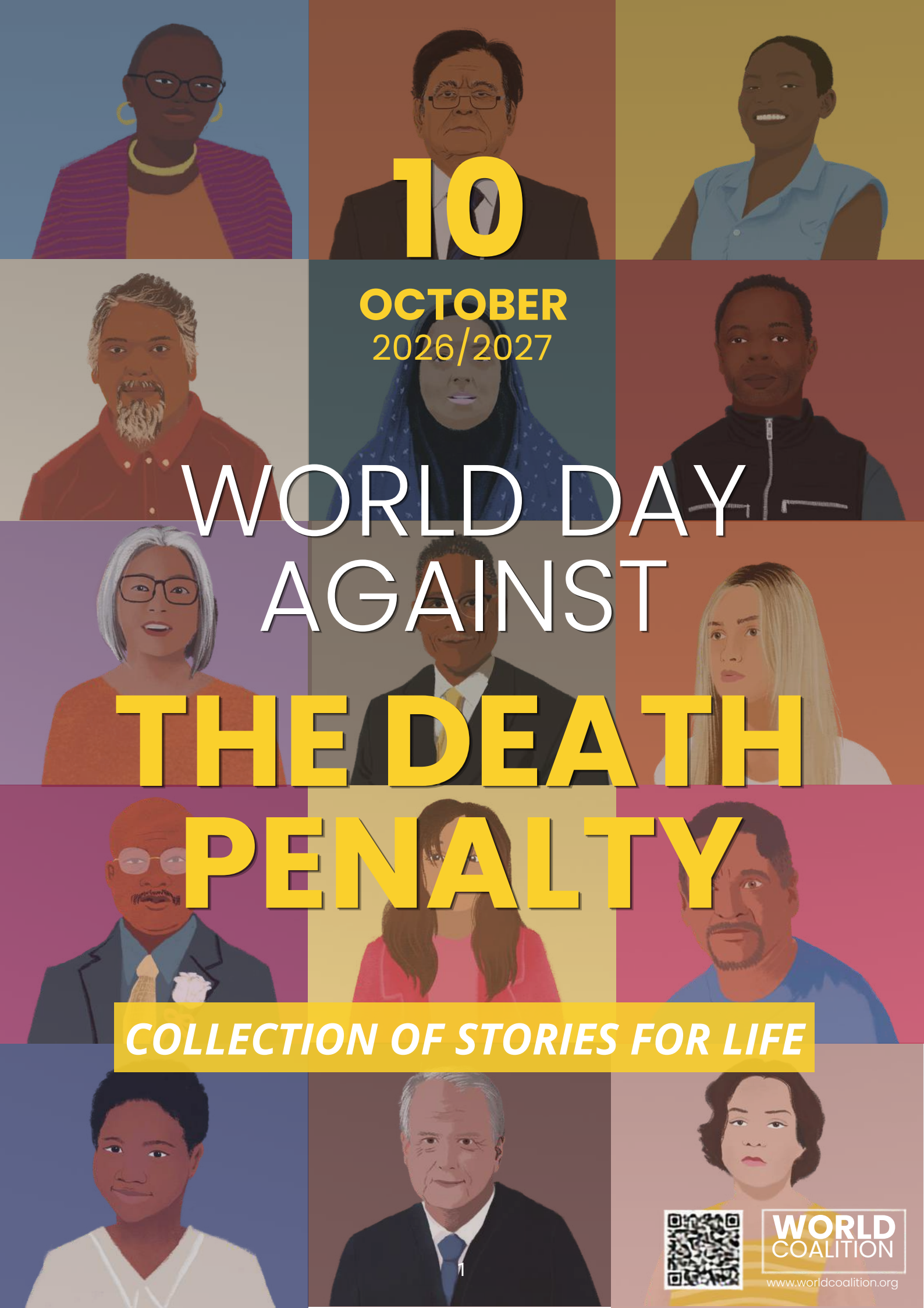




10

OCTOBER
2026/2027

WORLD DAY
AGAINST
THE DEATH
PENALTY

COLLECTION OF STORIES FOR LIFE



WORLD
COALITION

www.worldcoalition.org

FOREWORD

This collection of testimonials was put together for the **24th and 25th World Days Against the Death Penalty** that will take place on 10 October 2026 & 2027.

It brings together the voices of **35 individuals from around the world** who have been confronted to the death penalty, one way or the other: people sentenced to death, their relatives, family members of victims, lawyers, judges, prison staff, activists, and others.

In their own words, they describe how the death penalty has fractured their lives, affected their families and communities, influenced their work, and impacted their physical and emotional well-being. Their stories remind us that the death penalty is imposed on human beings and that its consequences reach far beyond the courtroom—shattering multiple worlds at once and bringing more death than justice or closure.

Because storytelling and humanisation serve as powerful tools to build bridges and reconnect us to our shared humanity, **we encourage you to use this collection in your advocacy efforts**—during and beyond 10 October.

Some testimonials have been adapted for social media. You can find the content for sharing here:

[CLICK HERE !\[\]\(a870788d6ed9b8fd294b7654a8c8526b_img.jpg\)](#)

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***LET INJUSTICE
BE DONE***

ROBIN MAHER, USA



I have never met a rich person who has been sentenced to death because rich people can afford good lawyers.

[Rich persons] hire the best lawyers and they are not sentenced to death. They have access to resources, to people who have influence in society, they themselves may have status as people who have education, who have important jobs. Those are things that poor people don't have. We don't know what it is like to go to bed hungry at night, we don't know what it is like to be sick or have a loved one sick and not able to take that person to the doctor or to pay for the medications. Here in the United States, the richest country in the world, we have children who are hungry all the time and that's their prevailing major memory of their childhood is being hungry and not have enough food to eat. We have violence, and we have drug abuse and we have terrible housing condition, we have lack of access to medical care, so many things that poverty brings on these children who then grow up to maybe make bad decisions, maybe because of the trauma in their life reacts inappropriately to stimuli on to situation in which they find themselves in trouble.

Every client I have ever represented or even come in contact with here in the United States and all around the world, they all have been poor. They all have been poor. There is no question that it is a major contributing factor to the fact they end up on death row. Because they come to this point so already burdened, they have so many difficulties because of their economics status. Because our world is you know, the gap between the rich and the poor grows larger and larger. So, I think, you know it is again one more reason I don't think we should not be using the death penalty when we see the effects it is having disproportionately on people who are poor, people who are vulnerable for so many reasons. Despite all the differences that we have country to country, we see poor people on all of those death rows and so I think it is a very appropriate thing to focus on. It focuses the public attention on.



MIBURO ABDULKARIM, TANZANIA

Collected by Reprieve



At trial, I asked to withdraw my confession and said that I was beaten and threatened. I had no familiarity with the court system in Tanzania nor did I know the language.

I fled Burundi almost 30 years ago to escape being killed by militia groups. I was only 16 years old when I fled by myself to a Rwandan refugee camp. When militia groups reached the camps, I was forced to flee again. After years of running and trying to find my family, I ended up in a Tanzanian refugee camp and was living by myself as a teenage refugee. I survived by giving rides to people on my bike.

One day, I was dropping off a customer when I was rounded up by the police. At the police station, I was kept apart from other people and was deprived of sleep for two days. **Police officers beat me repeatedly and told me that the beatings would not stop unless I confessed to a crime I did not commit.** They used sticks, a wooden club and the butt of a gun. I was desperate for the beatings to stop, so I gave in to their demands.

At trial, I asked to withdraw my confession and said that I was beaten and threatened. However, I had no familiarity with the court system in Tanzania nor did I know the language. I was sentenced to death and have spent over 24 years in prison without hope of finding my family again.

