

END THE DEATH PENALTY

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DEATH PENALTY MYTHS DEBUNKED

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MYTH:

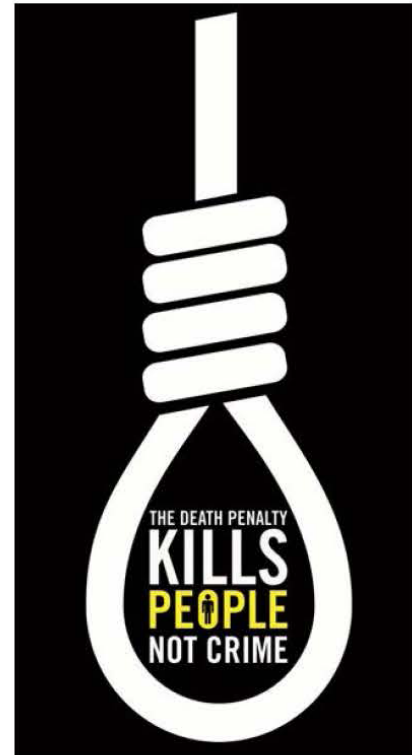
**THE DEATH PENALTY DETERS VIOLENT
CRIME AND MAKES SOCIETY SAFER.**

FACT:

There is no convincing evidence that the death penalty has a unique deterrent effect.

More than three decades after abolishing the death penalty, Canada's murder rate remains over one third lower than it was in 1976.

A 35-year study compared murder rates between Hong Kong, where there is no death penalty, and Singapore, which has a similar size population and executed regularly. The death penalty had little impact on crime rates.



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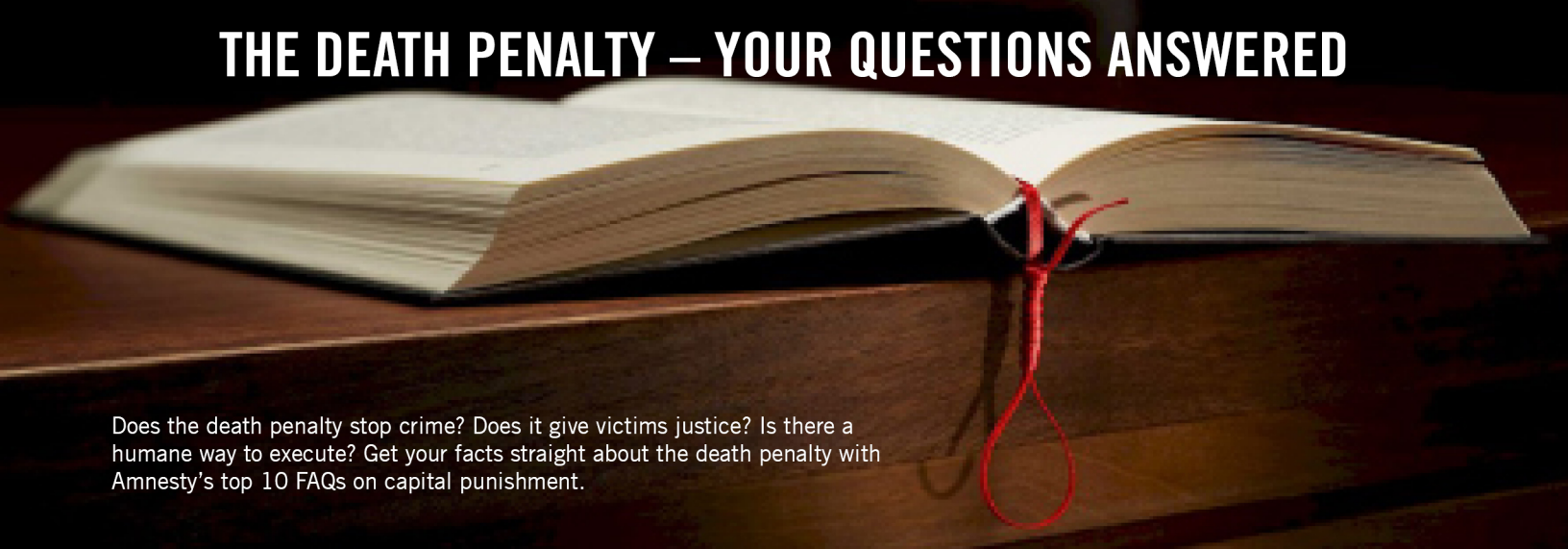


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**Countries
had completely abolished
the death penalty by the
end of 2015**

#NoToDeathPenalty

THE DEATH PENALTY – YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED



Does the death penalty stop crime? Does it give victims justice? Is there a humane way to execute? Get your facts straight about the death penalty with Amnesty's top 10 FAQs on capital punishment.

