In October 2014 the Greater Caribbean for Life celebrated its first year of existence amidst a busy programme including a productive Speaking Tour in six Caribbean countries and campaign activities by members in the region, as well as lobbying efforts and collaboration with other organisations.

The collective efforts of all GCL members are instrumental in keeping the organisation alive and active. Our success in securing external funding has also greatly facilitated GCL's activities, particularly the Speaking Tour. Changing hearts and minds will not take place overnight. We are in this for the long haul and raising awareness of our work is critical if we are to maintain a strong presence in the region/world.

GCL is also pleased to welcome new members in its ranks, including Human Rights Activist, Mary Francis of St Lucia, Brian Clarke of Barbados and the UNESCO Chair of Education for Peace at the University of Puerto Rico. The membership of our organization currently includes members from 14 Caribbean countries.

CAMPAIGNING IN THE CARIBBEAN: GCL’S SPEAKING TOUR

GCL's efforts to commemorate the World Day Against the Death Penalty across the Greater Caribbean Region culminated with the organisation of a Speaking Tour in six countries, namely Antigua, Jamaica, St Lucia, Grenada, Barbados and The Bahamas, between 3 October and 8 November (the visit to the Bahamas was postponed to November).

We already shared with you details from the first two stops of the tour in Antigua and Jamaica where GCL's Chair, Leela Ramdeen, pleaded the cause of abolition of the death penalty. She was accompanied by guest speakers Renny Cushing, member of the House of Representatives of the State of New Hampshire, and founder and Executive Director of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights (an organization that comprises of families of murder victims who oppose capital punishment); and Juan Melendez, a Puerto Rican who spent nearly 18 years on death row in Florida for a crime he did not commit. He was exonerated in 2002 (Juan Melendez 6446 documentary).

See our online articles for details.
Greater Caribbean for Life

- St Lucia

On 10 October, Leela, headed south to St Lucia to continue the campaigning tour. In St Lucia, GCL collaborated with the British High Commission and the Alliance Française who put together a busy programme for World Day Against the Death Penalty. Leela was interviewed, together with journalist and film director, Alex Hannaford, by NBC TV. The interview was aired on the evening news.

About a hundred persons attended the public event that was organised at the Alliance Française, and featured the screening of several films on the Death Penalty followed by a panel discussion. The films shown included an interview with former Minister of Justice of France and abolition advocate Robert Badinter; Video testimonies from Hope Victim Support Group, by GCL member Gwenolyn Ruth Greaves; Untold stories – Am I my Brother’s Keeper? By Dale Elliot (St Lucia); and the Caribbean premiere of The Last 40 miles.

Panellists included Alex Hannaford, Journalist, author and director of The Last 40 miles, Leela Ramdeen, Chair of GCL, several St Lucian Attorneys-at-law and Journalists, as well as a Psychotherapist. The discussion focused, among other issues, on the issue of "due process of law". One proponent of the death penalty felt that capital punishment was acceptable once "due process of law" was followed. Other panellists outlined the limitations of the criminal justice system in countries in the region and further afield. Leela highlighted the case of Stephen Mongroo, shown in the 3rd documentary, as a clear example of a case where poor legal representation and other deficiencies in the system hindered "due process." The discussions showed that many of those who participated in the event were retentionists. The discussion was recorded to be aired on Radio St Lucia. It will be added to GCL You Tube Channel.

- Grenada

From St Lucia, Leela continued on to Grenada where GCL organised a similar event, on 13 October, with the support of the Alliance Française of Grenada. Attendance wasn’t as ample as in St Lucia, but participants included several prominent politicians.

The two documentaries presented included an interview with French abolitionist Robert Badinter, as well as Gwenolyn Ruth Greaves’ documentary, presenting the testimonies of three Trinidadian women who, although they have lost family members as a result of crime, oppose the death penalty.

Leela and Mr. Chester Humphrey, President-General of the Grenada Technical and Allied Workers’ Union (GTAWU) were the panellists. Mr Humphrey spoke in his personal capacity as a supporter of the death penalty. Mr. Humphrey expressed his firm belief that capital punishment is a deterrent. He rejected as “unproven” all the research and data set out by Leela to highlight some of the reasons why the death penalty should be abolished. Leela highlighted the need for courageous, principled leaders who, rather than baying for blood, will focus on addressing the root causes of crime and using preventive measures e.g. through youth development, job creation, addressing poverty and social exclusion. While the antithetical positions of the panellists led to a heated discussion, questions from the audience denoted a genuine openness to hearing all arguments.
Barbados

On 14 October, Leela went to Barbados to share GCL’s message on another panel discussion organised by the British High Commission. With support from GCL, she was joined again by journalist and film director, Alex Hannaford, whose film, *The Last 40 Miles*, was screened together with Gwenolyn Ruth Greaves’ documentary. The discussion was moderated by local criminologist, Yolande Forde. Before the panel discussion, Leela and Mr Hannaford were interviewed by the media and their comments were aired during the evening news on a popular TV station. During the panel discussion there was free and frank discussion among participants who included lawyers, magistrates, other officials in the justice system, local human rights activists, representatives of churches, as well as diplomats and representatives from several international organisations.

