



T +33(0)388412560 www.coe.int pressunit@coe.int

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European and World Day against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2011

Joint declaration by Catherine Ashton, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 10.10.2011 - The European Union and the Council of Europe reaffirm their united opposition to the death penalty, and their commitment to its worldwide abolition.

We consider capital punishment to be inhumane, and a violation of human dignity. Experience in Europe has taught us that the death penalty does not prevent an increase in violent crime, and nor does it bring justice to the victims of such crimes. Any capital punishment resulting from a miscarriage of justice, from which no legal system can be immune, represents irreversible loss of human life.

Since 1997 no execution has taken place on the territory of our Member States (*).

We continue to condemn the use of the death penalty in Belarus, the only country in Europe still applying capital punishment. We urge Belarus to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, with a view to its complete abolition.

We welcome the UN's recent resolutions on the death penalty, with a view to its complete abolition, supported by a wide coalition of States from all regions of the world. The growing support granted to UN resolutions on this matter in 2007, 2008 and 2010 confirms an increasing international trend against the death penalty. At the same time, in acknowledging the growing number of countries which have done away with the death penalty (the figure grew from 55 to 97, between 1993 and 2009), we cannot ignore the fact that 58 countries in the world still retain the death penalty.

(*) The Council of Europe counts 47 member countries, which include all 27 member countries of the European Union.