1. Why does Amnesty International oppose the death penalty?

The death penalty violates the most fundamental human right – the right to life. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

The death penalty is discriminatory. It is often used against the most vulnerable in society, including the poor, ethnic and religious minorities, and people with mental disabilities. Some governments use it to silence their opponents. Where justice systems are flawed and unfair trials rife, the risk of executing an innocent person is ever present.

When the death penalty is carried out, it is final. Mistakes that are made cannot be undone. An innocent person may be released from prison for a crime they did not commit, but an execution can never be reversed.

2. Don't victims of violent crime and their families have a right to justice?

They do. Those who have lost loved ones in terrible crimes have a right to see the person responsible held to account in a fair trial without recourse to the death penalty. In opposing the death penalty, we are not trying to minimize or condone crime. But as many families who have lost loved ones have said, the death penalty cannot genuinely relieve their suffering. It just extends that suffering to the family of the condemned person.

3. If you kill someone else, don't you deserve to die, too – “an eye for an eye”?

No. Executing someone because they've taken someone's life is revenge, not justice.

An execution – or the threat of one – inflicts terrible physical and psychological cruelty. Any society which executes offenders is committing the same violence it condemns.

4. Doesn't the death penalty prevent crime?

Not according to the research. There is no credible evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than a prison term. In fact, crime figures from countries which have banned the death penalty have not risen. In some cases they have actually gone down. In Canada, the murder rate in 2008 was less than half that in 1976 when the death penalty was abolished there.

5. What about capital punishment for terrorists?

Governments often resort to the death penalty in the aftermath of violent attacks, to demonstrate they are doing something to “protect” national security. But the threat of execution is unlikely to stop men and women prepared to die for their beliefs – for example, suicide bombers. Executions are just as likely to create martyrs whose memory becomes a rallying point for their organizations.

People accused of “terrorism” are especially likely to be sentenced to death after unfair trials. Many are condemned on the basis of “confessions” extracted through torture. In some cases, special or military courts set up through counter-terrorism laws have sentenced civilians to death, undermining international standards.

6. Isn't it better to execute someone than to lock them up forever?

Every day, men, women, even children, await execution on death row. Whatever their crime, whether they are guilty or innocent, their lives are claimed by a system of justice that values retribution over rehabilitation. As long as a prisoner remains alive, he or she can hope for rehabilitation, or to be exonerated if they are later found to be innocent.

7. Is there a humane and painless way to execute a person?

Any form of execution is inhumane. The lethal injection is often touted as somehow more humane because, on the surface at least, it appears less grotesque and barbaric than other forms of execution such as beheading, electrocution, gassing and hanging.

But the search for a “humane” way to kill people should be seen for what it really is – an attempt to make executions more palatable to the public in whose name they are being carried out, and to make the governments that execute appear less like killers themselves.

8. What business is it of Amnesty's if different societies want to use the death penalty?

Human rights – including the most basic right to life – are universal and endorsed by the vast majority of countries in the world. Our call to end the death penalty is consistent with the mercy, compassion and forgiveness that all major world religions emphasize. To date, 140 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice, demonstrating that the desire to end capital punishment is shared by cultures and societies in almost every region in the world.

9. What if public opinion is in favour of the death penalty?

Strong public support for the death penalty often goes hand in hand with a lack of reliable information about it – most often the mistaken belief that it will reduce crime. Many governments are quick to promote this erroneous belief even though there is no evidence to support it. Crucial factors that underlie how the death penalty is applied are often not understood. These include the risk of executing an innocent person, the unfairness of trials, and the discriminatory nature of the death penalty – all of which contribute to a fully informed view of capital punishment.

