



Adoption of the resolution for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty warmly congratulates the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on the adoption of the resolution for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, which was adopted by a great majority of 123 UN Member States on 16 December 2020. Since 2007, eight resolutions for a moratorium on executions have been adopted with a steady increase in the overall number of votes in favor, rising from 104 in 2007 to 123 in 2020. In contrast, the number of States whose legislation continues to provide for the death penalty continues to drop over time, as does the number of States that continue to apply it. Only a small minority of retentionist States carried out executions in 2019 – 20 in total.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the world how vulnerable and valuable human life is. Over the past year, most governments have been deploying exceptional policies to contain the spread of the virus among people, aiming to ensure that everyone is entitled to the right to life. Preventive measures, aiming to protect lives, have sometimes been misused by a handful of States where lawbreaking can still result in a sentence of death. This global challenge, unfortunately, has not stopped on-screen death sentences from being issued and socially-distant executions from being carried out. Now more than ever, one execution tarnishes all of humanity's dignity, and we urge the remaining 56 retentionist States to fully comply with the UNGA's call to suspend executions.

The right to life is inherent to every individual for the sole reason of belonging to humanity, and this humanity should be upheld in all circumstances, irrespective of any status, choice, behavior, or act. In these difficult times, governments should dedicate their utmost efforts to saving as many lives as they can, not to clinging to an outdated and arbitrary prerogative over life and death that should not be a reasonable and probable cause to trample on basic human rights in any case.

This year started with an unprecedented crisis, yet we do hope this new resolution contributes to 2021 being a new age for human dignity. Capital punishment has no evidence-based unique deterrent effect; it disproportionately affects individuals living in poverty; it often turns out to be a political tool used against minorities in the hands of authoritarian administrations; it puts innocent people at high risk of being sentenced to death, what no commutations, pardons or retrials could ever repair; and it fails to enjoy the unanimous support of the family members of murder victims. A death sentence pays tribute neither to justice nor to democracy, two fundamental values to which the international community is deeply attached. Hence, we solemnly invite all UN Member States that favored the resolution but whose law still provides for the death penalty not to confine themselves to a de facto moratorium on executions, but to take all further measures to unreservedly and formally enshrine abolition in law.

All people on death row are left behind, forgotten, and dehumanized, yet no human being deserves such an absolute fate. We can undoubtedly be a stronger world without the death penalty. By renouncing the death penalty in all circumstances, a majority of 106 UN Member States have agreed that abolition is anything but a political weakness, and that no common good can arise out of a violence-based system that risks irreversible decisions. We therefore call upon States that have not yet done so to duly reconsider their use of the death penalty, to follow in the abolitionist movement's footsteps, and to end a punishment inconsistent with what our societies deserve the most – peaceful justice for all people at all times.