Facts on the death penalty

Juan Melendez spent 17 years on Florida's Death Row for a crime he did not commit. In December 2001, his conviction was overturned because prosecutors at his original trial had withheld key evidence.

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The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights. It is the premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state in the name of justice. It violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, whatever form it takes—electrocution, hanging, gassing, beheading, stoning, shooting or lethal injection.

There can never be any justification for torture or for cruel treatment. Like torture, an execution constitutes an extreme physical and mental assault on an individual. The physical pain caused by the action of killing a human being cannot be quantified, nor can the psychological suffering caused by foreknowledge of death at the hands of the state.

The death penalty is discriminatory and is often used disproportionately against the poor, minorities and members of racial, ethnic and religious communities. It is imposed and carried out arbitrarily. In some countries, it is used as a tool of repression to silence the political opposition.

In other countries, flaws in the judicial process are exacerbated by discrimination, prosecutorial misconduct and inadequate legal representation.

As long as human justice remains fallible, the risk of executing the innocent can never be eliminated.

The death penalty:

- denies the possibility of rehabilitation and reconciliation.
- promotes simplistic responses to complex human problems, rather than pursuing explanations that could inform positive strategies.
- prolongs the suffering of the murder victim's family, and extends that suffering to the loved ones of the condemned prisoner.
- diverts resources and energy that could be better used to work against violent crime and assist those affected by it.
- is a symptom of a culture of violence, not a solution to it. It is an affront to human dignity.
- should be abolished. Now.