

European and World Day against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2021: Joint statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union and the Secretary-General on behalf of the Council of Europe

On the European and World Day against the Death Penalty, the European Union and the Council of Europe reaffirm their firm opposition to capital punishment at all times and in all circumstances. The death penalty is a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment contrary to the right to life. Its abolition is essential to ensure respect for human dignity.

This year's World Day is dedicated to women. Although women represent a small percentage of global death sentences, gender-based discrimination continues to impact women at all levels of the criminal justice system. In some countries, women are sentenced to death at higher rates than men for offences linked to sexual morality, such as adultery. Moreover, mitigating circumstances related to gender-based violence and abuse are rarely taken into consideration during the criminal process.

The abolition of the death penalty is primarily a question of political will. We welcome the fact that the number of countries that are still executing people has continued to fall. Last year, no executions took place in 176 countries, representing 91% of the UN member states. Every year there are new steps towards global abolition of the death penalty. On 8 October, Sierra Leone abolished the death penalty. This year saw one more abolition in the USA: the State of Virginia. President Biden's intention to abolish the death penalty at the federal level in the United States, as well as the moratorium on executions imposed by the US Attorney General are important steps for the future. Armenia ratified the second optional protocol on the abolition of the death penalty, and Kazakhstan is in the process of finalising its ratification. We urge Belarus to move towards abolition.

Ending the trade in goods used in capital punishment is particularly important for eliminating the death penalty. Reflecting the EU 'Anti-Torture' Regulation, the Council of Europe this year adopted a Recommendation that aims to stop European participation in this terrible trade ([Recommendation CM/Rec\(2021\)2](#) "on measures against the trade in goods used for the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment"). We encourage all Council of Europe member states to implement it. We count on those Council of Europe member states, which have not yet acceded to the relevant Protocols to the European Convention on Human Rights, to do so without delay. The Global Alliance for Torture-Free Trade today involves 62 states. We call on all states to join it and to step up efforts towards establishing common international standards on torture-free trade.

In the run up to the 2022 World Congress against the Death Penalty, we will continue to support increased public debate and awareness-raising activities concerning the death penalty and its appalling impact on families and societies. We will not stop our work and our vigilance, our dialogue with those who have not yet accomplished abolition and our support to civil society and NGOs until no further death sentence is applied.