

World Day against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2020: Joint Declaration by the High Representative of the European Union and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe



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Today on the World and European Day Against the Death Penalty, the European Union and the Council of Europe reaffirm their opposition to the use of capital punishment in all circumstances and call for the universal abolition of the death penalty.

We welcome the continued decline in the use of the death penalty, confirming the overall trend towards universal abolition. In 2019, for a second consecutive year, executions were carried out in only 20 countries around the world. This is a historic low, but it is nonetheless 20 countries too many. We, therefore, use this occasion to call on all Members of the United Nations to support the Resolution on a Moratorium on the Use of the Death Penalty at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly in December 2020.

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty has dedicated this year to the right to effective legal representation. The violation of this fundamental right disproportionately affects the most vulnerable members of society, who cannot afford experienced lawyers or who may not be familiar with the legal system. It is essential that justice systems provide resources to prepare an effective defence, including accurate translation and interpretation services if needed.

Perpetrators of crimes must be held accountable and punished. However, the experience of abolitionist countries has shown that the death penalty does not deter violent crime nor contribute to a safer society. On the contrary, killing as a punishment perpetuates a cycle of senseless violence.

We call upon those Council of Europe Member States who have not yet acceded to the relevant Protocols to the European Convention on Human Rights and to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty to do so without delay. The Council of Europe and the EU once again urge Belarus, the only European Country still carrying out executions, to abolish the death penalty and join the large majority of nations that have abandoned this cruel and inhuman practice once and for all. We also call on those Council of Europe observer States, who have not yet abolished death penalty, to promote an open debate on the obstacles blocking their path towards abolition of the death penalty.

We look forward to the adoption by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers of the Recommendation concerning the trade in goods used for torture and/or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment – including the death penalty. We also encourage all countries to join the Global Alliance for Torture-Free Trade, a remarkable example of global cooperation against torture and the death penalty, and to step up efforts towards establishing common international standards on torture-free trade.

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