



Sant'Egidio and the Death Penalty

Since the second half of the 1990's the fight against capital punishment has become one of the spheres of global engagement and a priority of the Community of Sant'Egidio. A synthesis of several violations of human rights, the death penalty always represents a form of mental torture for the condemned person, contradicts a rehabilitative conception of justice, lowers society as a whole to the level of killer, legitimizes a culture of death at its highest level on the part of the state while claiming to want to defend human life and disproportionately affects political, ethnic, religious and social minorities, humiliating the whole society.

The Community of Sant'Egidio started by concretely approaching death row inmates, through visits, correspondence, legal defence and humanization of prison conditions. Through the years it has become a leading player in the battle for a universal moratorium and the abolition of the death penalty all over the world. In these years it promoted letter exchanges, direct contacts with more than 1,500 inmates and the defence of over 300 people sentenced to death in different parts of the world



In 1998 the Community of Sant'Egidio drafted an Appeal for a Universal Moratorium endorsed by leaders of the world's major religions as well as more than five million people, believers and non believers, in 153 countries. The petition was presented to the United Nations on the eve of the historic vote in the General Assembly in a resolution rejecting the death penalty as a means of justice (2007).



In 2002 the Community of Sant'Egidio contributed to the founding in 2002 in Rome, at the Community's headquarters in Sant'Egidio square, of the World Coalition against the Death Penalty.





The same year, the Community of Sant'Egidio launched also the International Day of Cities against the Death Penalty, which takes place every year on November 30 – on the anniversary of the first abolition of the death penalty on the part of a State, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany on November 30, 1786.

Since 2004 Annual Conferences of Justice Ministers, jurists, Supreme Court members from countries which have abolished the death penalty - and those which still apply it - have been organized for the purpose of developing new strategies and common meeting grounds.

Such International conferences represent a laboratory for a method of operation takes place during the year in participating countries at all levels, involving civil society, government officials and political representatives.

The Community of Sant'Egidio's presence in over 25 African countries, with native membership, makes it possible to identify local solutions and spark a "positive contamination" of a decline of violence and the use of the death penalty, making the most of the continent's local cultures and experiences.



In the first few years special attention was paid to Africa, a continent in rapid transformation, utilizing legislative, social, parliamentary and public opinion venues for attaining first a reduction and then an end to executions, leading all the way to de facto or legal abolition. (Burundi, Gabon, Togo...).

In Asia and Latin America, the Community of Sant'Egidio operates on a national and transnational level, relying on a local network of institutional, inter-religious and governmental contacts, and is actively involved in dialogues for humanitarian and peace-making purposes.

In 2011, the international conference was attended by Justice Ministers of more than 20 countries. Aside from the substantial African and European presence,

there was heightened participation of Asian countries, bound to further increase in the future.

“Cities for Life” - November 30

Since 2002, the Community of Sant’Egidio has organized the International Day of Cities for Life, Cities against the Death Penalty, which takes place every year on November 30 – on the anniversary of the first abolition of the death penalty on the part of a State, the Gran Duchy of Tuscany on November 30, 1786.

About 80 cities participated in the first edition in 2002. Today there are more than 1,460 participating cities, including 67 capitals on five continents which, making use of symbolic monuments and squares, hold educational and artistic events aimed at raising public awareness.

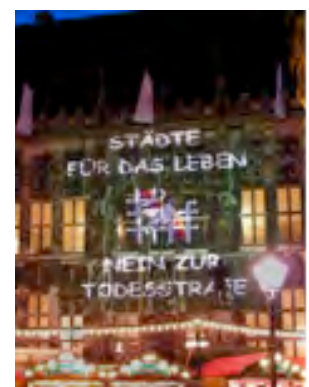


On November 30, 2011, 67 world capitals and 1,460 cities in 87 different countries took part in the tenth edition of “Cities for Life Day” organizing mobilizations, marches, sit-ins, shows, public assemblies, in schools and universities, as well as official statements of support from city authorities



All cities taking part in the initiative make their major monuments available as “living logos”, which “speak” with the help of special illuminations, thus becoming symbols of a commitment to hold a dialogue with the population aimed at achieving a world without the death penalty.

The International Day of Cities for Life/Cities against the Death Penalty constitutes, along with the World day against the Death Penalty on October 10, the biggest modern planetary mobilization in favour a higher and more civil form of justice capable of repudiating once and for all capital punishment.



The purpose is to establish a dialogue with civil society, elicit the involvement of public administrations in the effort to attain the abolition of the death penalty, and turn the commemoration into a continuous practice and a characteristic of the cities and populations that participate, including those in death penalty countries. Thus new occasions arise for involving broader segments of society, in abolitionist and non-abolitionist countries, bolstering the efforts of local activists and organizations in an international network.



The **Coliseum** in Rome, lit up in special colours, has become a universal symbol of the abolitionist movement, offering international visibility to places in the world which have taken major steps on the path to abolition or a lasting moratorium: New Jersey and New Mexico celebrated their abolitions in 2007 and 2009, Chile and other countries before that.

The International Day of Cities for Life, Cities against the Death Penalty is one of the initiatives that characterize the commitment of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty. It represents the culmination of a week of abolition events and an occasion for global and local mobilization.



A letter of presentation to participating cities and assistance in organizing such an initiative are available to all abolitionist groups, not only on the part of the Community of Sant'Egidio, but also on the part of humanitarian groups and activists on a city to city basis.

Thereby other international organizations, associations and local groups can avail themselves of the occasion for raising awareness of the citizenry or of specific groups (students, teachers, jurists, opinion leaders, administrators, witnesses, the press, journalists) or organizing mobilization and gaining consensus for local initiatives, strengthening their effect on the population.



The **web site** of the campaign for the abolition of the death penalty is <http://nodeathpenalty.santegidio.org/>, which is also accessible from the Community's own site, www.santegidio.org and has a permanent link with the site of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (www.worldcoaliton.org) .

The website names over 1,460 "Cities for Life" and publishes information about the initiatives that are organized for the **International Day "Cities for Life – Cities Against the Death Penalty"**.



The global message is summed up in the phrase **"No Justice without Life"** and the activities take place between November 29 and 30 and are then spread out during the course of the year as part of a campaign of varying intensities aimed at involving local administrations on a permanent basis. In some cases a Fund for Legal Assistance of

death row inmates, twinning between cities, artistic and educational programs and the support of the media emerged from these events. The cities that take part in "Cities for Life" have at their disposal a space in the website where they can publicize their initiatives for the campaign (illumination of monuments, public events, conferences, theatrical shows, etc.) and hook up with the links of pages to other sites Each year tens of new cities apply for participation in the campaign, filling out the membership form on the website. It is possible to download an organizing kit and contact the coordinating office (info@citiesforlife.net) for a joint signing of the presentation letter, get access to existing material for mobilization and communications (videos, statements from international figures, appeals to take a meaningful stand) and learn about the initiatives taking place elsewhere in the world.