We believe governments need to be open about this information, while promoting respect for human rights through public education programmes. Only then can there be meaningful debate on the death penalty.

10. Is the battle to abolish the death penalty being won?

Yes. Today, two-thirds of countries in the world have either abolished the death penalty outright, or no longer use it in practice. Although there have been a few steps backwards, these must be weighed up against the clear worldwide trend towards abolition. In 2015 alone, Fiji, Madagascar and Suriname all turned their backs on the death penalty once and for all. Burkina Faso, Mongolia and South Korea are on their way to doing the same. Europe remains virtually free of the death penalty. And the USA, historically one of the nations most reluctant to give up the death penalty, is slowly turning against capital punishment.

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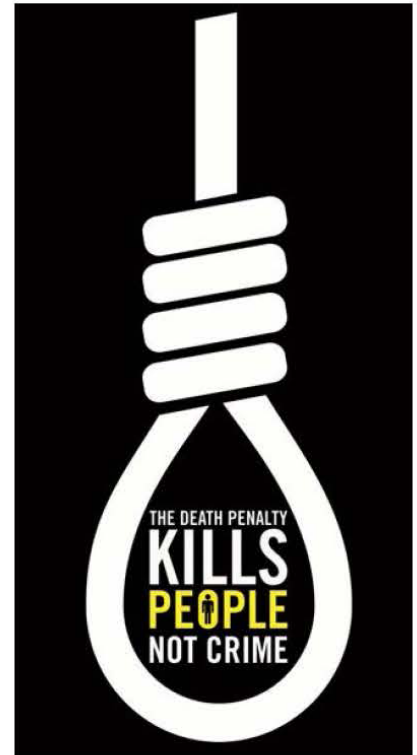
THE DEATH PENALTY IS FINE AS LONG AS THE MAJORITY OF THE PUBLIC SUPPORTS IT.

FACT:

History is littered with human rights violations that were supported by the majority, but which were subsequently looked upon with horror.

Slavery, racial segregation and lynching all had support in the societies where they occurred but constituted gross violations of the people's human rights. Ultimately, the duty of governments is to protect the rights of all individuals, even though sometimes this means acting against the views of the majority.

Moreover, public opinion often changes depending on political leadership and when objective information on the death penalty is provided to the public.



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**The death penalty
is a symptom
of a culture
of violence, not a
solution to it.**

10 REASONS TO OPPOSE THE DEATH PENALTY

- 1 THE DEATH PENALTY IS THE ULTIMATE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
- 2 IT VIOLATES THE RIGHT TO LIFE AS PROCLAIMED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
- 3 IT IS THE PREMEDITATED AND COLD-BLOODED KILLING OF A HUMAN BEING BY THE STATE IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE.
- 4 IT IS THE ULTIMATE CRUEL, INHUMAN AND DEGRADING PUNISHMENT.
- 5 THE DEATH PENALTY IS NOT A UNIQUE DETERRENT TO CRIME.
- 6 THE DEATH PENALTY IS DISCRIMINATORY AND IS OFTEN USED DISPROPORTIONATELY AGAINST THE MARGINALIZED SECTOR OF SOCIETY, THE POOR, MINORITIES AND MEMBERS OF RACIAL, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.
- 7 IT IS IMPOSED AND CARRIED OUT ARBITRARILY.
- 8 THE DEATH PENALTY LEGITIMIZES AN IRREVERSIBLE ACT OF VIOLENCE BY THE STATE AND WILL INEVITABLY CLAIM INNOCENT VICTIMS.
- 9 THE JUDICIARY IS COMPOSED OF PEOPLE WHO ARE FALLIBLE, THUS THE RISK OF EXECUTING THE INNOCENT CAN NEVER BE ELIMINATED.
- 10 EXECUTION BRINGS 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
KILLS
PEOPLE
NOT CRIME

