

Press Release

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The Council of Europe marks the 2nd European Day against the Death Penalty

Statement by Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 10.10.2008 - "A year ago, the Council of Europe established the European Day against the Death Penalty as the occasion for an annual public debate on why executing people is wrong. We are delighted that the European Union has decided to join this initiative.

Forty-six of our forty-seven member states have abolished the death penalty in law. Russia promised to join the rest within three years of joining the Council of Europe in 1996. This has not yet happened, but they took the first and very important steps of a moratorium so that the death penalty has been abolished in practice..

Two of our observer states – Canada and Mexico – have also abolished the death penalty. The other two – Japan and the USA – continue to execute people. The European Day against the Death Penalty is an opportunity to remind them that they are out of step with rest of the democratic and civilised world.

Finally, the European Day against the Death penalty is an opportunity to support the movement for a worldwide moratorium on executions. In December last year, 104 countries, from all continents, voted in favour of the UN General Assembly Resolution to this effect. I am confident that this inhuman and degrading form of punishment will soon be abolished across the world."

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 47 member states.