



JOINT STATEMENT

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Trinidad and Tobago: government urged to end crime, not lives

On the occasion of the 2016 World Day Against the Death Penalty, Amnesty International, the Greater Caribbean for Life, the Trinidad and Tobago Catholic Commission for Social Justice, and RED Initiatives are calling on the government of Trinidad and Tobago to urgently tackle the root causes of crime and end misleading statements that the death penalty has a unique deterrent effect.

The undersigned organizations are deeply concerned at daily reports of serious crime being perpetrated in Trinidad and Tobago, where, according to local media, 359 murders have been carried out this year so far. We urge the country's authorities to take immediate steps to protect people's lives and effectively tackle the root causes of crime.

While the authorities have taken some steps to put greater emphasis on long-term crime prevention measures, we remain concerned that the government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to present the death penalty as a crime control measure when publicly confronted with spiralling murder rates, making no effort to challenge the public perception that this punishment will deliver the security that people desire.

As recently as 2 September 2016, the Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, referred to the death penalty as an effective crime prevention measure. He also reiterated the government's intention to conclude proceedings in death penalty cases within the five year-period, after which death sentences must be commuted to comply with limits set up in regional jurisprudence.

There is no convincing evidence that capital punishment has a unique deterrent effect on crime. The most comprehensive survey of research findings carried out by the UN on the relationship between the death penalty and homicide rates concluded: "[R]esearch has failed to provide scientific proof that executions have a greater deterrent effect than life imprisonment. Such proof is unlikely to be forthcoming. The evidence as a whole still gives no positive support to the deterrent hypothesis". Statistics from countries that have abolished the death penalty show that the absence of the death penalty has not resulted in an increase in the crimes previously subject to capital punishment.

Trinidad and Tobago retains the mandatory death penalty. With the exception of the USA, where the number of death sentences imposed continues to decrease, Trinidad and Tobago was the only country in the Americas to impose death sentences in 2015. Its retention of the death penalty sets the country against the global trend towards abolition. Four more countries – Fiji, Madagascar, Republic of Congo and Suriname- became

abolitionist for all crimes in 2015 and Nauru became the 103rd abolitionist country this year. As of today, 140 countries are abolitionist in law or practice.

Our organizations oppose the death penalty unconditionally, in all cases and under any circumstances as a violation of the human right to life. We renew our calls on the government of Trinidad and Tobago to establish a moratorium on executions and repeal the mandatory death penalty as a first steps towards full abolition of this punishment.

Background

The Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago reported a total of 420 murders for 2015, only 57 of which were classified as detected. Amnesty International indicated in its overview of the global use of the death penalty that nine men were sentenced to the mandatory death penalty for murder in Trinidad and Tobago in 2015, an increase of 22% compared to 2014. Six of these death sentences were imposed in the same case. Thirty-two men remained under sentence of death at the end of the year.

A 2012 UN Development Programme report on human development and better citizen security considered the increase in crime and violence in the Caribbean, as well as the decrease in public confidence in the state capacity to protect people and ensure justice. The report identified critical steps, such as investment in education, youth-empowerment and employment; improvement in training of the police service and accountability mechanisms; the shortening the time spent by defendants in pre-trial detention and reduction of prison overcrowding; more transparent and corruption-free processes to manage the acquisition of firearms; better support for offenders management and alternatives to incarceration.

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than three million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories. The organisation exposes human rights violations and campaigns for justice around the world. It is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and is funded mainly by its membership and public donations.

The **Greater Caribbean for Life** is an independent, not-for-profit civil society organization constituted in October 2013 to unite Caribbean abolitionist organizations and individuals, reflecting the highest respect to right to live in the struggle against death penalty.

The **Catholic Commission for Social Justice** is a Trinidad and Tobago NGO which aims to be a fearless united voice challenging injustice, awakening social consciousness and fostering integral development through social justice education and advocacy; promoting people-centred development, and working for the transformation of inequitable structures and systems.

Red Initiatives is a grassroots NGO which has been focusing on HIV prevention programmes, access to health and social services, and promotion of human rights.