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Pope Francis: "Death penalty inadmissible"

An extract from the Pope's letter to the International Commission against the Death Penalty.

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Vatican City, 20 March 2015 (VIS)-
This morning the Holy Father received in audience a delegation from the International Commission against the Death Penalty. Below we offer extensive extracts from the

letter the Pope gave to Federico Mayor, president of the Commission, to greet and offer his personal thanks to all the members of the aforementioned International Commission, the group of countries that lend their support, and all those who collaborate in its work.

“I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some reflections on what the Church contributes to the humanistic efforts of the Commission. The Church's Magisterium, based on the Sacred Scripture and the thousand-year experience of the People of God, defends life from conception to natural end, and supports full human dignity inasmuch as it represents the image of God. Human life is sacred as, from its beginning, from the first instant of conception, it is the fruit of God's creating action.”

“States kill when they apply the death penalty, when they send their people to war or when they carry out extrajudicial or summary executions. They can also kill by omission, when they fail to guarantee to their people access to the bare essentials for life. ... On some occasions it is necessary to repel an ongoing assault proportionately to avoid damage caused by the aggressor, and the need to neutralise him could lead to his elimination; this is a case of legitimate defence. However, the presuppositions of personal legitimate defence do not apply at the social level, without risk of misinterpretation. When the death penalty is applied, it is not for a current act of aggression, but rather for an act committed in the past. It is also applied to persons whose current ability to cause harm is not current, as it has been neutralised – they are already deprived of their liberty.”

“Nowadays the death penalty is inadmissible, no matter how serious the crime committed. It is an offence against the inviolability of life and the dignity of the human person, which contradicts God's plan for man and society, and his merciful justice, and impedes the penalty from fulfilling any just objective. It does not render justice to the victims, but rather fosters vengeance.”

“For the rule of law, the death penalty represents a failure, as it obliges the state to kill in the name of justice. ... Justice can never be wrought by killing a human being. ... With the application of the death penalty, the convict is denied the possibility of to repent or make amends for the harm caused; the possibility of confession, by which a man expresses his inner conversion, and contrition, the gateway to atonement and expiation, to reach an encounter with God's merciful and

healing justice. It is furthermore frequently used by totalitarian regimes and groups of fanatics for the extermination of political dissidents, minorities, and any subject labelled as 'dangerous' or who may be perceived as a threat to its power or to the achievement of its ends".

“The death penalty is contrary to the sentiment of humanitas and to divine mercy, which must be the model for human justice. ... There is discussion in some quarters about the method of killing, as if it were possible to find ways of 'getting it right'. ... But there is no humane way of killing another person.”

“On the other hand, life imprisonment entails for the prisoner the impossibility of planning a future of freedom, and may therefore be considered as a sort of covert death penalty, as they

deprive detainees not only of their freedom, but also of hope. However, although the penal system can stake a claim to the time of convicted persons, it can never claim their hope".

“Dear friends, I encourage you to continue with your work, as the world needs witnesses of God's mercy and tenderness, and may the Lord Jesus grant the gift of wisdom, so that the action taken against this cruel punishment may be successful and fruitful.”

(From Vatican Information Service)

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