Appointment of Juan Ángel Gutiérrez Rodríguez as Project Manager

GCL members wish our Project Coordinator, Giulia Pasquinelli, all the best as she moves into a new phase of her life. We thank her most sincerely for all that she has done to advance the goals of our organisation. We benefitted from her commitment, dedication and professionalism. She truly displayed initiative and creativity.

GCL welcomes Juan Ángel Gutiérrez Rodríguez, who joined GCL as Project Manager at the end of November 2015. Juan Ángel is already employing his knowledge, skills and experience to assist us as we chart our way forward to achieve the permanent abolition of the death penalty in each and every country of the Greater Caribbean region.

Speaking Tour 2015
(Barbados, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and St. Kitts and Nevis)
9 – 14 November 2015

After its successful Speaking Tour last year, GCL organised another Tour to various Caribbean countries. Barbados, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica were selected initially, but the latter was substituted by St. Kitts and Nevis after Tropical Storm Erica severely affected this country in September. It was GCL’s first formal visit to St. Vincent and the Grenadines and St. Kitts and Nevis. GCL was represented by Carmelo Campos-Cruz, Deputy Chair. He was accompanied by Bill Pelke, President and Cofounder of Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing, an organization led by murder victim family members who are opposed the death penalty.

Bill Pelke and Carmelo Campos Cruz been interviewed by Belle Holder CBC Channel TV 8

Quote of this issue

“With every cell of my being, and with every fiber of my memory, I oppose the death penalty in all forms... I do not believe any civilized society should be at the service of death”

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Prize

YOU CAN CONTACT US AT

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@gcforlife.org
- gcforlife.org
- GCFLife
- @GCLnoDP
Greater Caribbean for Life

The objectives of the tour were to raise awareness of the inhumanity of the death penalty; of its ineffectiveness as a crime reduction strategy; to meet with persons and institutions committed to working towards abolition, with the purpose of gathering first-hand information about the situation affecting our campaign in each country included in the Tour; and to establish a formal relationship with these individuals.

GCL's Tour commenced in Bridgetown, Barbados, where Carmelo and Bill were interviewed by journalists from Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation (Channel 8), Barbados Today and Daily Nation. Lively meetings were conducted with religious leaders, including Anglican Church Archdeacon, Eric Lynch; Canon Noel Burke, Chair of the Barbados Christian Council; and Reverend Cuthbert A. Edwards, Superintendent Minister of the Methodist Church. Legendary Barbadian composer and singer, Dr. Anthony Gabby Carter (a.k.a. Mighty Gabby), joined GCL and offered to write a song against capital punishment.

A conference was held at the Faculty of Law, University of West Indies at Cave Hill on 9 November. More than 90 law students from various Caribbean countries attended and the discussions were spirited. Mr Westmin R.E. James, Deputy Dean (Postgraduate and Research), addressed those gathered about the legal situation regarding the death penalty in Barbados. After a dynamic Q&A session, some students approached Carmelo and Bill and revealed that before the conference they were on the fence in this issue, but after participating in the conference, they have shifted their position and now oppose the death penalty. James Mc Gregor Millington, a student from Barbados joined GCL, becoming the first person from this country to join our organisation. Many others expressed their intention of joining GCL.

The Tour continued to Kingstown, St. Vincent, where Carmelo and Bill had the opportunity to meet with Bishop Calvert Leopold Friday of the Anglican Church. He shared with them a thoughtful analysis of where the Vincentian society stands in this issue.” The media and religious leaders were also contacted to promote GCL and the abolitionist campaign. The last stop of GCL's Speaking Tour was Basseterre, St. Kitts. There Carmelo and Bill had an opportunity to have an animated meeting with Sir Probyn Inniss, a prestigious lawyer and former Governor of St. Kitts, as well as Angela J. Inniss, who has represented defendants in three capital cases over the last years. They shared their concerns about the difficulties faced by lawyers representing defendants in capital trials and the need for legal resources and training programmes relating to such cases. Carmelo and Bill were also interviewed by Jaedee Caines, of ZIZ TV (Channel 5) for the evening news segment of this public station.

