



*DRAFT 25 June 2013 5.45 p.m.*

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS AT HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON THE DEATH PENALTY**  
**New York, 28 June 2013**

Excellencies,  
Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the second in a series of UN panel discussions on moving away from the death penalty.

I thank the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for organizing it.

And I particularly welcome the participation of Mr. Damien Echols, an innocent man who spent 18 years on death row.

He is one of too many people around the world who have endured the nightmare of injustice compounded by the threat of death.

Others did not survive despite their innocence.

These individuals prove more powerfully than any words why we must do away with the death penalty.

The taking of life is too absolute, too irreversible, for one human being to inflict on another, even when backed by legal process.

That legal process will be discussed today.

We have a duty to prevent innocent people from paying the ultimate price for miscarriages of justice.

The most sensible way is to end the death penalty.

This cause is embraced by an ever-growing coalition – from human rights defenders, civil rights organizations and faith leaders to law enforcement officials, political representatives and families of murder victims.

In 2007, the UN General Assembly took a significant step toward the abolition of capital punishment – and the protection of human rights -- by endorsing a call for a worldwide moratorium.

Since that landmark vote, the trend against the death penalty has gained momentum in every region and across legal systems, traditions, customs and religious backgrounds.

There are now 76 Parties to the 1989 Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aimed at ending capital punishment.

More than 150 countries have either abolished the death penalty or do not practice it.

Last year, 174 of the 193 Member States of the United Nations were execution-free.

Since 2007, Argentina, Burundi, Gabon, Latvia, Togo and Uzbekistan have abolished the death penalty.

In the past year, Benin and Mongolia initiated measures to follow suit.

In May this year, Maryland became the 18<sup>th</sup> of the United States of America to reject death as a punishment.

I particularly want to recognize former death row inmate Mr. Kirk Bloodsworth for his advocacy efforts in this regard.

A number of countries are also currently engaged in national dialogues on whether to introduce official moratoriums or to abolish the death penalty altogether.

Others are gradually restricting its use.

I welcome this trend and call on all Member States who still practice the death penalty or retain it in law to follow suit.

I also urge those countries that have resumed executions after maintaining a moratorium for many years to reconsider.

I also call for greater transparency.

My forthcoming report on the death penalty expresses particular concern that the application of the death penalty is often cloaked in secrecy.

The lack of data on the number of executions or individuals on death row is a serious impediment to any national debate on capital punishment.

But it is a debate that must continue until the world is free of this cruel punishment.

The General Assembly call for a global moratorium is a crucial stepping stone in the natural progression towards full worldwide abolition.

Let us do our utmost to put a final end to this inhumane and unjust practice.

I wish you a productive discussion.

Thank you.