

**MOVING AWAY from the DEATH PENALTY:
NATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

**MEDIA ADVISORY**

**WHAT?**

**Moving Away from the Death Penalty: National Leadership**

High-level event of the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

**WHO?**

* Mr. **Jan Eliasson**, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General
* Mr. **Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Keynote Speakers**

* H.E. Mr. **Thomas Boni Yayi**, President of the Republic of Benin
* H.E. Mr. **Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj**, President of Mongolia
* H.E. Mr. **Mohamed Moncef Marzouki,** President of the Republic of Tunisia
* H.E. Mr. **Matteo Renzi**, Prime Minister of Italy and President of the Council of the European Union
* Moderator: Mr. **Ivan Šimonović**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

**WHEN?**

Thursday, 25 September 2014, 1:15-2:45pm

**WHERE?**

ECOSOC Chamber (CB),
United Nations Headquarters, New York

**Background**The High-level event is intended to inform discussion among Member States, with a particular focus on political leadership required to move away from the death penalty. The event will also see the launch of an OHCHR publication on the death penalty, *Moving Away from the Death Penalty, Arguments, Trends and Perspectives*.

Member States representing a variety of legal systems, traditions, cultures and religious backgrounds have taken a position in favour of abolition of the death penalty. Currently, more than 160 Members States of the United Nations have either abolished the death penalty or do not practice it. Some States that opposed the abolition of the death penalty in the recent past have moved to abolish it; others have imposed a moratorium on its use.

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**10 FACTS ABOUT THE DEATH PENALTY**

1. **Wrongful convictions** are simply not avoidable.
2. Capital punishment is **too** **final and irrevocable.**
3. There is **no empirical evidence that the death penalty deters crimes**.
4. Death penalty is **not imposed in a just and equal way**.
5. As long as the death penalty exists, **it can be misused**.
6. **The world is moving towards the abolition** of the death penalty.
7. 160 countries are **abolitionist in law or practice**.
8. **Not all victims’ families support the death penalty**.
9. Methods of execution currently used can **inflict inordinate pain and suffering.**
10. Death penalty **is not an entitlement of the state**, as it violates human rights.

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**Ban Ki-moon,** Secretary-General of the United Nations\*

Today, more than four out of five countries have either abolished the death penalty or do not practice it. Globally, there is a firm trend towards abolition, with progress in all regions of the world. Member States representing a variety of legal systems, traditions, cultures and religious backgrounds have taken a position in favour of abolition of the death penalty. Some States that opposed the abolition of the death penalty in the recent past have moved to abolish it; others have imposed a moratorium on its use. The application of the death penalty appears to be confined to an ever-narrowing minority of countries.

Those remaining States cite a number of reasons for retaining the death penalty, including what they see as its deterrent effect; that it is consistent with public opinion; that it is equally applied against all perpetrators; and that there are sufficient judicial safeguards to ensure defendants are not wrongfully convicted.

Over the past two years, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has convened a series of important panel discussions on the death penalty, seeking to address these issues. The events drew on the experiences of government officials, academic experts and civil society from various regions which, in recent years, have made progress towards abolition or the imposition of a moratorium. They covered key aspects of the issue, including data on wrongful convictions and the disproportionate targeting of marginalized groups of people.

This publication brings together the contributions of the panel members as well as other experts on this subject. Taken as a whole, they make a compelling case for moving away from the death penalty.

The death penalty has no place in the 21st century. Leaders across the globe must boldly step forward in favour of abolition. I recommend this book in particular to those States that have yet to abolish the death penalty. Together, let us end this cruel and inhumane practice.

*\* Preface to: “Moving away from the death penalty, Arguments, Trends and Perspectives*. Book launch on 25 September 2014.

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**What they say about the death penalty?**

***Victims***

“If a great country cannot ensure that it won’t kill an innocent citizen, it shouldn’t kill at all.”
***Kirk Bloodsworth,* victim of wrongful conviction**

“They took us to trial, and the evidence was the Stephen King novels that I read, the music I listened to and the clothes that I wore. They found us guilty, and I was sentenced to death.”
***Damien Echols,* 18 years on death row for a crime he did not commit**

***Officials***

“In the 21st century, the right to take someone’s life is not a part of the social contract between citizens and a state....”
***Ivan Šimonović,* UN Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights**

“Rejecting capital punishment is about choosing what kind of society we want to live in, and which values—including human rights and dignity, democracy and the rule of law—we want to uphold.”
***Federico Mayor,* President of the International Commission against the Death Penalty**

***Activists***

“… The risk that innocent people will be executed can never be eliminated …”
***Saul Lehrfreund*, co-executive director of The Death Penalty Project**

“Discrimination is a problem in the application of the death penalty around the world.”
***Alice Mogwe*, director of the Botswana Centre for Human Rights**

“The cruel ultimate punishment has little chance of healing society.”
**Mario Marazziti, Community of Sant’Egidio and member of the Italian legislature**

***Scholars***

“The empirical research conducted over the past few decades demonstrates that no matter what politicians argue or the public believe, neither deterrence nor public opinion should be seen as barriers to abolition.”
***Carolyn Hoyle and Roger Hood* authors of *The Death Penalty: A Worldwide Perspective***

“The death penalty is one of America’s most prominent vestiges of slavery and racial oppression.”
***Stephen Bright*, president of the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta, Georgia**

“Terrible tragedies involving sensational crimes too often make bad law.”
***Stephen L. Braga*, professor at the University Of Virginia School of Law**

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**Timeline: The United Nations and the death penalty**

**1966**: The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the UN, permits the application of the death penalty in countries that “have not abolished” it only if it is imposed for “the most serious crimes”. There are only 26 abolitionist countries at the time.

**1977**: The UN General Assembly adopts resolution 32/61. The resolution states that throughout the world, it was desirable to "progressively restrict the number of offenses for which the death penalty might be imposed, with a view to the desirability of abolishing this punishment."

**1984**: The UN Economic and Social Council adopts principles related to the imposition of the death penalty, also known as Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty.

**1989**: The UN General Assembly adopts the Second optional Protocol to ICCPR, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. This gives abolition a decisive new momentum.

**2007, 2008, and 2010**: The General Assembly adopts a series of resolutions calling upon States to respect international standards that provide protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty and to progressively restrict its use and reduce the number of offences for which it may be imposed.

**Since 2012**: OHCHR has organised a unique series of knowledge events in New York and Geneva to encourage member states to move away from the death penalty. These events have brought together UN officials, including the Secretary-General, representatives of Member States, academia, civil society, as well as legal experts and victims of wrongful convictions.

**25 September 2014**: For the first time, the United Nations will host a High-Level discussion with Head of States on the issue of moving away from death penalty and the role of leadership.

**10 October 2014**: 12th International Day against the death penalty.

**November 2014**: Vote of a UN General Assembly resolution on the question of the death penalty.

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