

Joint Declaration by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on behalf of the European Union and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on the occasion of the European and World Day against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2019

The European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe firmly oppose the death penalty at all times and in all circumstances. The death penalty is a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment contrary to the right to life. The death penalty means revenge, not justice, and its abolition contributes to the enhancement of human dignity.

142 countries, representing 74% of the UN member states, have already stopped using the death penalty, either by removing it from their penal code or not carrying out executions for a long time. The abolitionist trend is continuing, with the number of death sentences and executions also falling. In 2018, executions were carried out in 20 countries, representing a historic low of 10% of the countries of the world.

The Council of Europe member states which have not yet acceded to Protocols No 6 and 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights are called upon to do so without delay. The Council of Europe and the EU once again urge Belarus to abolish the death penalty and join the community of nations that have chosen to replace vengeance with human dignity. They also invite those observers to the Council of Europe who have not yet abolished death penalty to engage in dialogue on the obstacles blocking their path towards abolition.

The EU and the Council of Europe encourage all countries to join the global Alliance for Torture-Free Trade, which currently involves 62 States committed to restricting the trade in goods used to carry out torture and the death penalty. Global cooperation against the death penalty can trigger change. It will also help to fight international organised crime, since abolitionist states will often not extradite suspects to countries where they could face capital punishment.

An ever-growing majority of people and leaders share the view that the death penalty is no better a deterrent to crime than other punishments, and that it does not contribute to public safety. The death penalty disproportionately affects members of vulnerable groups, who cannot afford experienced defence lawyers, and death row prisoners continue to represent the most marginalised sections of society.

The impact of this cruel punishment also affects the relatives of people subjected to the death penalty, first and foremost their children. Denying children and families a burial or cremation violates their human rights, notably their right to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Children who have lost parents because of executions suffer deep and lasting grief and trauma. No-one is better placed than these unseen victims to understand the impact the death penalty can have.

The EU and the Council of Europe recognise the importance of a fully-informed public debate about the death penalty. It has been shown that the more people know about the execution process, the arguments for abolition and alternatives to capital punishment, the more they agree with abolition.