

# **DEATH PENALTY FOCUS**

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***For Immediate Release***  
***November 29, 2006***

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## **World Day of Cities Against the Death Penalty Cities and Capitals Around the Globe Prepare to Celebrate 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Event Opposing the Death Penalty**

November 29, 2006 - On Thursday, November 30, 2006 the *World Coalition Against the Death Penalty* - comprised of major international organizations including Amnesty International, Death Penalty Focus, Community of Sant'Egidio, Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort, Penal Reform International and FIACAT - will be joining the government leaders of more than 550 cities around the world, including 15 national capitals, in celebrating the 5th Annual World Day of Cities Against the Death Penalty.

Opposition to capital punishment is building globally. According to Amnesty International, 94 percent of all known executions take place in just four countries: China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the USA. All western democracies, except the United States, have abolished the death penalty. Most world religions and all human rights organizations have made it their mission to abolish the death penalty. International declarations, treaties and covenants prohibit it and within the United States more than 80 percent of all executions take place in only a handful of southern states.

Recently, momentum has increased to end the practice of state killing in the United States. The recent decisions of the United States Supreme Court declaring the death penalty unconstitutional for juveniles and the mentally retarded, and the decline of death sentences and executions, indicate that the courts are becoming increasingly critical of the American death system. A May 2006 Gallup Poll indicated that more Americans preferred Life Without Parole (48%) over the death penalty (47%) as a punishment for murder.

Lance Lindsey, Executive Director of Death Penalty Focus stated, "Globally, the death penalty is widely unpopular and practiced by only a handful of nations, most of which have abysmal records of extensive human rights abuses. The United States is increasingly isolated within the community of western democratic nations in its brutal and brutalizing practice of killing prisoners."

Mike Farrell, President of Death Penalty Focus said, "The killing of prisoners is a reprehensible political practice that serves no public safety purpose. The majority of nations in the world understand this and have abolished the death penalty. I am confident the US will eventually catch up to the rest of the civilized world and end judicial killing in our lifetime."

The *World Coalition Against the Death Penalty* was founded in May 2002, in Rome, at the headquarters of the international human rights organization, the Community of Sant'Egidio and the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual World Day of Cities Against the Death Penalty was launched on November 30<sup>th</sup> of that year. Since then, more than 550 cities, including 15 national capitals, have participated by illuminating a city landmark on this day and by hosting an educational event for the public. Monuments that have been illuminated include: the Coliseum in Rome; the Atomium in Brussels; the cathedral square in Barcelona; the Moneda Palace in Santiago; and the Casa Rosada in Buenos Aires.

Death Penalty Focus is a non-profit organization and one of the nation's largest membership-based organizations dedicated to abolishing capital punishment.

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