



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See  
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva  
at the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council – Item 3 – Biennial High-Level Panel on  
“The Death Penalty”

1<sup>st</sup> March 2017

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See thanks the High Commissioner and the distinguished panelists for their presentations. My Delegation appreciates the ongoing efforts toward the elimination of the death penalty in many countries.

Mr. Chairman,

My Delegation reaffirms that life is sacred “...from conception to natural death,”<sup>1</sup> and recalls the words Pope Francis, that “even a criminal has the inviolable right to life”.<sup>2</sup>

In this regard, one should consider that human justice is fallible and that the death penalty *per se* is irreversible. We should take into account that capital punishment always includes the possibility of taking the life of an innocent person. Moreover, we believe that, whenever possible, the legislative and judicial authorities must always seek to ensure the possibility for guilty parties to make amends and to remedy, at least in part, the impact of their crimes.

At present, there is insufficient evidence that the death penalty has a deterrent effect on crime. As Pope Francis recently has affirmed, in his letter to the President of the International Commission against the Death Penalty, “for a constitutional state the death penalty represents a failure, because it obliges a State to kill in the name of justice. But justice is never reached by killing a human being”.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Letter to the president of the International Commission Against the Death Penalty, 20 March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Angelus, 21 February 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Letter to the president of the International Commission Against the Death Penalty, 20 March 2015.

My Delegation believes that more humane measures are available to address crime, ensuring the victim the right to justice and giving the criminal the chance to reform. Moreover, this will facilitate the development of a more just and fair society, fully respectful of human dignity.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, the Holy See is strongly committed to the aim of abolishing the use of the death penalty, and we firmly support, as an interim measure, the *moratoria* established by the 2014 General Assembly resolution. Moreover, we take this occasion to encourage States to improve prison conditions in order to guarantee respect for the dignity of every person without regard for criminal status, and to ensure the implementation of the right of the accused to a fair trial and due process.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.