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The Inhuman Death Penalty Must End

A Crude Method of Revenge

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The fact that the death penalty is still enforced in a world in which there is increasing access to freedoms – such an important part of life – and in which a democratic perspective is now dominant, is one of the most terrible marks of shame facing mankind. No matter what their crime may be, sentencing someone to death is an unacceptably cruel and primitive. Punishment exists to discipline people, and the aim in present-day sentencing policy is to reform and reintroduce that person into society, but any possibility of that is removed when they are sent off to be killed.

The right to life is the most basic right, and is possessed from the moment of birth. Indeed, without the right to life, all other rights and freedoms are meaningless. The death penalty is the most terrifying violation of this right, enshrined in international agreements and declarations.

Those in favor of the death penalty maintain that it is the most effective way of deterring serious crimes and that it is essential for the state to discharge its duty to protect the social order. However, the state's right to punish does not include putting an end to life.

The death penalty is a crude and simplistic means of revenge devoid of any humanity or rationality. The state and the law cannot act out of feelings of revenge. The responsibility of the state is to protect the life of all, without exception.

The only Western country in which the death penalty is enforced is the USA, with 38 out of 50 states keeping it in their statutes. There are some 24,000 people currently waiting their turn to be executed in the country. It is astonishing that the USA, which regards itself as the greatest advocate of human rights and liberties and accuses other countries of human rights violations, engages in such an inhuman practice before the eyes of the world and is not subjected to adequate condemnation in that respect. Condemnations within the USA are not enough either; both public opinion and the government and the media are largely in favor of the death penalty.

It is also a fact that the justice and legal system – being operated by human beings – will increase the likelihood of judicial error. Human beings are of course prone to make mistakes; the slightest judicial error could result in the death of an innocent person and that also constitutes a grave error in terms of human rights violations. The death penalty is an irreversible punishment. Many people are known to have been executed in error or on political grounds. It has subsequently emerged that innocent people have been unjustly executed due to errors in police procedures, thus making a proper defense impossible. One hundred forty-six people on death row have subsequently been found innocent and released in the last 40 years.

Another disgraceful state of affairs in terms of violations of human rights in the U.S. is sentencing mentally ill people to death. Although this violates international law, federal courts still sentence mentally unbalanced people to death. In addition, the fact that racism is an unfortunate fact of life within the judicial system makes the U.S. one of the leading countries in terms of human rights violations. African Americans, Asians and Hispanics frequently complain of being subjected to racist attacks and deprived of their basic citizenship rights. African American citizens and people of other ethnic origins say they are invariably regarded as potential criminals and are subjected to mistreatment. The number of African American citizens and citizens of other ethnicities sentenced and held in U.S. jails is much higher than that of whites.

Another human rights violation in America is that poor people are more often sentenced to death. As confirmed by the Supreme Court, a defendant with a good defense team in court can usually escape the death penalty; however, a good defense team costs a great deal of money, and if a defendant is poor, he or she has no access to such counsel.

History has witnessed numerous savage punishments that have gone down as crimes against humanity. That includes numerous dark deeds, such as female children being buried alive and the courts of the Inquisition. Another example is the way in which torture was a legally permissible practice for much of history, but is now regarded as a crime in almost the entire world. The death penalty is another such outmoded punishment that needs to be abolished. It is enough to isolate a criminal from society in a prison cell. All countries that still enforce capital punishment therefore need to adopt a civilized and humane approach and alter their legal systems so that the most severe penalty becomes life imprisonment. That is a basic precondition for being a state of law.

There is no doubt that countries such as China and the USA and all other countries that still impose capital punishment would lose nothing by bringing their sentencing systems in line with humanity and good conscience by abandoning the harsh policies they have exhibited to date, and they would benefit greatly from it. Capital punishment deprives people of their most basic right, the right to life, and therefore free will and honor. When a person is deprived of the right to life,

when his free will and honor are taken away in other words, the good name of the state is also damaged. The countries in question will regain their honor and enjoy respect in the eyes of the world when they put an end to the inhuman practice of capital punishment.