One of the main successes of GCL's tour was that we used every opportunity to send an unequivocal message about the inhumanity of State executions. Bill Pelke's powerful testimony of love and forgiveness from a murder victim in a capital case had a profound effect in Caribbean audiences. Also, due to the nature of our organization, it is clear that on-site visits are crucial for the development of a regional network, especially in countries with no membership. There is no substitute for face to face contact with key actors and partners.
CARIBBEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

Four members of GCL’s Executive, Leela Ramdeen, Chair; Carmelo Campos Cruz, Deputy Chair; Mariana Nogales, Secretary; and Dr Lloyd Barnett, as well as GCL member, Mary Francis, attended the above Conference which was organised by the Delegation of the European Union in Guyana, in cooperation with the British High Commission and the International Commission against the Death Penalty.

Dr. Barnett joined two other panelists and focused on: The Death Penalty in the Caribbean. The panel on which Leela Ramdeen participated focused on the topic: The Death Penalty as a deterrent: Does it work? Her presentation can be accessed via the following link: [http://gcforlife.org/2015/11/27/eu-conference-in-guyana-for-the-abolition-of-the-death-penalty/](http://gcforlife.org/2015/11/27/eu-conference-in-guyana-for-the-abolition-of-the-death-penalty/)

The three other GCL members present participated well during the Q&A sessions and all five GCL members embraced the opportunity, for example, to network with others and to recruit new members.

The conference which was funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the British High Commission in Guyana, was held in Guyana at the Arthur Chung International Conference Centre on 23 and 24 November 2015. It consisted of keynote speeches and a number of panel discussion on aspects of abolition of the death penalty.

It also considered “the various compelling reasons for the abolition of the death penalty, including the risk of executing innocent people, the incompatibility of the punishment with human rights and human dignity and its ineffectiveness in deterring crime.”

Participants included: His Excellency Jernej Videtič, Ambassador of the European Union; Honourable Raphael Trotman, Minister of Governance within the Ministry of the Presidency; Mr Fernando Ponz Cantó, Deputy Head of Division for the Caribbean, European External Action Service; Lord Navnit Dholakia, UK All Party Parliamentary Committee on Abolition of the Death Penalty; Dr. Asunta Vivó Cavaller, Secretary General, International Commission Against the Death Penalty (ICDP); Ms Ruth Wijdenbosch, former Deputy Chair of the National Assembly of Suriname; and Mr Derek Lambe, Head of Political, Press and Information, EU Delegation Guyana. GCL thanks Mr Lambe for including GCL in this important regional conference.

As reported, twenty-five participants came from Europe and the Caribbean region, as well as numerous participants from Guyana. The following organizations were also represented: the European External Action Service; the International Commission against the Death Penalty; the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Abolition of the Death Penalty, the World Coalition against the Death Penalty; Greater Caribbean for Life; Parliamentarians for Global Action; Guyana Human Rights Association; Justice Institute Guyana; Human Rights Commission Belize; National Human Rights Defense Network Haiti; and the Ministry of Legal Affairs of Guyana. The presence and participation of more than 100 5th and 6th Formers and University Students was welcomed.

While in Guyana, GCL Members took the opportunity to arrange for the delivery of three letters, one to each of the following: The Prime Minister of Guyana, Hon. Moses Nagamootoo, Honourable Basil Williams, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, and Hon Carl B. Greenidge, Minister of Foreign Affairs.
The following are extracts from the letters:

“1. GCL encourages the government of Guyana to vote in favour of the approval of a future resolution for a moratorium on executions at the General Assembly of the UN. Although we recognize that in the past your country voted against such resolutions, the moratorium will give your country an opportunity to evaluate the appropriateness of the death penalty as a measure to reduce crime. If voting in favour of this resolution is not an expedient option at this time, we respectfully recommend that, as a minimum and first step, your country should abstain in such a vote.

