

DEATH PENALTY DEBATE

Ethics

I believe that opposition to the death penalty is above all an ethical duty, because the right to life is intimately linked to the dignity of the person and this must be absolutely inviolable. The maximum penalty is a violation of human rights and its irreversibility makes it the most extreme case of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Thus, execution of a human being is never an act of justice but an act of revenge and therefore a failure of the Administration of Justice.

Irrevocable mistakes

Over 150 people in the last few years in the US have been taken off death row because they were innocent. I know there are people who want to believe that no innocent person has ever been executed in some countries. But when you have this many people conclusively proved by DNA evidence to be actually innocent, there is no escaping the conclusion that innocent people have been executed.

There are cases where prosecutors withheld exculpatory information. They knew that there were bogus pieces of evidence introduced. They knew that there were defendants who were coerced into entering a guilty plea to a crime they had not committed.

Cost of death vs life in prison

One of the most common misperceptions about the death penalty is the notion that the death penalty saves money because executed defendants no longer have to be cared for at the time of execution, that might be indeed true. But, as every prosecutor, defense attorney, and judge knows, the costs of a capital case begin long before the sentence is carried out. Experienced prosecutors and defense attorneys must be assigned and begin a long period of investigation and pre-trial hearings. Jury selection, the trial itself, and initial appeals will consume years of time and enormous amounts of money before an execution is on the horizon. All of the studies conclude that the death penalty system is far more expensive than an alternative system in which the maximum sentence is life in prison.

Closure for victims' families

To me, the death penalty also is something else, a sad reminder of how justice's systems typically offer punishment instead of healing for the survivors of violent crimes.

For a growing number of victims of violence, the thought of honoring our loved ones by killing another human being is not only counter-intuitive but abhorrent. Perhaps more than others, I understand acutely that an execution would just visit pain on another family.

Moreover, the death penalty typically brings the opposite of what survivors of crime most need: accountability, healing and closure.

The death penalty also keeps us stuck in an angry stage of grief. The death penalty requires all of us, victims and spectators alike, to actively summon feelings of hatred and contempt in order to justify the murder of another human being. While not all murder victim family members feel this way, many of us do. For all these reasons, I say to prosecutors who seek the death penalty: not in my name.