

World Day Against the Death Penalty Observance at the UN

Observed on 20 October 2016

Welcoming Remarks by H.E. Dr. Caleb Otto, Permanent Representative of Palau to the UN

On behalf of the sponsors of this event - Australia, Norway, and Palau Missions to the United Nations and the Parliamentarians for Global Action - it is my honor to welcome you today. As you know we are here to commemorate the World Day Against the Death Penalty here at the UN. Although the actual day is on 10 October, our observance was delayed here due to scheduling conflicts. The event is particularly noteworthy as it is held in the margins of Third Committee deliberations on a draft resolution calling for a global moratorium against use of the death penalty.

2016 marks the 14th year for the World Day Against the Death Penalty. This year's theme is the Death Penalty and Terrorism. After many years of steady decline in the number of countries using the death penalty and the number of executions, 2015 and 2016 have seen a reversal of this trend. More countries are using the death penalty and more executions are being carried out with war against terror a common justification.

Our panelists today will show:

- (1) There is no evidence that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to any crime and especially no evidence that it deters terrorism driven in most cases by extremists who welcome martyrdom whether during commission of their crime or at the hands of courts after the fact.
- (2) There is no internationally accepted legal definition of terrorism and many statutes include a loose collection of offenses that do not meet the legal standard for "most serious crimes" and may include acts of peaceful protest and free speech protected under international human rights law;
- (3) Whether carried out for terrorism or regular offenses, the death penalty is inequitably applied across all countries using it; the poor, minorities, and marginalized persons are disproportionately at risk of a death sentence; use of the death penalty against persons charged with religious offenses or their membership in LGBT communities is a particularly serious violation of international human rights law.
- (4) In many countries where executions are carried out, international legal standards are not rigorously applied including standards that protect the most vulnerable including children and persons with mental health conditions.

The speakers today will provide strong evidence that we cannot effectively fight terrorism with terrorism. I am proud that Palau does not now nor has never used the death penalty. I am pleased to stand in solidarity with today's organizers. I welcome you and look forward to learning from our panelists along with you in the audience.

I thank you.