During a wide-ranging discussion, issues discussed included: the need to address, as a first step to abolition, the mandatory death penalty which is still part of the criminal codes in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago; the lack of connection between the abolition of the death penalty and the rise in crime; the fact that the death penalty is not effective/ is not a deterrent to murder; and the flaws in the system that has led to many innocent individuals being executed or languishing on death row in many countries.

The Bahamas

For a variety of reasons, the visit to Nassau had to be postponed to 7-8 November. Speakers in Nassau were Leela and Renny Cushing, who gave presentations in a public event on 8 November at the College of the Bahamas (COB). The audience was mainly composed of lawyers, students, academics - including two professors at COB, as well as members of The Bahamas Human Rights Network. The presentations were well received by participants, many of whom were supportive of the abolitionist movement. The proceedings were recorded and GCL will share them in due course.

The visit’s major impact was in the media appearances of the two speakers. Leela and Renny were invited to the popular Chrissy Love Programme on Guardian Talk Radio FM. Although they were able to put forward their views clearly and forcefully during the hour long programme, it was clear from the texts that Ms. Love read to them during and after the programme, that many listeners were supporters of the death penalty. Leela and Renny were also interviewed by Wendall Jones, a committed abolitionist, during an hour long programme on Jones Communications Network (TV and Radio ). The interview was aired on the following Sunday. Leela and Renny also gave an interview to the Nassau Guardian Newspaper. See article published on 19 November.
MORE CARIBBEAN CAMPAIGNING FOR WORLD DAY AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

The Speaking Tour was not the only campaigning effort to mark the 12th World Day Against the death penalty. Many GCL members across the region took action to raise awareness of the theme for 2014 (Mental Health: Care Don’t Kill) and promoted reasons why the region should abolish the death penalty. Below are some examples of the activities undertaken in St Vincent, Guatemala, Trinidad, Jamaica and Grenada.

- **St Vincent**
  In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), GCL member, Nicole Sylvester, with the SVG Human Rights Association, partnered with the Alliance Française of St Vincent to organise a screening of the French documentary, *Honk*, followed by a debate on capital punishment. The event took place on 13 October.

- **Guatemala**
  In Guatemala, GCL member Mario Polanco and the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM), and other civil society organisations organised a forum on the abolition of the death penalty in Guatemala inviting members of parliament from various political parties political such as Encuentro por Guatemala, Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza, CREO or LIDER. At the forum, it was recognized that abolition of the death penalty was a Human Rights necessity, although some politicians continued to believe in the deterrent effect of capital punishment.
  The forum formed part of a wider lobbying effort, by GAM and other civil society organisations to identify the position of members of the Guatemalan Congress, as regards the death penalty, and hold meetings with the politicians to convince them of the need to abolish capital punishment.

- **Trinidad and Tobago**
  In Trinidad, on 10 October, workers from the Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) collaborated with a number of Catholic Schools throughout the country to address the issue of the death penalty, for example, during School Assemblies.

- **Jamaica**
  In Jamaica, on Friday 10 October, GCL member, Peter Espeut, dedicated his weekly column in The Gleaner to the issue of capital punishment. See the online version of his column “Fighting the culture of death”.
  Also on 10 October, GCL member, Dr. Lloyd Barnett and the Independent Jamaican Council for Human Rights, partnered with the Jamaica Psychiatric Association to organise a public seminar entitled “Mental disorder is never a crime – Care don’t kill!”.

- **Grenada**
  On 10 October, GCL Member, Selwyn Strachan, gave a 30-minute live interview in the morning show on National television, and another 30-minute live interview on GTC Radio morning show. Later, on 15 October, Mr. Strachan delivered an address at the National Consultation on Constitutional Reform, calling for the abolition of the death penalty, and submitted a recommendation to the Constitution Review Commission to include the necessary Constitutional amendment. The consultation was broadcast live on national radio and television. Mr. Strachan’s call for abolition was reported in several newspapers and TV reports. See Grenada Broadcasting Network (GBN) TV report.

