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More Than 100 International Organizations Gathered in San Francisco to Oppose the United States' Continued Use of the Death Penalty

SAN FRANCISCO, CA--On June 12 and 13, the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty met in San Francisco, marking the first time that more than 100 international organizations working for alternatives to the death penalty have gathered on U.S. soil.

San Francisco-based Death Penalty Focus co-hosted a free one-day conference for the public and World Coalition members on Saturday at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law.

"The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty gathering was a historic event that brought together death penalty opponents from all over the world," said Elizabeth Zitrin, International Outreach and Communications Coordinator for Death Penalty Focus. "The conference was a chance for American death penalty opponents to learn from activists from around the world and share strategies for worldwide abolition."

The conference included panel discussions lead by victim's families, wrongfully convicted death row prisoners, and former members of law enforcement opposed to the death penalty.

Darryl Stallworth, a former Alameda County prosecutor who currently opposes the death penalty, spoke about his experience prosecuting a capital case and the difficulty he experienced arguing for the death of another human being.

"I had to make him a monster," Stallworth said. "I had to dehumanize him. In all reality, we kill people because we hate them. We don't do it because it deters crime, because it doesn't. We don't do it to help victims' families either, because it doesn't. In fact, it often makes it worse."

Randy Steidl, who was wrongly convicted of murder and sentenced to death, serving 17 years before being exonerated, told his story to illustrate how an innocent man could be convicted.

"If it was not for outside resources, like college students and news media, I'd be dead today," he said. "That's the power our system has."

The World Coalition includes 105 organizations from 35 nations on five continents, all committed to universal abolition of the death penalty. According to Zitrin, the Coalition has been instrumental in urging the United Nations to adopt a worldwide moratorium on all executions, and they chose to meet in the United States out of concern about the continued use of the death penalty in this country.

“The vast majority of the world’s nations no longer use the death penalty,” said Stefanie Faucher, Associate Director of Death Penalty Focus. “95% of executions occur in just five countries: China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. The recent rejection of California’s proposed lethal injection protocols once again shows how broken our death penalty system is, and now the world is showing us a better way to provide swift and certain justice instead of decades of uncertainty and delay.”

Organizations that attended the WCADP meetings included France's leading abolition organization Ensemble contre la peine de mort, the Community of Sant'Egidio, Amnesty International, Penal Reform International, Murder Victims Families for Human Rights, the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty, and other organizations from the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

“We must work together to help countries with the death penalty to realize the importance of a moratorium,” said Hsinyi Lin, Executive Director of the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty. “The members of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty are our best partners and our supporters.”

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