

Appeal to end the death penalty

The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal I made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.

Pope John Paul II, St. Louis, Mo., January 27, 1999

Although the world-wide movement towards abolition of death penalty has proceeded in an increasing pace, it has to be recognized that in half of the the countries of the world the death penaltly still exists. Amnesty International reported that in 1998, 105 countries have abolished the death penalty by law or in practice. On the other hand, 90 countries still apply the death penalty. According to Amnesty International 1.625 people in 37 countries were executed in 1998.

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. The Universal Declation for Human Rights has stipulated protection against subjection to cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. The death penalty is a violation of these rights.

Therefore, the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions strongly appeals that the death penalty must be abolished in every state. This comes from its Christian conviction that human life is irreplaceble and of unique value.

As we approach the next millennium, we are challenged by the evolution in Catholic teaching on the death penalty, and we are encouraged by new and growing efforts to stop executions around the world.

Through his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* Pope John Paul II has asked governments to stop using death as the ultimate penalty. Instances where ist application is necessary to protect society have become rare, if not practically non existent. In his 1998 Christmas address the Holy Father called for a moratorium on the death penalty in the year 2000.

In the spirit of comming biblical jubilee, Justice and Peace commissions join the Holy Father in his call upon all governments to observe a moratorium of the death penalty by the year 2000 and to suspend all executions, in order to completely eradicate capital punishment. The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions support the Moratorium 2000 campaign for a Death Penalty Free Millenium, and urge all people of good will to join the campaign and to work to end the use of capital punishment.

The Appeal for a Moratorium of Death Penalty by the Year 2000 is supported by San Egidio, Amnesty International, the JPIC Commissions USG/UISG, the Administrative Board of the US Catholic Conference, Pax Christi International and many other organizations around the world.

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