I still have scars on my stomach and foot from the torture I suffered. **I have come to live with the bad memories of what happened to me, but I am still sometimes unable to sleep due to flashbacks.** More than anything, I feel alone. I have been away from my family for 30 years now. I am worried that I will never be able to go back to Burundi again.

Abdulkarim is a 46-year-old Burundian refugee who was sentenced to death in Tanzania in 2007. His sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in 2020, and he has spent 24 years in prison. He has maintained his innocence before and after his conviction.



ERICA SHEPPARD, TEXAS, USA

Collected by Japan Innocence, Death Penalty Research Center
and Witness to Innocence



**At trial, I felt that
as a Black woman I was held
to impossibly high standards.**

At trial, I felt that as a Black woman I was held to impossibly high standards. **If I cried, I was too emotional, but if I didn't cry, then I was cold and heartless.** In fact, my lawyer told me to show as little emotion as possible during the trial so that I wouldn't come across as an angry Black woman, but I think the jury and the judge interpreted this as me not having any remorse.

Since I was convicted and sentenced to death, the racism and sexism have only gotten worse. Take my medical care, for example. I have a degenerative spinal condition that leaves me in constant pain. But if I cry out because officers touch me and hurt me, they tell me I'm just being "overly dramatic" and a "hysterical" woman.

Sometimes I feel I'm supposed to just sit back and take all of this abuse just because I'm Black. **That's my history—I'm a slave.**

For example, on one occasion, I was coming back from the hospital and officers asked me to get out of the van. I said I couldn't do it because I couldn't move, but the officers didn't believe me, and sprayed me with a chemical agent right in my face. They dropped me on the floor, then grabbed me to drag me back to my cell. It was like I was a rag doll. Their fingerprints formed bruises that were left on my body for probably about a week.

At that point I realized I was not human; these people do not see me as human; these people do not care about me. After that, I could not take any more victimization.

Erica Sheppard is currently on death row in the State of Texas.

REYHANEH JABBARI MALAYERI, IRAN

Collected by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran

In the spring of 2007, when she was 19 years old, [Jabbari] met Mr. Morteza Abolali Sarbandi, a 47-year-old doctor and former Intelligence Ministry employee, at an ice cream parlor. [...] According to Ms. Jabbari, she had visited the apartment on that day, under the impression that it was a workplace. She went there for the purpose of designing the interior decoration of a surgery. She realized, however, that Mr Sarbandi intended to rape her; hence wounded him by stabbing him in the shoulder with a knife. She fled the scene after calling for an ambulance. She was hanged in 2014.

[According to diary entries Jabbari wrote while in prison], **"He took out a small packet (condom) and said: Do you know what this is? I knew. I was seized with fear.** I stood up. He came forward[...] I was soaking with sweat.. I headed toward the door and turned the handle. But the door would not open. He was laughing with his eyes. Where are you going? The door is locked... He said, "You can only leave here when I let you."

ISuddenly, I noticed the knife. mustered whatever strength I had left in me and said: "Look. Let me go, and I promise not to tell anyone what has happened. In fact, I will forget it totally." He let go of me and took a step back. Go? Go where? I took the last decision of my life.

I was no longer in his clutches. I jumped. I was holding the knife. He said, mockingly, "You want to hit me?" He yelled, "Look at me. You want to hit me, with that?" I ran as fast as I could into the kitchen. It had a balcony. I opened the door. I bent down the balcony and aimed to jump. I got scared. I turned around. He was standing in front of the television set by the prayer mat. I wanted to aim for the door, again. He pounced quicker than I.

I implored him, saying, "You are a devout man. By God, please let me go. Just let me go." He said, "Why are you acting like a gypsy? What's the matter with you?"



I burst into tears. He approached me. I stepped back. He stepped forward. I screamed: I will hit you. He yelled: "You cannot do a damn thing." I said, "Get back." But he didn't. He went red in the face, again [saying], Hit me. I raised my hand and drew a very long breath. I brought down my hand with all my strength."

In the opinion of Judge Tardast, who presided over the case, Ms. Jabbari's relationship with the victim was not a business one, hence her claim of rape is invalid. To prove his point, the judge said that she was not a virgin and had been involved in an illicit affair with her boss at the firm where she was employed. Judge Tardast gave her reason and motive for the murder as her masculine spirit, narcissism, lack of stable personality, psychological state, and an abnormal relationship with her family.

The testimonial has been edited for length and clarity. Reyhaneh Jabbari Malayeri's full story can be found here: <https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-7338/reyhaneh-jabbari-malayeri>

JUDGE WILLIAM FLETCHER, USA

Collected by The Advocates for Human Rights



Because Landrigan's lawyer put forth little mitigating evidence, the judge sentenced him to death.

I want to emphasize that the great majority of prosecutors are hardworking and ethical. But there are exceptions. When there are exceptions, they often involve the failure to hand over to the defense exculpatory (...) On February 10, 1988, Gary Benn shot and killed his half-brother and a friend of his half brother. Benn immediately called the police and asked them to come to the house. There was no question Benn had committed a double homicide. The question was whether it warranted the death penalty. The Pierce County prosecutor's office decided to seek the death penalty. What made Benn death eligible under Washington law was that—at least in the prosecutor's view—Benn had killed the men to cover up another crime. The other crime, in the prosecutor's view, was arson, followed by insurance fraud. Benn's house trailer had burned some time before, and Benn had made an insurance claim based on the fire.

Two reports were prepared by fire marshals. The first report tentatively concluded that the fire had been an accident. After this report, the fire marshal and an electrical inspector conducted a second, more thorough investigation, and conclusively determined that the fire was an accident, noting that the Coleman heater in the trailer was known to have a flaw that caused fires. A second report was prepared after the second investigation, but it was short and misleading. It did not recount the findings of the investigations; indeed, it suggested that the Coleman heater had not caused the fire. **The prosecutor gave Benn's lawyers both reports, but did not disclose the investigation's conclusion that the fire was accidental. He kept that conclusion secret.**

At trial, the prosecutor used a jailhouse informant—a snitch—to provide evidence to support the arson theory. This particular jailhouse snitch was known to the prosecutor as a drug user who had acted as a snitch in an earlier murder trial and who had lied to police on prior occasions. The prosecutor revealed the name of the snitch only the day before trial in order to prevent the defense from investigating him. The prosecutor told the court that he had delayed revealing his name because he was in a witness protection program. That was a lie. The snitch was not—and had never been—in a witness protection program.

Jeffrey Landrigan, who was executed by Arizona in 2010 (...) had brain damage and had been severely abused as a child. **Largely due to the incompetence of his trial counsel, his brain damage and abuse had not been revealed during the penalty phase of the trial.** In Arizona when Landrigan was sentenced, the judge acted alone in determining the sentence. Because Landrigan's lawyer put forth little mitigating evidence, the judge sentenced him to death. When the mitigating evidence later came out during federal habeas corpus proceedings, the state trial judge reassessed [the ruling]. **That state judge stated publicly and repeatedly that, had she known at sentencing what she came to know later, she never would have sentenced Landrigan to death.** But she no longer had jurisdiction, and Landrigan was executed.

William Fletcher is a Judge of the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit. These testimonies are from the lecture "Our Broken Death Penalty" given in 2013 in New York organized by the New York University Law Review, subsequently published in volume 89, issue 3 of the New York University Law Review.



PRINCESS (MRS) PATRICIA IYOMON, NIGERIA

Edo State in Nigeria, has notoriety for handing down the death penalty for cases involving capital offences, even when there is evidence that the defendant/offender is a first offender or there were circumstances beyond the immediate control which contributed and or affected the defendant negatively to commit the offence for which he was convicted and sentenced to death.