Praying circle and posters. Mayo RC School, Trinidad & Tobago
Greater Caribbean for Life

**GCL LOBBYING EFFORTS**

**GCL introduced to all Greater Caribbean governments** - In August, GCL sent letters to all of the 25 governments in the region to introduce the organisation, its objectives and its activities. Letters were sent to the Head of Government, with copies to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, interior and Justice/Legal Affairs. Several replies were received, mainly from abolitionist countries.

**UN Moratorium** - The lobbying action continued with GCL Media release that was sent to all members for distribution, urging Caribbean countries to vote in favour of the United Nations Moratorium on the use of the death penalty. See article on Caribbean Trakker and Op-Ed on Now Grenada.

**Cuba** - The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, a Member of GCL, also published a press release urging Caribbean governments to consider abolishing capital punishment on the occasion of the Fifth CARICOM–Cuba Summit, held in Havana, Cuba on 8 December. See article in Diario de Cuba (in Spanish).

**Universal Periodic Review** - GCL will continue partnering with the US based organisation, The Advocates for Human Rights, to prepare submissions on the issue of the death penalty for the Universal Periodic Review on Caribbean countries. St. Lucia and St. Kitts and Nevis are on the Human Rights Council’s agenda for February 2015, followed by Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago in September 2015.

**GCL Building its international network** - We have already talked about GCL’s cooperation with the US organisation, The Advocates for Human Rights for UPR submissions. Here are other examples of GCL’s international networking:

GCL’s Chair met in London with members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Abolition of the Death Penalty, led by Baroness Stern. She was able to present GCL and its activities.

She also met with various scholars, including Peter Hodgkinson, Director of the Centre for Capital Punishment Studies at Westminster University (UK) and author of the book, Capital Punishment: New Perspectives, which offers a critical analysis of abolitionism; and Dr James Campbell, Historian at the University of Leicester (UK), whose research work focuses on capital punishment, including its existence in criminal codes in some countries in the Caribbean region. She discussed with Dr Campbell potential avenues for cooperation.

On the diplomatic front, GCL received a strong expression of support from the French Ambassador to the OAS, Mr. Nolla. This offer of support was later confirmed in a letter from the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, who invited GCL members to approach French Representatives in the region for support. A good example of collaboration occurred during World Day campaigns, when GCL members partnered with the local Alliance Française in a number of Caribbean countries.
UN MORATORIUM VOTE

Nations of the world once again demonstrated that they do not believe in the use of the death penalty: on 18 December, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, with a record 117 votes in favour, with only 37 countries opposing the text.

The number of countries supporting such resolution has been increasing steadily, since the first vote in 2007, and while the resolution is non-binding, this overwhelming support sends a clear message to retentionist States. The Caribbean region is still lagging behind on this matter with 12 Caribbean votes against the resolution, representing over 30% of the “No” votes. A significant positive change this year for our region is Suriname’s vote that changed from an abstention to a “yes”, as the country is in the process of abolishing capital punishment.

THE INHUMANITY OF EXECUTIONS - Hanging

GCL condemns the death penalty not only for its inhumanity but for its potential cruelty. In this issue we continue to examine methods of state executions. The method of execution which has been most common in the British Commonwealth is hanging. This method was extensively but exclusively used against slaves. It has survived not only in the post-Abolition period but in the post-colonial period. Hanging is legally prescribed as the method of execution in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

The Long drop method, developed in Ireland in the 19th Century was later adopted in Britain, to replace the previous short drop method, because the latter often led to a lingering death by suffocation. The ‘Long Drop Method’ involves the calculation of the drop distance required to break the prisoner’s neck based on his/her weight, height and build. The aim is to cause the body to be moving quickly enough so that at the end of the drop, the neck is broken and the spinal cord severed. However, there is no guarantee, even when the length of the rope is properly calculated, that the prisoner’s neck is broken at the end of the drop causing death instantaneously. There is considerable scientific evidence that hanging can result in substantial pain and suffering before actually causing death. If, for instance, the prisoner’s neck muscles are strong or the noose has been wrongly positioned, the prisoner may be painfully strangled over an extended period of time.

In 1992, James and Naysmyth-Jones found that in only 19% of the post mortems done on a sample of victims of judicial hanging was there the presence of the neck fractures indicative of instant death. Additionally if the rope is too long, excessive velocity may be generated by the drop, the result of which is decapitation. Furthermore the entire process of hanging can be reasonably described as violent, as it is expressly designed to cause the abrupt ripping and breaking of tissue and bone.