

Press Release

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"Capital punishment must be totally removed in all countries which strive to uphold democracy, the rule of law and human rights," says PACE President

Strasbourg, 10.10.2006 – "Capital punishment must be totally removed once and for all from the legislation of all countries which strive to uphold democracy, the rule of law and human rights," the President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), René van der Linden, said today to mark the World Day Against the Death Penalty.

"The death penalty has been abolished in all our member states, with just one exception, the Russian Federation", Mr van der Linden said. He urged the Russian authorities to show, vis-à-vis public opinion in their country, the same determination and persuasiveness displayed by the other Council of Europe member states, which had the political will and courage to abolish the death penalty despite the potential unpopularity of the measure. "The sentence of life imprisonment of the only surviving Beslan terrorist was a clear signal of Russia's respect of a *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty, but I hope that this moratorium could soon result in a *de jure* abolition of the death penalty," he said.

At the same time, he warned against all attempts to launch discussion on the re-introduction of the death penalty in Europe.

He also recalled that at its June 2006 session, the Assembly had noted with concern that the separatist territories, not recognised internationally, of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and the Dnestr Moldavian Republic do not observe the abolition of the death penalty by Georgia and Moldova respectively. "The Assembly believes that the death penalty should be abolished in these territories and that the sentences of all prisoners currently on death row in Abkhazia and the Dnestr Moldavian Republic should be immediately commuted to terms of imprisonment in order to put an end to the cruel and inhuman treatment of those who have been kept on death row for years in a state of uncertainty as to their ultimate fate," he stressed.

In respect of countries having observer status with the Council of Europe, he referred to earlier PACE Resolutions [1349 \(2003\)](#) and [1253 \(2001\)](#), in which the Assembly calls on Japan and the United States to place an immediate moratorium on executions and to take the necessary steps to abolish the death penalty. "The Assembly finds it inadmissible that these appeals have gone unheeded and that both Japan and the United States continue to apply the death penalty and violate their fundamental obligation to uphold human rights."

He finally called on all countries in the world which have not yet abolished the death penalty to follow the lead given by the 46-nation Council of Europe, a *de facto* "death-penalty-free zone".

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).