My client, Charles Omawumi was tried, convicted for murder and sentenced to death in suit B/7C/2003 for an offence he allegedly committed when he was only 12 years old! **A lighter sentence should have sufficed had the death penalty not been mandatory in Nigeria.** Although he received state pardon down the line on June 13, 2019 after spending 17 years in custody (11 years on remand while 6 years on death row), the trial court while delivering its judgment, stated in quote: 'Unfortunately, there is only one sentence in a case of murder and that is death'.

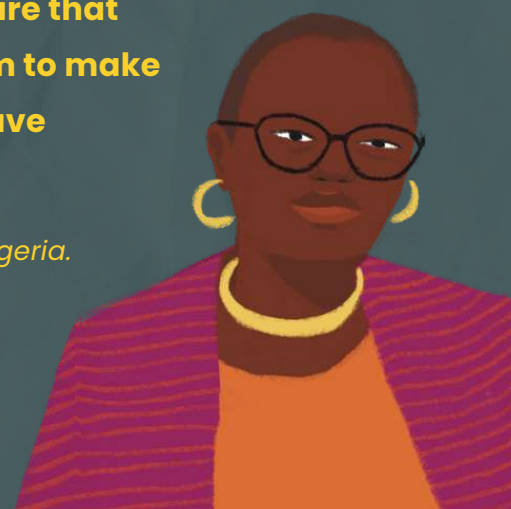
Arising from the above, there is the need for the abolishment of the mandatory death penalty as it would serve better purposes if lighter sentence is passed on the offender rather than outright death penalty. Not allowing Judges to exercise their discretion in specific cases, works great injustice landing many on death row in Nigeria simply because of the unfortunate mandatory nature of the death penalty in the Nigerian Criminal Laws.

In some cases just before making a pronouncement of death in a capital case in Nigeria, **the Judges would sometimes declare that their hands are tied**, in order words the law mandates them to make a death penalty pronouncement even where they could have handed down a lighter sentence. This troubling observation remains one of my greatest resolve to stand against death penalty.

In some cases just before making a pronouncement of death in a capital case in Nigeria, the Judges would sometimes declare that their hands are tied, in order words the law mandates them to make a death penalty pronouncement even where they could have handed down a lighter sentence.

Mrs Iyomon is a capital defense lawyer based in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

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RALPH WRIGHT, USA



[...] there is so much more to this process that goes on that so many of us don't know. I didn't even know and I was on law enforcement.

”

I survived [death row] by relying on my faith, hope and prayer that one day the truth would be discovered and I would be released before somebody wanted to try and execute me.

It opened my eyes, it educated me. It taught me that there is so much more to this process that goes on that so many of us don't know. I didn't even know and I was on law enforcement.

I used to never be for or against capital punishment because it was not a major concern to me. Even as a police officer, I had no interest or concern for what happened to the people I arrested and took to jail. I never knew what happened with them. Now that I see that **there are so many flaws in a criminal justice system that need to be corrected**, it's opened my eyes and helped me to see that maybe I need to be more proactive to help bring about some of these changes in our criminal justice system as well as learning the problems and issues with capital punishment that showed me we really need to abandon and cease capital punishment whatsoever.

Ralph Wright is a former police officer and military, death row survivor, and member of Witness to Innocence Board of Directors.

ANONYMOUS, SWANA

Collected by The European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR)

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The execution of dozens of people from our community has not made our area any safer. Instead, it has made us feel targeted, as if **the death penalty is being used by the state as a tool to control and intimidate our community**, nothing more.



SURVIVING DEATH ROW

ANONYMOUS, FLORIDA, USA

Collected by lifespark

”

At one point, don't know how, a lizard got into me cell. Right away, I tried to attract his attention by feeding him some bread crumbs. **We became friends.** I tried to be careful not to be seen by the guards when I was feeding him. But he was such good company that one day, I didn't notice that a female guard was looking at me... she saw the lizard. She entered my cell and stepped on my friend with her heavy boot. She then took the smashed animal by the tail and went away.

The following day, in my sandwich, my friend's tale was in it.....

PETE JR. RUSSELL, TEXAS, USA

Collected by ACAT-France



ROUTINE DEHUMANIZATION

While you're at home enjoying life kick backed, and relaxed, not a worry in the world whatsoever.

There is a system in place that takes pride in destroying human beings.

A system designed to break the will and mind.

Forget about, we the people.
Forget about, post racial America...
Forget about, vote for me!
Forget about, man was created in the image of God.

Understand the system on a daily basis, continue the process of elimination, by routinely dehumanizing individuals that are incarcerated.

Let me give you an example of a sadistic ritual that takes place everyday across America inside of prisons. (close your eyes, and picture this):

Pete Jr. Russell is held on death row at the Allan B. Polunsky Unit, Polk County, Texas. This poem is part of one of his exchange with Véronique, his correspondant, revealing the violence of the treatment inflicted on the people condemned.

What if I told you to take off your clothes?
Take off them damm shoes too!
What if I told you to raise your hands in the air!
No, you are not under arrest...just do what I say.
What if I told you to run your fingers through your hair?
By the way, you need a hair cut too!
What if I told you to open your mouth and stick out your tongue?
Just say "aaaaaaaaaaaa" and wiggle your tongue.
What if I told you to lift your feet up?
Come on now, you can do it, one foot at a time.
What if I told you to lift your nuts(sack)up???
What if I told you to turn around and spread your cheeks????
You heard me...open your ass boy!

Say, What???????

Inmate, are you disobeying an order?

Fuck you! **I am a man, not an animal.**



MOHAMMAD NASIR, BANGLADESH

Collected by De-cage Initiative

Mohammad Nasir was arrested in 2013 and spent approximately eight years on death row.



we did not speak of the torture because we feared they would torture us even more.

The court sentenced us to death and sent us from Lakshmipur to Comilla Prison. After that, we spent eight to nine years in the condemned cell. Many people in the condemned cell died of heart attacks. **Two men we knew — one named Emon and another named Shipon — were executed in front of us. That night we could not sleep.**

The four of us were implicated in a false case, and the police tortured us severely — they beat us until our limbs were injured, then hung us from a fan and tortured us further. They forced confessions out of us; the torture was so intense that we gave statements under Section 164. After that they sent us to prison. They repeatedly told me, “If you say that I’m beating you, we will torture you more.” Even when my condition became very bad, they would not allow me to be admitted to hospital. At first, when we gave the Section 164 statements, **we did not speak of the torture because we feared they would torture us even more, so we kept silent.**

DEATH ROW INMATE B, TAIWAN

Collected by the Taiwanese Alliance to End the Death Penalty (TAEDP)

Our system isn’t gonna let us, death row inmates, prove our worth. Even if they want me to go to war or guard nuclear waste, I can do it. **We don’t wanna be a useless person, you know what I mean? We all need that independent process to contribute and prove ourselves.** That’s the real value of life.

We can’t just live day by day and have our food and sleep like a dog in prison till death. If they gave me a chance to read books for ten years, I might be a doctor by now; maybe then I would have value and [could] take on some responsibilities. Not just like a dog being fed. **I want to serve my time with dignity.** However, we are often treated badly and can’t even choose when to die. It’s really sad. Even if we die on the battlefield today, it’s fine, at least we did something. But the government puts us in prison and tortures us for a long time, and we contribute nothing. **We make mistakes, but they should give us a chance to change our lives.** But the government doesn’t; that’s why I’m pessimistic.



If they gave me a chance to read books for ten years, I might be a doctor by now.



