Welcome to the first issue of the Greater Caribbean for Life’s (GCL) Newsletter!

A brief history relating to the formation of this group may be helpful to the reader. Initially, a working group emerged from a Conference on the Death Penalty within the Greater Caribbean held in Madrid, Spain on October 17-19, 2011.

The main purpose of the Working Group was to create a sustainable organisation and network of persons and civil society organisations working towards the abolition of the death penalty and state executions. The Group adopted the title: The Greater Caribbean for Life (GCL) and developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which was circulated widely encouraging other interested persons to join forces with GCL.

On 1 October 2013, GCL organised an International Conference in partnership with The Catholic Commission for Social Justice, Trinidad and Tobago; Alpha Chambers, Trinidad and Tobago; the World Coalition against the Death Penalty; Community of Sant’Egidio, Italy; and the Puerto Rican Coalition against the Death Penalty. It was held at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago and was attended by abolitionists from the Caribbean region and further afield.

On October 2 2013, GCL held a meeting at Normandie Hotel, Trinidad, at which meeting those present adopted GCL’s Constitution, elected members to form its Executive Committee, and agreed on a Final Declaration. GCL’s main aim is to campaign for and work towards the permanent abolition of the death penalty in the Greater Caribbean and to support Caribbean abolitionist activists and organizations in this region. GCL is concerned to promote the dignity of each person and respect for all life.
The Executive Committee of the GCL was elected as follows:

- Leela Ramdeen, Catholic Commission for Social Justice- Trinidad and Tobago, Chair
- Carmelo Campos-Cruz, Puerto Rican Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Deputy-Chair
- Mariana Nogales-Molinelli, Puerto Rican Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Secretary
- Nicole Sylvester, President of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association, Deputy-Secretary
- Fenella Wenham, D’Infinite Inc., Dominica, Treasurer
- Dr. Lloyd Barnett, Independent Jamaica Council for Human Rights
- Mario Polanco, Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, Guatemala

Other members include:

- Antoinette Moore, Human Rights Commission of Belize, Belize
- Ayanna Nelson, Grenada
- Carmen Aida Ibarra, Movimiento Pro Justicia, Guatemala
- Elizardo Sanchez, Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconcilación Nacional, Cuba
- Elsworth Johnson, Bahamas Bar Association and Bahamas Human Rights, Bahamas
- Godfrey P. Smith, Marine Parade Chambers, Belize
- Rev. Gwenolyn Ruth Greaves, Hope Support Group, Trinidad and Tobago
- Rev. Peter Espeut, Jamaica
- R.E. Barnes, Bahamas Human Rights Network, Bahamas
- Selwyn Strachan, Grenada
- Sir Clare K. Roberts, Human Rights for All, Antigua and Barbuda
- Stephen Fraser, Fraser, Housty & Yearwood, Attorneys-at-Law, Guyana

News from the GCL

**APPOINTMENT OF A CONSULTANT**

In the months that followed its inauguration, GCL’s Executive created a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/GCFLife), inter alia, to raise awareness of its work. GCL was also able to secure funding and appointed a part-time Consultant for a period of 4 months. The Consultant is instrumental in assisting GCL in producing e.g. a high quality Pamphlet about GCL and its work, and supporting the Executive in the production of a Strategic Plan.

**GCL LEGALLY INCORPORATED UNDER THE LAWS OF PUERTO RICO**

On 31 January 2014, GCL was incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the laws of Puerto Rico.

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

On 23 January 2014, a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed between GCL, The Caribbean Institute for Human Rights, and the International Human Rights Clinic of the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, School of Law. The MOU will facilitate the preparation of Universal Periodic Review Shadow Reports on the Death Penalty for the countries of Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica and the USA (limited to Puerto Rico) and other reports sponsored by the United Nations Organization related to the Death Penalty.
The 11th World Day Against the Death Penalty (10 October 2013) was dedicated to the Greater Caribbean where few executions take place, but where a core of countries remain strongly opposed to abolition. GCL members organised a number of activities in their respective countries e.g. seeking to mobilise the media by raising awareness of death penalty issues via media releases, panel discussions on the death penalty and so on.

