

Parliamentary Roundtable and Consultations on the abolition of the Death Penalty

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Speaking points

Honourable Members of Parliaments,
Distinguished participants,
All protocol observed

- The European Union is against the death penalty.
- We hold a strong and principled position against capital punishment. We consider it is cruel and inhuman, and made worse by the fact that it is irreversible.
- There is no going back and innocent lives are sometimes lost as a consequence of human mistake.
- All Member States of the European Union have abolished the death penalty. Abolition is a clear precondition for accession to the European Union.
- The abolitionist path taken by European countries was long and winding. Each country has an experience to share on how to achieve this.
- The process may include a broad consultation, leading to a review of the criminal codes to propose sound alternatives for the most serious crimes; introducing the necessary adaptations to the constitution and other legislation; appropriate training of the judiciary, and ensuring political leadership throughout.
- Consistently with its internal values, the European Union has made the abolition of the death penalty a core objective of its human rights policy worldwide.
- Establishing a moratorium can be a first step. Where the death penalty still exists, we call for a progressively restricted use and in line with international minimum standards.

What does the European Union do to advance its objective:

- When we engage with retentionist countries, we use all political and diplomatic means such as statements, demarches, press releases, human rights dialogues.
- We base our arguments in the principles of international human rights law and try to build on existing commitments by partner countries, such as those made in the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council.
- The European Union is at the heart of a great inter-regional alliance which co-sponsors the UN General Assembly Resolution calling for a Global Moratorium on the use of the death penalty.
- To make our approach consistent as European Union we have adopted common guidance called the **EU Guidelines on Death Penalty**.
- The Guidelines are approved by European Union Ministers for Foreign Affairs meeting in the Foreign Affairs Council which is chaired by the High Representative of the European Union.
- The first version of the Guidelines was adopted in 1998. The latest was agreed in 2013. The new text consolidates the experience of the European Union in its leading global role towards the abolition of the death penalty.
- The Guidelines thoroughly update language on minimum standards and define clearly the "most serious intentional crimes", excluding drug offences. There is reference to non-execution of the elderly, the right to contact a consular representative, conditions of imprisonment of persons on the death row and the obligation to notify family and lawyers on execution details.
- The European Union is also the first regional body in the world having adopted **rules prohibiting the trade in goods used for capital punishment**, torture and ill-treatment. The supply of technical assistance related to such goods is also forbidden.
- Export controls are now applied also to specific anesthetic agents, which could be used for the execution of human beings by means of lethal injection.
- Furthermore, the Regulation is under review to assess if additional measures might be necessary to ensure that EU economic operators refrain from this trade.

- The **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights** is another important tool for the implementation of our commitment against the death penalty.
- Since 2007 the EIDHR has allocated almost 20 million Euro to projects around the world, making the European Union the lead donor supporting efforts by civil society organisations towards abolition.
- The fight against capital punishment remains a priority under the new financial package of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights for the 2014-2020 period.
- Assistance will focus on the abolition of the death penalty, the establishment of moratoria and, advocacy for its abolition and observance of international minimum standards where the death penalty is still applied.
- The European Commission will soon launch the first global call for proposals with the specific objective of supporting the fight against the death penalty.
- Assistance to civil society organizations includes raising awareness in retentionist countries through public education, outreach to influence public opinion, studies on how death penalty systems comply with minimum standards, securing access to appropriate legal support for death row inmates and training of lawyers.

Honourable Members of Parliaments,

Distinguished Participants,

The European Union believes that the abolition of the death penalty enhances human dignity and that everyone has the right to life, even those who abused this right and took lives.

Thank you.