

HOLY SEE SUPPORTS INITIATIVES AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

VATICAN CITY, FEB 7, 2007 (VIS) - Made public today was a declaration of the Holy See delivered during the course of a world congress on the death penalty, held in Paris, France from February 1 to 3.

"The Paris congress," reads the French-language text, "is being celebrated at a time in which, because of recent executions, the campaign against the death penalty is facing new and disquieting challenges. Public opinion has become sensitized and has expressed its concern for a more effective recognition of the inalienable dignity of human beings, and of the universality and integrity of human rights, beginning with the right to life."

As in previous meetings on the same subject, "the Holy See takes this opportunity to welcome and affirm once more its support for all initiatives that aim to defend the inherent value and inviolability of all human life, from conception to natural end. In this perspective, it is worth noting that the use of the death penalty is not just a negation of the right to life, but also an affront to human dignity."

"The Catholic Church continues to maintain that the legitimate authorities of State have the duty to protect society from aggressors," but "some States traditionally include the death penalty among the means used to achieve this end," an option "that is difficult to justify today." States now have new ways "of preserving public order and people's safety," which include "offering the accused stimuli and encouragement" to mend their ways. Such non-lethal means of prevention and punishment "correspond better to the ... the common good and conform more to the dignity of the human person."

"Any decision to use the death penalty involves many dangers," such as "that of punishing the innocent, and the temptation to foment violent forms of revenge rather than true social justice." It is also "a clear offense against the inviolability of human life ... and, for Christians, an affront to the evangelical teaching of forgiveness."

"The Holy See," the text concludes, "reiterates its appreciation to the organizers of the congress, to governments, ... and to everyone who works ... to abolish the death penalty or to impose a universal moratorium on its use."

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