



International Commission
against the Death Penalty

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Statement by the International Commission against the Death Penalty: ICDP at United Nations high-level event at UNGA, New York on “Moving Away from the Death Penalty: National Leadership”

On 25 September, the United Nations (UN)'s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights held a high-level event during the 69th session of the UN General Assembly in New York on the role of political leadership as States take steps to move away from the death penalty.

Keynote speakers of the panel included UN Deputy Secretary-General Mr. Jan Eliasson, the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, President Tsachiagiin Elbegdorj of Mongolia, President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki of the Republic of Tunisia, the Prime Minister Matteo Renzi of Italy who is also presently the President of the Council of the European Union and a representative of the President Thomas Boni Yayi of the Republic of Benin. The event was moderated by UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Mr. Ivan Šimonović. Commissioner Bill Richardson represented ICDP and several Support Group Member States made important contributions to the discussion.

During the event, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid launched a publication by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Moving Away from the Death Penalty, Arguments, Trends and Perspectives* which featured an article by ICDP President Federico Mayor titled “Leadership and the abolition of the death penalty.”

Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson pointed out the arbitrariness of the death penalty and called for more principled leadership to abolish capital punishment and stated that much more needed to be done to fight the death penalty as it is “unjust and incompatible with fundamental rights.” He exhorted the representatives of the UN Member States to become a State Party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty in order to “outlaw executions under international law”.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein delivered his first public statement on the death penalty since taking office in September 2014. He called the death penalty a “degrading and cruel” punishment and “the very example of human vengeance at its worst”. The Commissioner emphasized the discriminative, wrongful and incorrect application of the death penalty which is “intolerable”. Moreover, he offered the advice and assistance of his Office to those States that have not yet abolished capital punishment.

The President of Mongolia Tsachiagiin Elbegdorj delivered an inspirational statement against the death penalty. He shared his experiences of



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providing political leadership in Mongolia's move away from the death penalty and stressed the inhumanity of the punishment. Additionally, he called for an end of State killing arguing that "only when the death penalty is abolished we shall be able to genuinely enhance the value of human life". He deplored the inhuman, discriminative and secret nature of the death penalty and called upon international leaders to use their power to change the public opinion and to abolish capital punishment.

In his passionate intervention, ICDP Commissioner and former Governor of the US state of New Mexico Bill Richardson spoke about his own experiences with the death penalty; how he had changed his mind after having once been a supporter of capital punishment through conversations with exonerated prisoners and after intensive studies on the topic which made him aware of racial discrepancies surrounding the death penalty and of the poor legal representation provided to many defendants in the USA. Commissioner Richardson emphasized that no State, no nation, no legal system can, with certainty, remove the risk of executing an innocent person. He introduced the ICDP and thanked the role of Norway, Spain and Switzerland and the speech of President Elbegdordj of Mongolia.

"I strongly welcome the organisation of such a high level panel by the OHCHR on a crucial aspect related to the move away from the death penalty at the UN General Assembly. ICDP and I also note the timeliness of this event and the launch of an important publication in the light of the upcoming vote on the United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for the establishment of a global moratorium in December 2014," said ICDP President Federico Mayor.

ICDP considers these developments in the UN as important milestones as the world moves away from the death penalty.

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Background

ICDP was founded in Madrid in October 2010. ICDP is currently composed of 14 personalities of high international standing from all regions of the world who act with total independence and neutrality and work under its President Mr Federico Mayor.

ICDP opposes the death penalty under any circumstances believing that it violates the right to life enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ICDP promotes the abolition of capital punishment in law in those states that observe a de facto moratorium on the use of the death penalty and promotes moratoriums on executions in states that rarely use the death penalty. In states that continue to carry out executions ICDP urges strict adherence to international standards.

ICDP works with the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, governments and nongovernmental organizations to further the abolition of capital punishment worldwide.

The work of the ICDP is supported by a diverse group of 18 states from all regions of the world that are committed to abolition of the death penalty. Its secretariat is based in Geneva