2. GCL urges you and your government to approve a formal moratorium on executions for a period of five years. This will be a positive step, and will allow ample time for the exploration of non-lethal means of dealing with crime and violence, especially as no person has been executed in your country since 1997.

3. GCL kindly requests that Guyana explores preventive strategies to address rising crime rates such as investing in education, youth development and job creation, reducing poverty and socio-economic inequality. These strategies can contribute to build a safer, more democratic and just society, without the having to resort to lethal means of dealing with crime. Our aim should be to stop crime, not lives.”

GCL shares with readers hereunder the conclusions and recommendations arising out of the conference:

CARIBBEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY
Arthur Chung Conference Centre, Georgetown, Guyana - 23/24 November 2015

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS
The European Union organized a Caribbean Regional Conference on the Abolition of the Death Penalty in partnership with the International Commission against the Death Penalty. The conference was funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the British High Commission in Guyana. Twenty-five participants came from Europe and the Caribbean region, as well as numerous participants from Guyana. The following organizations were also represented: the European External Action Service; the International Commission against the Death Penalty; the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Abolition of the Death Penalty, Greater Caribbean for Life; Parliamentarians for Global Action; Guyana Human Rights Association; Justice Institute Guyana; Human Rights Commission Belize; National Human Rights Defense Network Haiti; and the Ministry of Legal Affairs of Guyana.

Conclusions of the conference:

The risk of executing innocent people exists in any justice system:
There have been and always will be cases of executions of innocent people. No matter how developed a justice system is, it will always remain susceptible to human failure. Unlike prison sentences, the death penalty is irreversible and irreparable.

The arbitrary application of the death penalty can never be ruled out:
The death penalty is often used in a disproportional manner against the poor, minorities and members of racial, ethnic, political and religious groups.

The death penalty is incompatible with human rights and human dignity:
The death penalty violates the right to life, which happens to be the most basic of all human rights. It also violates the right not to be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. Furthermore, the death penalty undermines human dignity, which is inherent to every human being.

The death penalty does not deter crime effectively:
The death penalty lacks the deterrent effect, which is commonly referred to by its advocates. As recently stated
by the General Assembly of the United Nations, “there is no conclusive evidence of the deterrent value of the death penalty” (UNGA Resolution 65/206). It is noteworthy that in many retentionist states, the effectiveness of the death penalty in order to prevent crime is being seriously questioned by a continuously increasing number of law enforcement professionals.

**Public opinion is not a major stumbling block for abolition:**

Public support for the death penalty does not necessarily mean that taking away the life of a human being by the state is right. There are undisputed historical precedents where gross human rights violations had had the support of a majority of the people, but which were condemned vigorously later on. It is the job of leading figures and politicians to underline the incompatibility of capital punishment with human rights and human dignity. It needs to be pointed out that public support for the death penalty is inextricably linked to the desire of the people to be free from crime. However, there exist more effective ways to prevent crime.

**Recommendations**

- Formalize the unofficial moratorium of the death penalty in countries in the Caribbean region that retain capital punishment;
- Respect international and regional human rights law and standards relating to the death penalty;
- Engagement and constructive dialogue with governments in the Caribbean region as they take steps towards eventual abolition of the death penalty;
- Strengthening justice system structures, including ensuring that it is sufficiently resources, that it has the capacity of effectively investigating crimes, ensuring that victims are supported, ensuring adequate legal assistance to vulnerable sections of society.
- Advancing human rights education as part of the curriculum for citizenship studies.
Moving Away from the Death Penalty: Arguments, Trends and Perspectives (2014)

At the launch, of the new edition of the above book, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon said: “I will never stop calling for an end to the death penalty … no one has proven that the death penalty even deters crime.” He highlighted the worldwide decline of capital punishment, noting, as the Death Penalty Information Centre reports, that “more and more countries and States are abolishing the death penalty.” Data from the book confirms these trends: in 1975, about 97% of countries were carrying out executions, as compared to only 27% today.” http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/node/6294

In the Preface of the book the UN Secretary-General says: “As long as the death penalty exists, there is a need for advocacy against it…The death penalty has no place in the 21st century. Leaders across the globe must boldly step forward in favour of abolition. I recommend this book in particular to those States that have yet to abolish the death penalty. Together, let us end this cruel and inhumane practice.”