GCL members also organised activities on Human Rights Day (10 December 2013) as part of its educational campaign to raise awareness of issues relating to the death penalty and to change hearts and minds so that everyone will respect the right to life of each human being.

On 7 February 2014, GCL issued a Media Release urging the Government of the Bahamas to find non-lethal means to promote the safety and security of citizens (see GCL’s Facebook page). This followed a March in Nassau by more than 200 proponents of the Death Penalty, calling on the Government “to remove impediments to the resumption of capital punishment.” Nassau Guardian reported on GCL’s Media Release.

During two days of intense work, a draft logo, and an e-mail address were created and a clear action plan was agreed upon – focusing mainly on short-term action that should be taken. Ideas for medium and long-term action were also noted. GCL will shortly launch its Website and has a Twitter account as a means of developing a social media presence.

**CAMPAIGNING FOR ABOLITION IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN**

The 11th World Day Against the Death Penalty (10 October 2013) was dedicated to the Greater Caribbean where few executions take place, but where a core of countries remain strongly opposed to abolition. GCL members organised a number of activities in their respective countries e.g. seeking to mobilise the media by raising awareness of death penalty issues via media releases, panel discussions on the death penalty and so on.

With the exception of Nicole Sylvester, GCL’s Deputy-Secretary, Members of the Executive met with the Consultant on 11 and 12 January 2014 for its first meeting at the Universidad del Sagrado Corazón in Santurce, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Sadly, Ms. Sylvester was unable to attend as she was affected by the devastation of the floods that adversely impacted on St Vincent and the Grenadines and other islands in the Eastern Caribbean at that time.

**FIRST EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD IN SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO (SATURDAY 11 – SUNDAY 12 JANUARY, 2014)**

With the exception of Nicole Sylvester, GCL’s Deputy-Secretary, Members of the Executive met with the Consultant on 11 and 12 January 2014 for its first meeting at the Universidad del Sagrado Corazón in Santurce, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Sadly, Ms. Sylvester was unable to attend as she was affected by the devastation of the floods that adversely impacted on St Vincent and the Grenadines and other islands in the Eastern Caribbean at that time.
On 12 February 2014, GCL wrote to the Constitutional Reform Commission of Trinidad and Tobago strongly recommending that the Commission include a recommendation in its report to abolish capital punishment in the Trinidadian Constitution – in The Chapter on Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms. Following a series of consultations, the Commission produced a report with a recommendation that said Chapter should not be altered. GCL’s letter urges the Commission to re-consider this decision.

GCL members take advantage of every opportunity to appear e.g. on radio and TV programmes to promote its work.

**Outside the Caribbean**

GCL’s Chair was invited by the Community Sant’Egidio to send a brief message to be shown at the VIII International Congress of Ministers of Justice for the abolition of the death penalty, that was held in Rome in November 2013.

Use the link to access the proceedings. The presentation by GCL’s Chair can be seen at around 1 hour 45 minutes (1.45) into the proceedings (move the cursor to view her presentation).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4g6L1Jz1Og

**THE WAY FORWARD:**

There is much work to do. While GCL condemns the rise of violent crime in our region and expresses solidarity with victims, members reject the notion that capital punishment will act as a deterrent or foster respect for life in our communities.

GCL is committed to promoting peace, respect for life, and good neighbourliness as appropriate methods of reducing crime in the Greater Caribbean region. This provides a more durable and effective solution than the taking of life.

As we seek to build capacity and work to achieve our goals, we invite you to join us on our quest to: **Stop crime, not lives!**

295 Palmas Inn Way, Suite 134, Humacao, Puerto Rico 00791, Tel: 1(787)375-6787
15 Pinewood Avenue, Ridgeview Heights, Tacarigua, Trinidad, W.I., Tel: 1(868)299-8945

contact@gcfforlife.org  gcforlife.org  GCFLife  @GCLnoDP