



DEATH PENALTY

THE ISSUE:

The death penalty is flawed beyond repair. It violates the human right to life, fails to serve as a deterrent to crime and does not keep us safer. It is applied disproportionately to people of color and poor people, and the risk of executing an innocent person can never be eliminated.

The U.S. ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1992, which recognizes that no one shall be subject to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and that imprisonment's essential aim is reformation and social rehabilitation. Thus, when the state ends a life through the death penalty it deprives a person of these human rights. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, regardless of innocence or guilt.

In 2019, 2,581 people were under sentence of death in the United States, and in the modern era of the death penalty over 1,500 people have been executed by U.S. states and the federal government. While there was an over 50% decline in the number of death sentences issued in the 2010s from the previous decade and executions remain at historically low levels, in July 2019, the DOJ announced plans to resume federal executions after a 16-year hiatus, issuing a new lethal injection protocol and five execution dates. Before the scheduled execution dates were reached, a district court issued a preliminary injunction halting the executions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The president should reinstate the moratorium on federal executions and work with the Attorney General to rescind the lethal injection protocol issued by Attorney General Barr on July 25, 2019.
- The president's FY 21 budget request should include an increase in funding for the Kirk Bloodsworth Post-Conviction Testing Program, under the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs budget.
- The president should appoint federal judges that respect the United States' obligation to uphold international law and standards.

TALKING POINTS:

The U.S. is the only country left in the Americas that maintains an active death penalty. Two-thirds of US states have either abolished the death penalty outright or not carried out an execution in at least ten years

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Death Sentences and Executions Report (2019), available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Death-Penalty-and-execution-2018.pdf>
- Darkness Visible in the Sunshine State: The Death Penalty in Florida (2018), available at <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Florida-Darkness-Visible.pdf>

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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