



The Holy See

VIDEO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE 7th CONGRESS AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

[Brussels, 27 February - 1 March 2019]

[Multimedia]

I greet the organizers and participants in the Seventh World Congress Against the Death Penalty, being held in Brussels.

Human life is a gift we have received, the most important and primary gift, the source of all the other gifts and of all the other rights. And, as such, it needs to be protected. Moreover, for a believer, the human being was created in the image and likeness of God. However, both for believers and non-believers, each life is good and its dignity must be protected without exceptions.

Hence, capital punishment implies a grave violation of the right to life that every person has. While it is true that human societies and communities must often face very grave crimes committed against the common good and the security of people, it is equally true that today there are other means to expiate the harm caused, and detention systems are increasingly effective at protecting society from the evil that some individuals can cause. On the other hand, we must never abandon the conviction to offer even those who are guilty of crimes the opportunity to repent.

For this reason, it never ceases to be a positive sign that there are increasingly more countries that focus on life and that no longer employ the death penalty, or have eliminated it completely from their criminal legislation.

The Church has always defended life, and her view on the death penalty has matured. Hence, I wished that this point be modified in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The death penalty was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and also to protect the common good. However, the dignity of a person is not lost even when he or she has committed the worst of crimes. No one's life may be taken away, nor may one be deprived of the opportunity to embrace once again the community that he or she has wounded and caused to suffer.

The aim of the worldwide abolishment of the death penalty is a courageous affirmation of the principle of the dignity of the human person and of the conviction that the human race can address crime, and likewise reject evil, by offering the convict the opportunity and the time to mend the damage caused, to consider the act committed, and thus be able to change his or her life, at least interiorly.

I accompany you with my prayer and I encourage you in your works and deliberations, as well as the governments and all those who have responsibilities in their countries, so that the necessary steps may be taken towards the total abolition of the death penalty. It is in our power to recognize the dignity of each person and to work so that other lives not be eliminated, but won for the good of all society.

Thank you.