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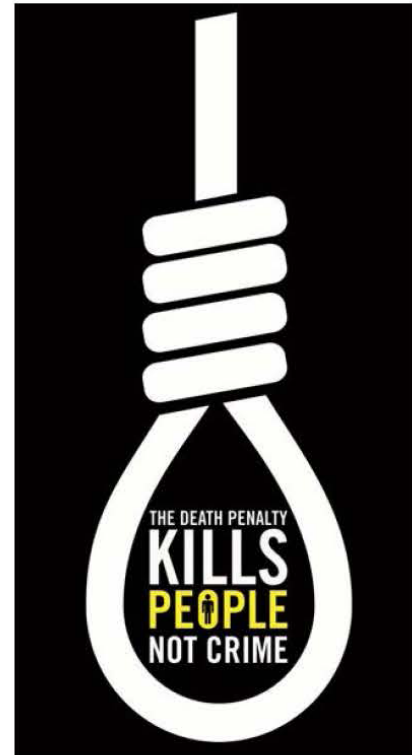
ALL PEOPLE WHO ARE EXECUTED HAVE BEEN PROVEN GUILTY OF SERIOUS CRIMES.

FACT:

Around the world, hundreds of prisoners are executed after grossly unfair trials. This can include the use of "confessions" extracted under torture, the denial of access to lawyers and inadequate legal representation.

The countries that execute the most are also the ones where serious concerns exist about the fairness of the justice system, such as in China, Iran and Iraq.

The 144 exonerations of death row prisoners recorded in the USA since 1973 show that, regardless of how many legal safeguards are in place, no justice system is free from error. As long as human justice remains fallible, the risk of executing the innocent can never be



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The Death Penalty is Discriminatory.

You are more likely to be sentenced to death if you are poor or belong to a racial, ethnic or religious minority because of discrimination in the justice system. Also, poor and marginalized groups have less access to the legal resources needed to defend themselves.

MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY



KILLING IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE

The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights. It is the premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being in the name of justice. 2015 saw a dramatic rise in the number of people executed – at least 1,634 – the highest recorded by Amnesty International since 1989.

When Amnesty International was founded in 1961, only nine countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes, and capital punishment was barely considered a human rights issue. More than half a century after, the trend towards worldwide abolition of the death penalty is unmistakeable.

The contribution of Amnesty International to humanity's long journey towards abolition of capital punishment has been fundamental. Soon after our foundation, we began sending appeals to prevent the executions of prisoners of conscience, but broadened our "total and unconditional opposition to the death penalty" to include all prisoners.

The application of the death penalty is often discriminatory and used disproportionately against the poor and marginalized. It is often imposed and carried out arbitrarily, in violation of international prohibitions and safeguards.

In some countries, the death penalty is used to silence political opposition. In other countries, flaws in the judicial process are exacerbated by discrimination, prosecutorial misconduct, a non-independent judiciary and inadequate legal representation. The risk of executing the innocent can never be eliminated.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to carry out the execution.

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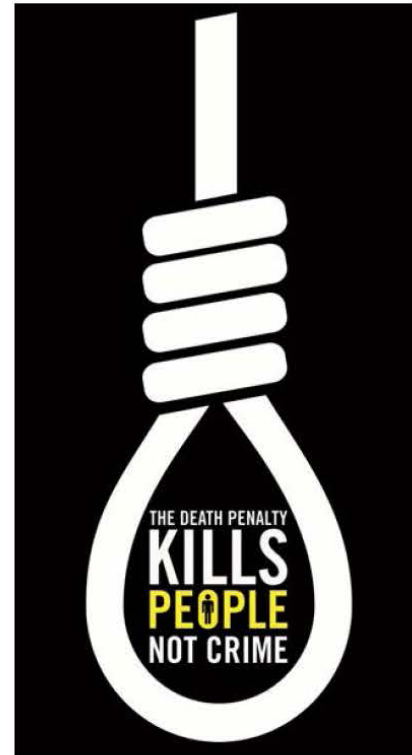
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MYTH:

Relatives of murder victims demand capital punishment.

FACT:

The worldwide anti-death penalty movement includes many who have lost their loved ones to, or have themselves been victims of, violent crime, but for ethical or religious reasons do not want the death penalty imposed "in their name". In the USA, organizations such as "Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights" are driving the movement to abolish the death penalty, for example, in New Hampshire.



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The death penalty breaches two essential human rights:
the right to life and
the right to live free from
torture. Both rights
are protected under the
Universal Declaration of
Human Rights,
adopted by the UN in 1948.