ANONYMOUS, FLORIDA, USA

Collected by lifespark



[...] did anyone take the defendant seriously when he earnestly and sincerely apologized and begged forgiveness for an act the defendant is still hard-pressed to comprehend?

Death Row, not unlike any other part of the prison system is tattered with a diverse group of individuals and there is no single all-inclusive description that can be fairly applied to every man or woman condemned to die. While it is true that there are some egregiously dangerous prisoners that have been condemned to death, this is the exception rather than the rule; as there are exceedingly more serial killers and prisoners convicted of multiple homicides serving life sentences or less time in the general population of State and Federal prisons throughout the United States of America. Some of the prisoners on Death Row proclaim their innocence outright; some are victims of circumstance; others are prisoners guilty of first-degree murder, still **not being fortunate enough to have knowledgeable qualified and experienced trial attorneys – they have been wrongly convicted of first-degree murder, and subsequently wrongly sentenced to death.**

From day to day one can lay back on his bunk and listen to one legal horror-story after another, as disillusioned prisoners desperately attempt to get the next to see the injustice he has suffered. But legal discourses are not the only topic of conversation.

In fact, there are a lot of people presently condemned to die that have as tounding insight into many of the country's societal and cultural juggernauts; very enlightening discussions occur quite frequently.

Being human, Death Row prisoners also can have a sense of humor and may spend an afternoon "kickin the bobo"; that is, jocularly teasing and jesting with one another. Over time one can come to know, like, and enjoy a genuine friendship with a fellow prisoner, albeit in the back of one's mind he may never know whether this friend was once capable of murder. Still, at the present time two people in similar circumstances freely reciprocate goodwill – much needed goodwill.

There are also bad days in Death Row, days fraught with stress, confusion, and indescribable heartache. **The hearts of those condemned to die are not always inerrably callous or unfeeling.** We have all heard the reports on capital defendants showing no remorse; did anyone take the defendant seriously when he earnestly and sincerely apologized and begged forgiveness for an act the defendant is still hard-pressed to comprehend?



ELWOOD JONES, OHIO, USA

Collected by ACAT-FRANCE



I had six execution dates. And the only reason I didn't die is because they didn't have the drug. And I know that I didn't do nothing, I'm innocent. So, I wondering: how many innocents have they killed? (sic)

I did twenty-seven and a half years on Ohio death row. I left January 10th, 1997, and I've been there until 2022. To me, it was just pure hell. No words that I can say can put that in the right context for you to understand that I'm in this 8 by 10 cage, sometimes 23 hours a day.

I spent my days writing to people and asked them to help me. That's how I ended up meeting people at ACAT-France. I built a relationship with them. Bernard, Jean-Louis, Christine... They became good friends. Hopefully someday I'll be able to come over there and visit them in person. I am very thankful for all I have met over the years on this journey. I am very blessed.

It was thirty years before I got my life back. In that process, **I lost so much**. I lost my parents, my wife, several siblings, sisters, and a few friends. And I wasn't able to say my goodbyes to them.

I had six execution dates. And the only reason I didn't die is because they didn't have the drug. So they pushed my date to another date, and another date... But if they had that drug, I'd be dead today. And I know that I didn't do nothing (sic), I'm innocent. So, I wondering: how many innocents have they killed?

So, I do know for a fact that the system is broken. And I truly believe that a moratorium must be put in place to stop it. I would like to see them abolish the death penalty, and if there's anyway I could help in that fight I'm there.

What really bothers me is that we're quick to lock people up, take their lives and turn them upside down. And when we let them go, there's no second chance program or anything in place to help them get back on their feet. I'm 73 years old. Who's going to hire me for a job? The system that they took from me, more than thirty years ago, was entirely different. There was not even cellphones at that time. So, I still need to lean on someone to help me navigate.

I think it's going to be a while before I can totally move on. Today, I share my story, I make teddy bears to survive and I volunteer a lot. It's not much, but it gives me some comfort that I can do something.



Accused of a murder he did not commit, Elwood Jones spent more than 27 years on death row in the state of Ohio, in the United States of America. He was definitively exonerated in December 2025.

LIN, HSINYI, TAIWAN

Collected by TAEDP



If \$2,000 NT is the only reason that you are losing the will to live, can I take the place of your parents and give you the money instead?

Between 2006 and 2010, Taiwan ceased death penalty execution. **Executions in Taiwan are carried out in secret, and neither family members nor the attorney get notified. The person on death row only finds out that they are being executed right before the execution.**

Starting in February of 2010, there were rumors of continuation of executions. TAEDP decided at the time to file the petition (still a draft at the time) for Constitutional Interpretation at the Judicial Yuan, as the law states that execution for a case cannot proceed if there is any retrial, extraordinary appeal, pardon or petition for Constitutional Interpretation filed.

At the time, I mailed each and every one of the forty-three death row inmates, and for the inmates that could not be reached, their family members to connect, asking the inmate/family to sign the power of attorney letter so that TAEDP could act on their behalf and file the petition. There were three individuals who refused our request; Chang, Chun-Hung was one of them. I went to the prison where they were held to get a better understanding of their situations.

When I met Chang, Chun-Hung, he said that what he did was wrong, and that he was not in good health as he had diabetes. **Because of his illness he had to purchase snacks in addition to eating what was provided in prison. However, as death row inmates could not work and earn money, he had to rely on his parents to send him \$2000 NT every month, which was a large burden for them [...]** As such, he did not want to make their lives even more difficult with the filing.

After hearing his explanation, I said "If \$2,000 NT is the only reason that you are losing the will to live, can I take the place of your parents and give you the money instead? If there really is a possibility that Taiwan can abolish the death penalty or stop executions, you have the chance to work in prison or even be released later on, and you can return the money at that time." He said he'll consider my proposal.

On April 30th, 2010, Taiwan resumed execution. Four individuals were executed, including Chang, Chun-Hung. Several days later, his parents went to the morgue to retrieve his body (after execution, the prison would send the body to the morgue), and I met them there. His parents were really old and scared. The media stayed outside refusing to leave without interviewing them, and they were afraid of being exposed by the media as then they would not be able to continue to live in their community. [...]

When I returned to our office, my colleague also came back from the prison and handed me some letters from Chang, Chun-Hung. Amongst them was a letter that he wrote the morning of his execution but could not mail to me in time. In it was his power of attorney letter.

Hsinyi is the executive director of TAEDP.



STEVEN CHING'OMBE, MALAWI

Collected by Reprieve UK



I could have done the job for them and hanged myself.

*In April 2021, the Malawi Supreme Court handed down an opinion that abolished the death penalty. Four months later, the Supreme Court changed their ruling, effectively retaining the death penalty in the penal code. Steven Ching'ombe, on death row in Zomba, described the experience: "We were so excited we couldn't eat. All our relatives outside the prison were so happy." Then when they heard the news four months later that the judgement had been changed "**our hearts were broken... we all just cried... I could have done the job for them and hanged myself.**"*

*Steven sought mercy from the government for himself and fellow people on death row following this terrible ordeal, saying: "the Government was merciful to my friends who were released through re-sentencing... We are hopeful they will be merciful to us too. **We ask for your forgiveness... We want to contribute to the development of Malawi...** None of those who were released through re-sentencing have come back to prison. We will be the same."*

ANONYMOUS, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

Collected by CODHAS



I've decided to kill myself because I can't stand all this, in fact I've been dead since the day I was sentenced to death for facts I don't know. For me, to live condemned to death is to live without hope.

