



Promoting fair and effective criminal justice

Dear Chair

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to address this meeting.

This is a joint statement on behalf of Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), Penal Reform International, the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, FIDH, the Advocates for Human Rights, Comunidad de Sant'Egidio, Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM), Death Penalty Focus, Collectif français libérons Mumia, Culture pour la Paix et la Justice, Fédération internationale de l'Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture (FIACAT), Lawyers For Human Rights International (LFHRI) and the Academic Council of the United Nations System (ACUNS).

We welcome the ninth quinquennial report of the UN Secretary-General on 'Capital punishment and implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty'. We welcome the report's comprehensive nature and the fact that growing numbers of countries are abolishing the death penalty in law and practice. We encourage all states to abolish the death penalty and to ratify Optional Protocol 2 to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which deals with abolition of the death penalty, and any relevant regional instruments. We welcome the adoption by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights of the draft Protocol on the abolition of the death penalty in Africa, and encourage member states of the African Union to adopt the protocol at the earliest opportunity.

We welcome the inclusion in the report of the growing range of issues and concerns about the death penalty. We appreciate the attention given to the time on death row and the recognition that the negative impacts of the death penalty are not just about being executed. We also value the focus on the impact of the death penalty on children of parents sentenced to death and other family members of those facing the death penalty. We hope that future reports will include the impacts of the death penalty on other affected groups, such as judges, lawyers and prison staff. Research has found that guards who participate in executions can feel 'mentally tortured' by their participation and develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, while those who guard prisoners on death row, often for many years, are frequently distressed when prisoners are taken to be executed. Lawyers who defend people facing death can feel that the struggle to save their client's life overwhelms the rest of their life, causing panic attacks and nightmares. The execution itself is devastating for them, and can cause numbness, flashbacks and depression that may last for months or years.

We appreciate the attention in the quinquennial report to the use of the death penalty for drug-related offences, given the upcoming UN General Assembly Special Session on drugs in 2016 and that the 2015 World Day Against the Death Penalty, on 10 October this year, will have as its theme the death penalty for drug offences. We support the report's assertion that 'because the term "most serious crimes" is an international standard, States are not free to claim they comply with it merely because the crime in question is seen as serious in their specific context.' Drug offences have been excluded by UN Special Rapporteurs from the

category of 'most serious crimes' and we consider the death penalty to be an inappropriate and disproportionate response to drug-related offences.

We look forward to discussing these issues further at the side event 'The Death Penalty - A Conversation with Professor William Schabas', taking place tomorrow at 1.10pm in Conference Room M7.