

ABOLISHING THE DEATH PENALTY: LESSONS FROM ZIMBABWE FOR NGOS

Zimbabwe's abolition took over 30 years of advocacy efforts. Effective abolition is not achieved through one action but through parallel strategies working over time. The key is persistence, partnership, and a strategy that blends grassroots mobilization with high-level engagement.

CONDUCT RESEARCH TO INFORM AND INFLUENCE

- Conduct public opinion surveys to assess attitudes and identify misunderstandings.
- Produce research papers on wrongful convictions, colonial legacies, and alternatives to the death penalty.
- Gather data on sentencing practices, racial/gender bias, and systemic failings.
- Document real-life stories and wrongful conviction cases.

Surveys and case studies revealed that most people, when informed, did not support capital punishment.

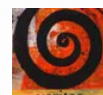
ENGAGE IN STRATEGIC LITIGATION

- Use the legal system to challenge and limit the death penalty.
- Legislative reforms may gradually restrict the application of capital punishment before its full abolition.
- Judicial training can influence sentencing practices.

MOBILIZE PUBLIC SUPPORT AND BUILD STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

- Use community radio, public events and theatre to connect the death penalty to people's lived experiences.
- Frame abolition around traditional values, human rights, and colonial legacies.
- Collaborate with civil society, religious leaders, and traditional authorities.
- Create local and international alliances.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer engagement between abolitionist leaders across countries.

The creation of partnerships is essential, both internationally and locally, but it is primarily local NGOs that play a key role in driving the abolition of the death penalty.



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ENGAGE LEGISLATORS AND POLITICAL LEADERS

- Work closely with parliamentarians to draft and introduce abolition bills.
- Reassure politicians that supporting the abolition of the death penalty will not harm their political reputation, popularity, or career.

PREPARE FOR THE POST-ABOLITION PHASE

- Ensure proper resentencing mechanisms for those on death row.
- Train judges, lawyers, and prosecutors on new sentencing guidelines.
- Remove all references to the death penalty from the constitution and penal codes.
- Ratify international treaties, such as the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR.

No need to start from scratch. Learn from organizations that have successfully abolished death penalty.

Reach out to organisations like

www.veritaszim.net

www.deathpenaltyproject.org

for guidance, resources, and best practices.