We were a close-knit, happy family until the death penalty ruined everything. My older brother had been arrested during the curfew here in Goma, it was like a joke, we thought he was going to be released as we knew he wasn't a bandit or linked to any armed group. After a while, we began to hear that he would be condemned in a trial with bandits who were making the city of Goma insecure. Some lawyers started coming to the house to ask for money to assist my brother, but as my parents were too poor, they said they had to sell our field to find money to give to the lawyers.

As the sale took longer, we were informed that he had been sentenced to death and would never leave prison again. My parents had just sold the field and gave all the money to the prison officials to try to obtain his release, but it was too late. Then they both died in succession, as they had not obtained their son's release after selling their only field. **When my brother learned that his parents had died, he also took his own life in prison.**

As we didn't yet know of his death, I went to the prison to visit my older brother. When I arrived at the prison, to my great surprise his cellmate presented me with a letter my older brother had left before committing suicide.

He had written: "I've decided to kill myself because I can't stand all this, in fact I've been dead since the day I was sentenced to death for facts I don't know. **For me, to live condemned to death is to live without hope.** My parents, who supported me and in whom I had hope that they could help me through this ordeal, are all dead. As their only son, I had to at least attend their funeral, but I know they're dead because they've given up hope of ever seeing me again. **I regret that I was the cause of the death of those who gave me life. For you my little one, I spare you the burden of always having to visit this twisted and traumatic place,** you'll suffer as little as possible I assure you it's my only way of protecting you to God little sister".

DR QADEER ALAM, PAKISTAN

Collected by Reprieve



The state of living in limbo—caught between life and death—is often more torturous than the execution itself. For both prisoners and their families, the uncertainty becomes a punishment far beyond what the law intends.

I have witnessed firsthand the devastating consequences of prolonged delays in the decision-making process for mercy petitions filed by individuals on death row. **Once all legal remedies have been exhausted, a mercy petition to the executive becomes the final, fragile hope.** Yet, these petitions are pending for years without any decisions. Many prisoners have already spent more than a decade under the constant threat of execution.

The effects of this prolonged uncertainty are painfully visible: **prisoners endure immense psychological strain, and their families live in a state of suspended grief—unable to mourn, unable to hope, unable to move on.** This situation exemplifies what is known as the **death row phenomenon**, the combination of a death sentence with indefinite delays in execution.

It results in a kind of **double punishment, bordering on double jeopardy, and violates basic human dignity.** The state of living in limbo—caught between life and death—is often more torturous than the execution itself. For both prisoners and their families, **the uncertainty becomes a punishment far beyond what the law intends.**

What is urgently needed is a clear, consistent, and humane policy for the timely review and decision of mercy petitions especially those who are old and ill. Establishing such a framework would not only uphold the rights of those facing the death penalty but would also reinforce the integrity of the criminal justice system and promote genuine security.

Dr Qadeer Alam is the Assistant Inspector General at the Inspectorate of Prisons in Punjab Prisons and Academic Visitor at the Criminology Centre of Oxford University.





THE FORGOTTEN ONES

SAIF UL MALOOK, PAKISTAN

Collected by the Paris Bar



When you defend someone accused of blasphemy, you are considered yourself a blasphemer.



Over my career, I visited lots of prisons and met lots of prisoners, including many death row prisoners. I confirm 99% of them are hopeless and depressed.

When you defend someone accused of blasphemy, you are considered yourself a blasphemer. However, I only do my duty in line with the Constitution and the law, which guarantees everyone the right to see her/his rights respected, and a to enjoy a fair trial. **Religious threats are endless. Sometimes they are taken away, but they always come back. I feel I live among lions in the jungle.** People look at me with hatred. My colleagues are afraid of getting in my car, my neighbors avoid me. My daughter and my wife are pointed at.

Saif Ul Malook defended Asia Bibi and is now defending a couple sentenced to death in Pakistan for blasphemy. The trial began on 22 June 2020.



BRENDA, TEXAS, USA

Collected by Coalizione Italiana Contro la Pena di Morte APS

Most people do not know my son is incarcerated. Those friends closest to me know my son is incarcerated and why. My friends do not judge but I believe that people who are not close to me would judge. I live in a town of 13,000. As the mother of an inmate there is not a day that goes by that you forget where your son is. He is not just an inmate. He is an inmate on death row.

We provide support every month for commissary and will stand with him and call if there is an episode at the prison. **I will not leave my son to deal with the prison system alone. I will never leave until he no longer draws breathe.** All people should be treated with decency and respect.

You hope and pray no one you know has to walk in these same shoes. Does your world change as well as the inmate? Yes. How could it not? In Texas a lot of the inmates do not have air conditioning. If you know anything about Texas you know it gets very hot in the summer. My son's area has air conditioning but so many others do not. That would make for a very miserable life existence.

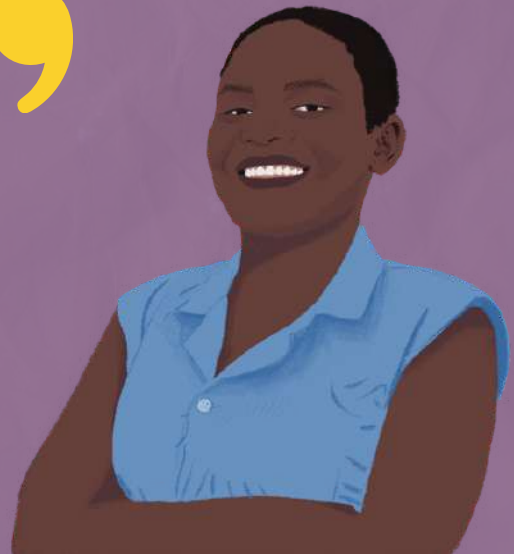
Just because you are an inmate doesn't mean you should get treated with such horrible conditions. By the time a lockdown is completed the cupboards are bare. You hope the meals served are decent so you do not go hungry. I can hear the panic in my son's voice when his staples are almost non-existent. This is a mother's life with an inmate.

NDGAGO WINNIE, UGANDA

Collected by Wells of Hope Ministries and the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative

They referred to every family member as a murderer because of our father.

”



My name is Ndago Winnie, 18 years old and I come from a family of eighteen children; my father was sentenced to death in 2012. Before the arrest of my father we lived as an extended family in the same compound with all the children and their mothers.

I recall that fateful day when a dying patient was brought to our home for treatment since my father was a witch doctor. Before he could even attend to the patient, sadly, the patient died and that's where trouble started from. The relatives of the deceased and the villagers accused him of negligence that he didn't respond to the patient with immediate effect leading to his death. He was harassed and taken to police. Our house was all surrounded by policemen who had guns and knives; who grabbed, beat and threw our dad in the boot of the car and drove off. Everyone at home was in sobs and had it in mind that he was killed and only waited for the return of his body for burial.

The situation worsened at home when villagers who were angry at the family destroyed and stole our property. They even looked for his children and other family members so that they could kill them. They referred to every family member as a murderer because of our father. I spent most of the time in the bush hiding so that I am they are not seen by the angry villagers.

We lacked food, clothing and a place to stay after some time, the police came and asked the villagers not to threaten the inmate's family anymore since their father was already serving his punishment in prison that is when the villagers gave this family some peace.

Since everything had been destroyed and stolen, when we came back home, we survived on sugarcanes and in most cases we slept on empty stomachs, we had to set up a temporarily shelter. None of us went to school anymore because our father was imprisoned. Whenever I saw other children happily going to school every morning, tears rolled down my cheeks because I admired going to school again too.

My life changed in 2013 when wells of hope reached out to our family. I feel **governments should abolish the death penalty because it's us the children that suffer** and if you kill a person you haven't dealt with the problem and also **put in place measures to support children who have a parent on death row.** I also want to the public to stop mob justice.

