and both times it failed to produce its intended effect, instead subjecting Ms. Pike to unimaginable pain with unforeseen consequences for her physical and mental health. As stressed by her attorneys before the Tennessee Supreme Court, she was in "unnecessary agony" in violation of her right to be executed free of cruel and unusual punishment.

After the second failed attempt, Ms. Pike was transported to what Tennessee corrections officials described as an "off-site medical facility," where she reportedly remains under treatment.

“As ICDP noted in its previous statement, Ms. Pike suffers from thrombocytosis, a condition that had been reported to the facility by multiple physicians and which raises the risk of severe suffering upon the administration of the lethal injection. Having ignored these concerns, the lethal injection not only failed, but caused Ms. Pike to suffer serious and unnecessary pain. Moreover, Christa Pike's case shows the arbitrariness of establishing her criminal responsibility without considering her young age at the time of the commission of the crime and her history of abuse and her level of maturity at the time” said Vice President Ruth Dreifuss.

"Capital punishment is intertwined with cruel and torturous methods, provoking limitless agony and inhuman suffering," said ICDP Commissioner Marta Santos Pais. “Christa Pike's case is only one of numerous examples displaying negligence and the perpetuation of an outdated and cruel punishment that serves no real purpose in the administration of justice and has no deterrent effect on crime rates, often invoked by retentionists.”

The ICDP once again expresses its sympathy for Colleen Slemmer's friends and family, whose loss caused immeasurable pain. The suffering of victims' families deserves support and respect, but it cannot be a basis for state-sanctioned retribution.

While the State has the authority to punish, international law imposes respect for legal safeguards and prohibits subjecting individuals to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including under Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the United States is a party, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

SARIA PREMIO René Cassin

ICDP urges the Tennessee authorities to refrain from any further attempt to execute Ms. Pike, to commute her sentence, and to ensure that she receives immediate, full and independent medical and psychological care.

The Commission takes note of Governor Bill Lee's decision to halt the remaining executions scheduled this year. This should be a first step toward a formal moratorium on capital punishment.

ICDP opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and for all crimes. No method of execution can be made humane. The Commission reiterates its call for a ban on the death penalty and for the promotion of alternative measures to fight impunity.

Background

The activities of ICDP, which was established in 2010, are led by 28 high-level Commissioners from all regions of the world, under the presidency of Judge Navi Pillay, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Commissioners include four former Presidents, six former Prime Ministers, ten former Ministers, two former U.S. Governors, ten Parliamentarians, six former Judges, and seven former senior UN officials, including three former UN High Commissioners for Human Rights. The work of ICDP is supported by a geographically diverse Support Group of 24 Member States who are committed to the abolition of the death penalty. Its 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.

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