Speaking at a press conference at the UN Headquarters in New York, ahead of the launch of the book, Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the editor of the book said: “according to several studies, there is no convincing evidence of any deterring effect the death penalty has on crimes committed. However, there is conclusive evidence that there is a correlation between death penalty and discrimination and unequal treatment against vulnerable groups… in most cases, people who end up getting executed are poor, belong to vulnerable groups or socially disadvantaged minority groups or have mental disabilities.”

The 5 chapters in this publication reflect “a diversity of geographic experiences – Americas and Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Europe, with articles exploring compelling arguments relevant in deciding in favour of moving away from the death penalty.”

In Chapter 1 of the book, Saul Lehrfreund, from the Death Penalty Project, focuses on “Wrongful convictions and miscarriages of justice in death penalty trials in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.”

Inter alia, he states that: “…the prevailing law and practice in far too many retentionist countries across the Caribbean, Africa and Asia do not provide the level of protection required in capital cases. Unless and until states can meet universally accepted standards, the death penalty should not be enforced. Too many countries retain the death penalty without assuming responsibility for the proper administration of criminal justice; many states fail to provide special procedural protections in capital cases.

“There are many instances of miscarriage of justice and unfair trials in capital cases in Caribbean countries. Wrongful convictions and unfair trials are all too common, and the ratio of successful appeals to the Courts of Appeal and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council reveals that the proper administration of justice is called into question in far too many capital cases…The vast majority of prisoners in the Caribbean cannot afford to pay for legal representation and are therefore provided with an attorney through an inadequate legal aid system. The accused are often assigned a very junior member of the bar to prepare the defence, usually without any expert help, medical or otherwise.

“In many capital cases from the Caribbean, individuals who are sentenced to death have subsequently been found to be suffering from mental illness and/or an intellectual disability that affected the safety and lawfulness of their convictions and death sentences. This is especially so in countries with inadequate mental health services, training and resources is lacking. The reality is that the death penalty is regularly imposed on people with significant mental illness and/or intellectual disability who are therefore at risk of execution contrary to recognized norms and strict procedural requirements that countries are obliged to observe in all capital cases. There are many examples of defendants being wrongly sentenced to death by virtue of the fact that inadequate or no medical evidence was produced at trial.
“In 2005, the UN Commission on Human Rights urged all states that maintain the death penalty “not to impose the death penalty on a person suffering from any mental or intellectual disabilities or to execute such a person.”17 The reality, though, is that a large proportion of prisoners under sentence of death have never been properly examined by a psychiatrist or psychologist, resulting in many prisoners who are mentally disordered or impaired facing the death penalty in the Caribbean and beyond…”

In Chapter 2 entitled: Myth of Deterrence, Carolyn Hoyle and Roger Hood state: “The empirical research conducted over the past few decades demonstrates that no matter what politicians argue or the public believe, neither deterrence nor public opinion should be seen as barriers to abolition. It is well-known that some categories of offenders would not be deterred by the threat of being executed…In Trinidad and Tobago, which has a very high homicide rate, academics have not been able to establish any relationship between trends in the execution and murder rates.”

In Chapter 5: Trends and Perspectives, Federico Mayor, President of the International Commission against the Death Penalty, focuses on the theme: Leadership and the abolition of the death penalty. He rightly states: “Rejecting capital punishment is about choosing what kind of society we want to live in, and which values—including human rights and dignity, democracy and the rule of law—we want to uphold….Principled political leadership, within the domestic realm and internationally, is an essential factor in the momentum that is driving the movement for the abolition of the death penalty.

“The role played by leaders—such as prime ministers, presidents, ministers, authorities within ministries dealing with domestic and international affairs, national human rights institutions, the judiciary (including judges and magistrates who pass rulings that shape the debate and jurisprudence), lawyers and bar associations, and key figures in the media, religious bodies and civil society organisations—has been and will remain crucial to ensuring progress towards a world free of capital punishment. Ultimately, it is the state that must decide to abolish the death penalty and protect the fundamental human right to life.

