

**Declaration by the Youth Ambassadors for the Abolition of the Death Penalty on the occasion of the European and World Day against the Death Penalty
10/10/2024**

We, the Youth Ambassadors for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, the youth of Europe and the world, unite today to call for the universal abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances. In a time of increasing global challenges, we wish to reaffirm that justice, human rights, and equality are core principles that must guide our societies. The death penalty stands in violation of these principles, representing an inhumane, discriminatory and irreversible form of punishment. In 2023, at least 1,153 known executions were conducted in the world, an increase of 31% from 883 in 2022¹. According to Amnesty International, Iran alone accounted for 74% of all recorded executions in 2023 and Saudi Arabia for 15%. This alarming rise demands our urgent attention and action.

Although Europe has made significant strides towards the abolition of the death penalty, recent calls for its reinstatement, driven by fear and political instability, threaten to reverse decades of hard-won progress. Pro-death penalty movements challenge fundamental human rights principles as well as the international and regional legal commitments ratified by most European countries. It is our responsibility to resist these harmful narratives and work towards ensuring that no government has the power to take a life. Despite Europe's positive direction regarding the abolition of the death penalty, Belarus persists in employing the death penalty as a form of punishment and introduced a new offense punishable by death in 2023². That's why we believe we must advocate for both retentionist countries in Europe and beyond, as well as for de facto and legal abolitionists, to make the universal abolition of the death penalty a definitive reality.

One of the most frequently cited arguments in favour of the death penalty is its alleged deterrent effect on crime. However, this theory lacks empirical backing, as current scientific research fails to provide credible evidence that the death penalty effectively deters crime. In fact, countries that have abolished the death penalty frequently report lower rates of violent crime afterward. For instance, Canada saw a 44% decrease in murder rates following its abolition. Rather than preventing violence, capital punishment perpetuates cycles of it. This is why the theme for this year's European and World Day Against the Death Penalty, "The Death Penalty Protects No One," is more important than ever.

We also wish to highlight the violations of international law by multiple countries that impose the death penalty and carry out executions based on prohibited legal grounds, particularly concerning vulnerable populations such as minors and individuals with disabilities³. Retentionist states must at least align themselves with international law and standards while making progress toward the universal abolition of the death penalty.

As a diverse network of youth advocates, we share common values and principles. While representing various nationalities, ages, cultures, beliefs, and experiences, we remain united to create a future where justice is rooted in fairness, dignity, and respect for human life. Together, we have critically assessed through dialogue the complex social, legal and moral implications that flow from the application of capital punishment. We do not want governments to execute individuals in the name of the people. We do not want lives to be taken in our names. We stand for the universal abolition of the death penalty everywhere.

By writing this declaration we aim to:

¹Amnesty International, Global Report, Death Sentence and Executions, 2023, p.9

²Amnesty International, Global Report, Death Sentence and Executions, 2023, p.32

³Amnesty International, Global Report, Death Sentence and Executions, 2023, p. 10

- Raise awareness: we seek to inform and engage the public and policymakers about the reality of the death penalty.
- Promote human rights: the abolition of the death penalty is central to the protection of fundamental human rights. It is linked to the prevention of torture, the right to life, and the need for justice systems free from discrimination and error.
- Achieve permanent and universal abolition: we are committed to working towards the permanent abolition of the death penalty in all countries, ensuring that this inhumane practice becomes a relic of the past.
- Fight misconceptions and prejudice: we aim to challenge and debunk myths about the death penalty's effectiveness, particularly its supposed deterrence effect, by underlining the role of research and evidence that show it does not prevent crime.

We call upon governments, civil society, and international institutions to:

- Advocate for the universal abolition of the Death Penalty;
- Communicate on the number of death sentences and executions in the world to inform on the realities of its practices across States and territories;
- Call to action for partner organizations and civil society to support the universal abolition of the death penalty;
- Partner with youth in meaningful ways to raise awareness and fight against the resurgence of pro-death penalty narratives;
- Empower both youth led and non-youth led abolitionist movements;
- Support educational and training programs that highlight the inhumanity of the death penalty;
- Promote restorative justice practices that focus on healing, accountability, rehabilitation and addressing the root causes of crime, rather than retribution;

We urge non-abolitionist States to:

- Stop sentencing people to death and cease executions;
- Commit to transparency in justice systems, including the release of accurate data on death row and execution statistics, and to prevent abuses of power;
- Progress towards the abolition of the death penalty;
- Ratify the International and regional legal instruments prohibiting the use of the death penalty;
- Reaffirm the support to the progression of the abolition of the death penalty by voting in favour of the moratory UN resolution;
- Call on other States and territories to abolish the death penalty.

On this European and World Day for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, we stand united in our belief that the youth of today can and will shape a future free from the death penalty. Together, we can build a world where justice is defined not by vengeance, but by a fair justice system protecting the dignity of all human life.