

Brussels, 10 October 2008

Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner calls for continued efforts to achieve universal abolition of death penalty

On the occasion of the World and European Day against the Death Penalty Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner said: "I am proud of the EU's leading role in the international efforts to abolish the death penalty. Although over half the countries in the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice, the global figures for its use remain much too high. I fully recognize the plight of victims of violent crime, but the death penalty is not the solution. On the contrary, it only serves to aggravate a culture of violence and retribution. The Commission is determined to work towards the universal abolition of the death penalty through all available diplomatic channels and as a leading donor in this field.

A culmination of the EU's efforts, actively supported by states from all regions of the world, was the adoption of the resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty, by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2007.

EU encourages public debate, strengthening public opposition and putting pressure on retentionist countries to abolish the death penalty, or at least introduce a moratorium as a first step. The EU also acts against the death penalty in multilateral fora, such as the United Nations; a culmination of this effort was the resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 2007. The EU's political commitment has been matched by substantial financial support for concrete projects, given that the death penalty is one of the priorities under the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

- 92 countries and territories have abolished the death penalty for all crimes;
- 10 countries have abolished the death penalty for all but exceptional crimes such as wartime crimes;
- 35 countries can be considered abolitionist in practice. They retain the death penalty in law but have not carried out any executions for the past 10 years or more and are believed to have a policy or established practice of not carrying out executions.

This makes a total of 137 countries which have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Since 2005, ten countries have abolished the death penalty.

However, figures of death penalty application around the world still remain high. During 2007, at least 1,252 people were executed in 24 countries, and at least 3,347 people were sentenced to death in 51 countries. 88 per cent of all known executions took place in five countries: China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the USA. The EU's action, as the worldwide leader on the fight against death penalty, remains urgent and necessary.

Under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, more than €15 million have been allocated to support civil society projects since 1994, aimed at raising public awareness in retentionist countries through public education, outreach to influence public opinion, studies on how states' death penalty systems comply with international minimum standards, informing and supporting strategies for replacing the death penalty and efforts for securing the access of death row inmates to appropriate levels of legal support and training for lawyers.

For more information:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/adp/index.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/worldwide/eidhr/index_en.htm