FIRMIN YANGAMBI, DRC

Collected par le Barreau de Paris



Then, one forgets oneself entirely. **One thinks only of those truly condemned to death: one's children.** An extreme sadness is met with a resilience that seems to come from elsewhere. One sleeps with one's eyes closed. **One decides to take up the fight. To fight against an insidious but ever-present enemy. To fight again, so that memory transcends fear and survives death.** We promise in the silence of anguish: Dad will come back. Yes. He will come back. One way or another. With the hope that it will be in the best possible way, that is to say, alive! For real.

The Returned.

TOM KALANZI, UGANDA

Collected by Penal Reform International's (PRI) Africa Office

I was born in 1975. I was 6 years old when my father was arrested in 1981.

I grew up with a sickly paternal grandmother. I studied at Kitenge Primary School in Masaka and dropped out in primary six due to financial constraints. I learnt about my father's imprisonment for murder when I was 15 years old. I was told that he had been sentenced to death. I was traumatized because I knew I was to never see him again. **Later I come to learn that the person my father was alleged to have killed was still alive.** This greatly tortured me, and **I felt betrayed by the system for cheating me of a father for 19 years.**

Tom is Mpagi Edimary's first-born son. Mpagi Edimary has been imprisoned in 1981 and pardoned in 2000.



I felt betrayed by the system for cheating me of a father for 19 years.



CHRISTINA TAFERO, USA

Testimony written for the occasion of the 7th World Congress Against the Death Penalty (Brussels, 2019) gathered by The Sunny Center and shared by Sant'Egidio

An innocent child,
a baby so pure.
My life was a sickness
for which there was no cure.
In the blink of an eye they were taken away
and from that day on,
my life would never be the same.
Safe and secure in my mother's arms,
I was torn away and subject to harm.
A baby I was, lost and alone.
My mother and Father may never come home...

**My arms are spread, please Momma STAY,
Daddy I LOVE YOU... will you be home
today???**

Soon my love, soon...is all I would hear
but those days grew farther, and life was unclear.

More tragedy and loss is what I would face.
Battered and bruised.... with tears down my face.

Momma COME HOME,
I can't yet my love,
but SOON BABY SOON...
That was a bluff.

For you never came...

and **I was lost in this game of life,
with nothing but heartache and strife.**

When they murdered my Father my heart
broke in two.

I wanted to die... TO BE WITH YOU.

I tried,

and I failed

but my courage prevailed.

I was damaged too.

So they sent me away...

JUST... LIKE... YOU.

Years gone by I would not see your face.

Hear your sweet voice,

or feel your embrace.

Then one day out of the blue,

they said my Mother was FREE AND COMING
FOR YOU!!!!

MY HEART filled with joy

and my eyes filled with tears.

Finally, FINALLY after all these years.

MY very best friend and one half of my heart.

We can build a new life and have a new start.

Let FREEDOM ring to the beat of my heart.

**They say that time heals and this my friends
is true.**

FORGIVENESS and LOVE will see you through.

And although there are obstacles in my way
and all the repercussions from that fateful day.

The pain hurt and anger are still very real
and maybe one day my soul will be healed.

But I'm not alone, there's many of us.

Who have overcome the injustices placed
upon us.

WE ARE NOT VICTIMS

WE ARE NOT WEAK

WE are STRONG individuals

with a voice to speak.

Sharing our Stories,

Sharing our pain.

Just like in this room today.

*Robert is the daughter of Sonia "Sunny" Jacobs, sentenced to death
in 1976 and exonerated in 1992, and Jesse Tafero, executed in 1990.*



ANONYMOUS, IRAN

Collected by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center: <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3264>



Isn't that what you say, that God takes good people away? Well, I want to go be with Baba as soon as possible.



My daughter's behavior changed when my husband died. She became abrasive and angry. If I raise my voice a little, she immediately raises hers and says, "I wish my father was here with me". A few nights ago, she was in her room studying and didn't answer, no matter how many times I called her. I went to her room and saw that she was hugging her father's picture and lying down under her blanket.

Sometimes she says she misses her father: "Why did Baba leave? Why are you and I alone?" And sometimes she asks: "Do you love me, Mommy?" and I say that I do, and she says: **"Don't love me, and I won't love you because God quickly takes those that you love away.** I won't have anybody if God takes you from me. My Baba is gone; who do I stay with if you leave me too?" Other times she asks: "Mommy, am I a good girl? Are you happy with me?" to which I say yes, and then she says: **"So I will go be with Baba. Isn't that what you say, that God takes good people away? Well, I want to go be with Baba as soon as possible."**

ANONYMOUS, IRAN

Collected by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center: <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3204>

I became seriously ill after my brother's execution. I was hospitalized three times in a single week. Right now, I cannot sleep or speak if I don't take pills. I'm undergoing psychological treatment. I was the one who suffered the most; no one endured the psychological torture that I did; I [couldn't] even talk to my own kid anymore, and I hit her. I feel like I was at fault because I was the one who told my brother to come to our house that night.

I go over these things a hundred times a day. I keep dreaming that they took my brother from our house, and when I open my eyes, I am reminded of him walking that hallway all alone to reach the gallows. **I begged anyone you can imagine, begging them to take me instead of my brother, saying that I had lived my life already, begging them to let my brother live. I said I would be their slave, I would be their maid, I would be their dog,** I used all of these words, and I fell at their feet. But now, in my heart, I miss my brother's scent.



I begged anyone you can imagine, begging them to take me instead of my brother, [...] begging them to let my brother live.

I said I would be their slave, I would be their maid, I would be their dog...

ALIAKSANDRA YAKAVITSKAYA, BELARUS

Collected by Amnesty International and elaborated by FIDH.

Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkm50C7zsIE>

Up to date, we continue wondering in what cemetery is he buried. We can only guess. Without having the possibility to visit his grave, we go to pray to our family grave.

”

29-year-old Aliaksandra (Sasha) Yakavitskaya is wedding and fashion stylist. Her father Gennady Yakavitski, convicted of murder, was sentenced to death and executed in 2016.

Aliaksandra learnt about his execution a month after it had taken place. *She remembers that on the day of the execution indicated in the death certificate she made all the way to the Valadarka prison where death convicts are detained to pass him a parcel. The latter was accepted by prison authorities although as she suggests, her father must have been shot or executed shortly after. **She could not visit him on that day since family visits are regulated by law and can only take place once a month:** a right that she had already used that month of November when execution took place.*

*“It’s very hard. **The execution can take place any moment and no one will notify you** neither in advance nor immediately hereafter” – Sasha Yakavitskaya about the effect of her father’s conviction.”*

“A month after the execution, I received a letter – just a piece of paper – notifying me of the fact that the death sentence had been carried out. Until the very last moment, we had hoped for a moratorium, that everything will be fine, but unfortunately, it was not the case.”

Uncertainty about the execution date and the execution process itself causes additional suffering, aside from the painful fact of killing:

Aliaksandra is Henadz Yakavitski’s daughter. Henadz Yakavitski has been sentenced to death and executed in 2016.

*“It is very hard to realize that it had happened since **my father’s personal belongings had not been returned to us, neither had we seen his body. According to the law, we were not allowed to bury it.** We were neither informed of his place of burial. Hence, I still have a feeling that he’s still out there is that it is alive and well.”*

*“Up to date, we continue wondering in what cemetery is he buried. We can only guess. **Without having the possibility to visit his grave, we go to pray to our family grave.** A lot of rumors exist concerning what happens to the bodies of the executed, and nobody knows for sure since it is classified information.”*

Conviction to death of a close relative chases her years after the execution: “So many people are constantly approaching my mother with unbelievable stories that my father is still alive. Some call her to request a ransom for information on his tomb.”

