

stop crime,
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MEDIA RELEASE: 13th World Day against the Death Penalty

The Greater Caribbean for Life (GCL) joins the global movement for the abolition of capital punishment on 10th October 2015 to commemorate the 13th World Day against the Death Penalty. This year's theme is *Drug Crimes*. The aim is to raise awareness of the need to reduce the use of the death penalty for drug-related offences.

GCL is a non-sectarian, regional civil society organization that is striving to encourage retentionist countries in the Greater Caribbean region to adopt non-lethal means of dealing with crime and violence. GCL was constituted on October 2, 2013, in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and is composed by abolitionist activists and organizations from fifteen nations of the Greater Caribbean.

The World Day against Death Penalty will coincide with the discussion of the imposition of capital punishment in some Caribbean countries. In Barbados, a Bill is before Parliament seeking to alter the country's Constitution in order to remove the provision authorising a mandatory sentence of death for murder. In Trinidad and Tobago, Chief Justice Ivor Archie has stated that he is "yet to find a convincing argument in favour of the death penalty." It is also worth noting Pope Francis' recent address to the US Congress, in which he made a forceful plea for the abolition of the death penalty.

While 140 countries worldwide have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice, showing a positive trend towards the permanent abolition of capital punishment, 58 countries and territories still uphold the death penalty and 22 countries carried out executions in 2014. According to the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, of the 58 countries and territories retaining the death penalty, 33 apply the death penalty for drug-related crimes and 13 of the 33 countries have carried out an execution for drug-related offences in the past five years.

In the Greater Caribbean region:

- 11 countries are abolitionist in law: Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador (for ordinary crimes only), Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname and Venezuela;
- one country is considered abolitionist in practice: Grenada; and
- 13 countries are retentionist: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.
- All territories or departments are abolitionist, except for the territories of the United States.
- one country still applies the death penalty in relation to drug crimes: Cuba.

Even though the Caribbean retentionist states have not carried out any execution for the last seven years, many have sentenced persons to death during this period. Also, most of them have consistently voted against the UN General Assembly resolutions on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty and have signed the Note Verbale, dissociating themselves from the moratorium.

GCL encourages everyone to participate in commemorating the 13th World Day against the Death Penalty in the Greater Caribbean region and continue striving for the global abolition of the death penalty. Let us urge our Governments to find alternative means of holding perpetrators of grave crimes accountable, and

to devote more time, energy and resources to identify and address the root causes of crime. The death penalty will not help us to build safe, just communities. Stop crime, not lives!

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