“Political leadership has been very important in overcoming domestic opposition to abolition in several countries. Political leaders have recognized that while public opinion is relevant, nations face difficulties if popular sentiment, which is difficult to gauge accurately, is allowed to determine penal policy. Experience shows that the majority of the public is willing to accept abolition of capital punishment once it is achieved.”

The following is a list of the Contents of the book which readers may find useful:

Preface – Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General p.7
Introduction – An Abolitionist’s Perspective, Ivan Šimonović p.9
Chapter 1 – Wrongful Convictions p.23
• Kirk Bloodsworth, Without DNA evidence I’d still be behind bars p.24
• Brandon Garrett, DNA evidence casts light on flaws in system p.30
• Gil Garcetti, In the United States, growing doubts about the death penalty p.39
• Saul Lehrfreund, Wrongful convictions and miscarriages of justice in death penalty trials in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia p.48
Chapter 2 – Myth of Deterrence p.67
• Carolyn Hoyle & Roger Hood, Deterrence and public opinion p.68
Chapter 3 – Discrimination p.85
• Damien Echols, The terrors of prison fade slowly p.87
• Stephen Braga, Damien Echols and the West Memphis Three Case p.91
• Steve Bright, Imposition of the death penalty upon the poor, racial minorities, the intellectually disabled and the mentally ill p.99
• Arif Bulkan, The death penalty in the Commonwealth Carribean: Justice out of reach? p.114
• Usha Ramanathan, The death penalty in India: Down a slippery slope p.134
• Alice Mogwe, The death penalty in Botswana: Barriers to equal justice p.154
• Innocent Maja, The death penalty in Zimbabwe: Legal ambiguities p.164
Chapter 4 – Values p.169
• Mario Marazziti, World religions and the death penalty p.170
• Paul Bhatti, Towards a moratorium on the death penalty p.182
Chapter 5 – Trends and Perspectives p.189
• Salil Shetty, Global death penalty trends since 2012 p.190
• Federico Mayor, Leadership and the abolition of the death penalty p.297
Acknowledgements p.212
MEMBERS

ORGANIZATIONS

- Amnistía Internacional Puerto Rico
- Bahamas Bar Association
- Bahama Human Rights Network
- Catedra UNESCO de Educación Por la Paz (Puerto Rico)
- Catholic Commission for Social Justice (Trinidad and Tobago)
- Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional del '+Infinito (Dominica)
- Frazer, Housty & Yearwood, Attorneys at Law (Guayana)
- Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (Guatemala)
- Human Rights Commission of Belize
- Human Rights for All (Antigua and Barbuda)
- Hope Support Group (Trinidad and Tobago)
- Jamaica Independent Council for Human Rights
- Main Parade Chambers (Belize)
- Movimiento Pro Justicia (Guatemala)
- Puerto Rico Coalition Against Death Penalty
- St. Vicent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association

INDIVIDUALS

- Ayanna Nelson (Grenada)
- Selwyn Strachan (Grenada)
- Jackie Leanna Pinder (Bahamas)
- Janet P. Kemp (Bahamas)
- Joey Leon Fox (Bahamas)
- Brian Clarke (Barbados)
- Fernando Saavedra (México)
- Mary Frances (Saint Lucia)
- Rev. Peter Espaut (Jamaica)
- Dr. Anthony Nicholas Carter (Barbados)
- Nefaste Morris (Guyana)
- Shellon Collins (Guyana)
- Madeeta Branche
- James McGregor Millington (Barbados)
- Cristal Annastacy Robinson (Guayana)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Leela Ramdeen - Trinidad and Tobago
- Carmelo Campos-Cruz - Puerto Rico
- Mariana Nogales Molinelli - Puerto Rico
- Fenella Wenham - Dominica
- Lloyd Barnett - Jamaica
- Mario Polanco - Guatemala