*“There are only a handful of people in our country who consider this problem to be important and who advocate for the abolition. Some are afraid. Some are just mean. **It was hard to recover from the shock after reading some comments on the Internet about my daughter, who is four years old, claiming she has to undergo the same fate as my father since she has his genes.**”*

“I am often asked why, I tell my story. The thing is that people’s attitude concerns me. They do not understand my family’s tragedy.”





***THOSE WHO
MUST WATCH***

HÉLÈNE NOA DUBOIS, USA

Collected by ACAT-France, translated from French to English

For the last two days, we talked from morning to night. But the day before, it was unbearable — how do you talk when you know there's no future left?

”

I met Steven in 2020, through a pen pal program with inmates. His profile struck me: he talked about sports, painting, and above all his determination to stay positive despite his situation. We first wrote letters, then spoke on the phone. A real closeness grew between us, and then feelings.

LIVING WHILE WAITING

I saw him for the first time in 2021. **Despite the searches and the glass partition separating us, everything felt natural. Steven was funny, intelligent, creative.**

After thirteen years on death row, he learned his execution date: February 5, 2025. It was horrible — **knowing the hour and the day of your death is the worst punishment.** But we held on to hope for a commutation, just to keep going.

Together with Father Jeff Hood, we launched an awareness campaign to make Steven's story known. ACAT-France helped us, and that warmed my heart. Then I moved to Texas to spend the last five weeks with Steven.

THE WORST DAY OF MY LIFE

For the last two days, we talked from morning to night. But the day before, it was unbearable — **how do you talk when you know there's no future left?**

The day of the execution was the worst day of my life. We cried a lot. We were still hoping for a last-minute reprieve, but the Supreme Court refused. Steven was cold, he was terrified, his voice was weak. In the last half hour, he kept asking me how much time we had left. Then we had to hang up.

An hour later, I was allowed into the execution chamber: Steven was on a gurney, his arms stretched out with two IV lines. He said his last words: "I'm going home, our love is unconditional, keep living for yourself and for us."

The lethal injection lasted twenty-six minutes. Steven's eyes were half-open. It was horribly long, time seemed frozen. A doctor took his pulse and announced the time of death. **I was able to see his body for fifteen minutes in the prison chapel, surrounded by guards and the warden. It was the first time I was able to touch Steven.**

HEAD HELD HIGH

After that, I didn't want our efforts to stop. Many death row prisoners have no one to talk to. **And when you see the terror in the eyes of someone being executed, you wouldn't wish that on anyone — facing it alone.** It isn't easy, I still think about Steven a lot. But I keep my head high and I put my energy into this fight.

Hélène Noa Dubois is the widow of Steven Nelson, sentenced to death in 2012 and executed in Texas in February 2025.

JUAN ROBERTO MELÉNDEZ, FLORIDA, USA

Collected by Witness to Innocence



I know precisely the moment when they burn the life out of him in the electric chair because I could hear the buzzing of the electricity, and the lights would cut on and off.

My name is Juan Roberto Meléndez. In 1984, I was convicted and sentenced to death in Florida for a crime I did not commit. Almost eighteen years later, on January 3, 2002, I was exonerated and released from death row. If it weren't for the very fortunate discovery of the taped confession of the real killer – 16 years after I had been sentenced to death – I would not be here today. Life on death row was hell. I lived in a six-by-nine foot cell, infested with rats and roaches. I suffered terribly.

One of the hardest things for me when I was on death row was when they would take another inmate to execute him—someone who lived in the cell next to me. Someone who cried on my shoulders, and I on his. Someone who shared with me his most intimate thoughts, and I with him. Someone who was like family to me and who I had grown to love. And one day, they snatch him out of his cell, and I know exactly what's going to happen. I knew that the state of Florida is going to kill him and there is nothing I can do to stop it. **And I know precisely the moment when they burn the life out of him in the electric chair because I could hear the buzzing of the electricity, and the lights would cut on and off.** The state of Florida had taken the life of another one of my dear friends. But the saddest part of all, I believe that some of them are innocent. Jesse Tafero, Benny Demps, Leo Jones, and Pedro Medina, all I can say is this: I'll see you soon.



SOHAIL YAFAT, PAKISTAN

Collected by Justice Project Pakistan



You never forget the sound of a body being dropped into the pit.

I was asked to witness an execution of one of my fellow inmates in 2006. Mami Pabal was a burly man, at least six feet tall with a booming voice. **He had been at Sahiwal Central Jail for years and had befriended many of us.** Even the prison officials liked his company. It was easy to forget that he had been accused of murder. He used to joke, 'There are a lot of crimes I should be in here for – but this murder is not one of them.'

When death unnecessarily came for him, he cried like a small child. He was escorted to the gallows. Half-carried would be more accurate. The Medical Officer, Magistrate, jail Superintendent, blacksmith, and two men from the victim's family were there. The jail staff who were present kept reminding the victim's family of the option to forgive Mami. The superintendent told him to recite the kalma. I don't think Mami heard him. He kept crying out that he had not done it, that he was innocent, that killing him would be murder, not justice.

You never forget the sound of a body being dropped into the pit. The way the beam creaks is not loud enough to drown out the choking, the sound of a bone breaking. The only dignity they give him is that at least you cannot see his tongue lolling out of his mouth as he gasps for breath.

The power to take a life has a humbling effect on prison officials. They, too, are taken aback by what they have done. They would be less harsh with prisoners the next day. After all, they have also lost someone who they have seen day in, day out, often for years. No job should require this much of you.

Sohail Yafat was falsely accused of murder in 2001. He spent ten years in jail before he was acquitted without any charge.

PRISON GUARD, IRAN

Collected by ABC



They used to be healthy educated people with big dreams, but they have entered this Prisons Organization, and they've been turned into strange creatures.

[A 14-year-old boy who had accidentally caused his girlfriend's death] was kept in X prison until he reached the age of 17 and then he was sent to X prison and kept there for almost a year. When he reached the age of 18, a crane came to the prison area, the prosecutor, the judge, and the victim's family were there, as well as the colleagues and the boy's family.

My colleagues strongly urged the victim's family to forgive him. But they didn't. The mother didn't forgive, and she put the rope around the boy's neck. And the crane [used as scaffolding for a make shift gallows] pulled him up after a button was pressed... **It is not pleasant at all to see someone die up there. I only saw the killer's family and my colleagues begging the victim's family to no avail.** My shift was over, and I left with my car. It was very sad. Later, when I came to X prison, someone was being executed every day.

Testimonial from a prison guard in 2020, who served for 11 years in 3 different prisons in Iran.

PRISON GUARD, IRAN

Collected by ABC

I saw some very unpleasant scenes in those years. The people who were sentenced to be executed [...] would not let go of their children when visitation time was over. For example, they would cry, their kids wouldn't leave their arms... I saw all the inmates' problems and their families and couldn't do anything for them, it was very painful for me... **In one or two instances, I had to bring the corpse down myself because no one stayed to help** [...] with all the sadness and pain. Because the [inmate] who I spoke to three days ago is now being executed in front of my eyes or I'm putting him inside the body bag myself to leave and never return. It was a very horrific scene.

When we checked the statistics, we saw that such-and-such prisoner wasn't there, and they said that he was executed. It was very sad, and these acts gradually burn your spirit; seeing these scenes destroys a person.

A prison guard becomes friends with a prisoner, whatever crime he has committed, whether he wants to or not, an emotional relationship develops between them. I have no problem with law enforcement. But when you see an execution, you become very upset... They have destroyed many colleagues' humanity. They used to be healthy educated people with big dreams, but they have entered this Prisons Organization, and they've been turned into strange creatures. They have seen executions, torture, floggings, and amputations. They are accustomed to these conditions, and nothing matters to them anymore and they only want to hang the person, take their wages, and go.

The Judicial system has divided people into two categories: one group devoid of feelings and conscience and the other group suffering [long lasting] tensions and stress.

These executions truly affected my life, my psyche and nerves, and it affected my everything. Many times, when I came home, I could not eat [...] I was always someone who, between friends and acquaintances and family, was 100% identified as a happy person. I lost my spirits. I mean when I would come home, I was in my thoughts a lot of the time... sometimes I would not even leave the house. I mean, for up to two or three months, according to my family, I talked in my sleep, or I would shout in my sleep, and I was sad.

Testimonial from a prison guard in 2018 who was employed for several years in prison in Iran, where he oversaw visitations and accompanied inmates to judicial or health centers.



***FROM STORIES OF DEATH
TO
STORIES FOR LIFE***

SAFIEH, IRAN

Collected by ABC



We thought Amirhossein's execution would bring us closure, but the day he was put to death was like the day we found out Setayesh had been killed as she had and was no longer with us.

After Amirhossein was executed, we didn't hear a word from anyone. We thought Amirhossein's execution would bring us closure, but the day he was put to death was like the day we found out Setayesh had been killed as she had and was no longer with us. **Things were just that bad, and it's not brought us even a bit of peace.** Maybe if we could go back, knowing that executing Amirhossein wouldn't fix anything, we would have pardoned him and he wouldn't have been put to death. [...] We can't tell people in situations like ours what to do, but the execution of Amirhossein hasn't made things better for us and hasn't changed a thing. **All that's happened is that Amirhossein's blood has been spilled.**

Safieh is the mother of Setayesh Ghoreishi, a six-year-old Afghan girl who was raped and murdered in 2016. Amirhossein Poujafar, who was 16 at the time of the crime, was put to death after being found guilty in 2018.

SHEIKH ZAHID HOSEN, BANGLADESH

Collected by De-cage Initiative



The world has moved on without him. Yet, when he steps outside, the gentle wind brushes against his face, and for a brief moment, he feels alive.

Sheikh Zahid holds a small photograph — edges worn, colors faded, time etched into its surface. "This was taken the day I was sent to jail," he says, after spending 20 years in solitary confinement. "I last saw this place when it was all fields and crops. Now there are buildings everywhere — **I can hardly recognize anything,**" said Sheikh Zahid, who spent 20 years in a condemned cell after being wrongfully convicted.

During those long years behind bars, Zahid lost everything. His parents passed away while he was still in the condemned cell. The government did not allow him to attend their funerals.

"Every time someone was taken for hanging, I thought, this might be my last meal," he recalled. "That fear never left me." Even now, freedom offers little comfort.

"Sometimes, when I lie down to sleep, I see a rope hanging above me," he whispered. "It feels so real I can't close my eyes. The nights are long, and the past never let's go."

Today, Zahid lives alone in a small house, working in a corner shop for 80 takas a day — barely enough to survive. The world has moved on without him. **Yet, when he steps outside, the gentle wind brushes against his face, and for a brief moment, he feels alive.**

Sheikh Zahid Hosen was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death. He spent approximately 20 years in Bagerhat's High Security Prison System before being acquitted in 2020.

REV. DR. JACK SULLIVAN JR., USA

The funds used for executions are better spent toward victim families than continuing the vicious cycle of death that claimed our loved ones.

”

The death penalty solves nothing. It is just a sign or an act of revenge and retaliation that accomplishes nothing except for more death and does not provide any healing or any redemption or any closure. It just continues the cycle of death. And I couldn't be part of that continuation.

I don't think there can ever be closure for those of us who lost loved ones to murder. I think there can be restoration of our families but never closure. We'll always remember our loved ones not with us at family gatherings and times in our lives.

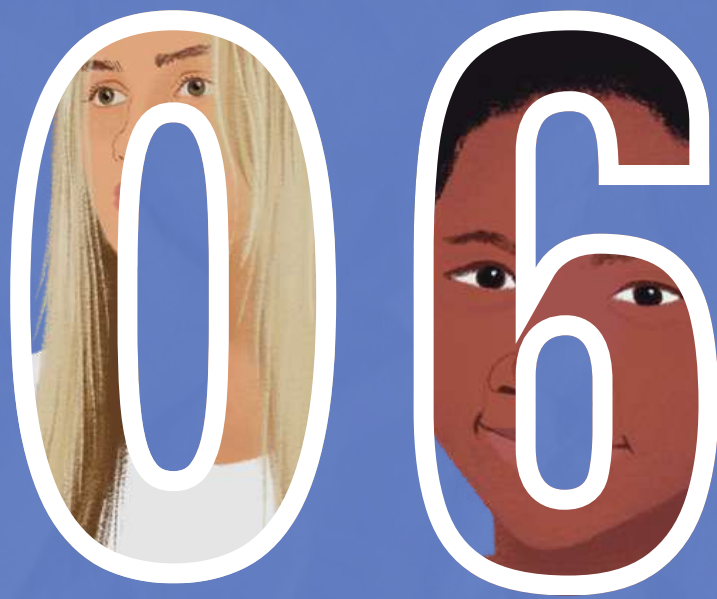
What can be useful for us is for the funds that are used towards execution to be directed toward our families to give us the means to restore our lives through therapy, education, payment of expenses like mortgages and rent payment, and many other expenses.

We move from stories of death to stories of life by rejecting the death penalty categorically in all events and in all circumstances. We are supportive of using the funds used for death to be used for life in restoration of murder victim family members and in investing in communities where we can prevent crimes and acts of horror that claim other people's lives.

As a relative of a murder victim, I don't want the State to kill in my name. Kill no one in my name. The answer violence and death in our world is love and compassion for all of humanity.

Rev. Jack Sullivan Jr. is the chairperson of Journey of Hope from Violence to Healing and the relative of a murder victim.





KNOW MORE

ABOUT WORLD DAY

Since 2003, **every 10 October**, the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty has been organizing local initiatives and global actions that shine a spotlight on the abolition of the death penalty.

Each year focuses on a specific issue related to the death penalty. In 2026 and 2027, the World Day will highlight the **human lives** affected by the death penalty and amplify their stories.

The main objective of this World Day is to **raise public awareness** that the death penalty affects humans beings and entire communities whose voices should be heard- among political leaders and the general public, in both retentionist and abolitionist countries. It serves to bring abolitionist movements together, and to provide global support to the sometimes-isolated actions on the ground.

To do so, the World Coalition and its member organizations have identified specific objectives:

- **Support** abolitionist **activities** by sharing important tools for advocacy and mobilization.
- **Share the stories** of persons sentenced to death, victims' families, law enforcement officials and other people affected by capital punishment.
- **Work with civil society organizations** that amplify the voices of persons directly impacted.



Find out everything about the World Day Against the Death Penalty at: [this link](#) including the World Day poster; the leaflet; the testimonies collection; and the last World Day report.



ABOUT US

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty is an alliance of more than 170 NGOs, bar associations, local authorities and unions. The aim of the World Coalition is to strengthen the international dimension of the fight against the death penalty. Its ultimate objective is to obtain the universal abolition of the death penalty. The World Coalition gives a global dimension to the sometimes-isolated actions taken by its members on the ground. It complements their initiatives, while constantly respecting their independence.

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